



Seaman Charles Saunders, Number 2158x, is buried in Ford Park (formerly Plymouth Old) Cemetery, *Pennycomequick*, in the English County of Devon. He shares his last resting-place with Able Seaman Frederick R. White and Deckhand John Mackenzie, both serving with HMS *Vivid*.

Having relinquished his occupation, likely that of a fisherman, and having then travelled from the northernmost reaches of the Island to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of

Newfoundland, on September 6 (a second source has September 5) of 1916 Charles Saunders reported...*to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Briton, moored in the harbour (see below).*

On that early November day he enlisted* for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the...*Duration of the War**...and underwent the required medical assessment on or about the same date. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.*



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King attired in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken in or about 1935.*)

***At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the ‘Duration’ at the time of their original enlistment.*



(Right above: *The White Ensign has been flown by the Royal Navy in its present form since about the year 1800 although other naval ensigns had existed for at least two centuries. It consists of a red St. George’s Cross – the national flag of England - on a white field with the Union Flag* in the upper canton.*)

**The Union Flag is commonly referred to as the ‘Union Jack’; this is, in fact, a misnomer since a flag is referred to as a ‘Jack’ only when flown from the bow of a ship.*

Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion in 1870 before the Reserve came into being in 1902.

Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.

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Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.



An elderly vessel, HMS 'Calypso', having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure reduced, and a wooden shelter built on her upper deck to provide training facilities and living quarters for the prospective naval recruits.

(Right above: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph of the 'Newfoundland Calypso' by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

(Right: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated)



(Right below: The newly-constructed C-Class cruiser 'Calypso' of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia)

Some three months later*, on December 6 of that same year, Seaman Saunders – as one of a draft of fifty naval reservists and a single Chief Petty Officer - departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, for the United Kingdom. The transport vessel was the SS *Southland* en route from Portland, Maine, to Liverpool – previously called *Vaderland*, she was a Dutch or Belgian ship, the name deemed too Germanic-sounding, which later, in June of 1917, was to be torpedoed and lost while en route from Liverpool to Philadelphia.

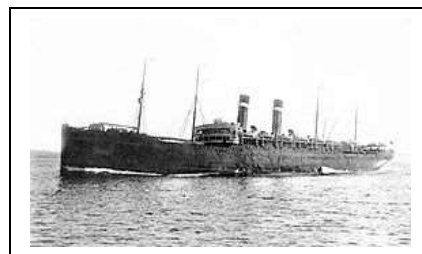


**The delay was possibly to allow him to perfect his technique in the use of a rifle as a single word on his report – perhaps misinterpreted by the author – suggests that there was yet work to be done: 'Dangerous'.*

Of course, Seaman Saunders' draft had left St. John's for Halifax some days before the SS *Southland* sailed for Liverpool. But ascertaining how the reservists were to journey to there has proved to be more than difficult. There were two reasonable possibilities for a contingent of some fifty persons: by train to Port aux Basques, a ferry-ride across the Cabot Strait, and then a train journey once again on to Halifax; or there was the direct passage by ship from St. John's to Halifax – both means of transport necessitating up to three days' travel.

Whichever was to be the case, a revised schedule saw *Southland* leave Halifax three days late, on December 6, and arrive in Liverpool eleven days afterwards, on December 17.

Once having set foot in the United Kingdom, Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training or to await a posting, at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England. In the case of Seaman Saunders, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid* at the Royal Navy complex of Plymouth-Devonport.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Red Star Line ship 'Vaderland' – later 'Southland' – is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

Vivid I (the establishment had several Divisions) was a training ground for seaman recruits and also one of the holding barracks for already-trained seamen awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships and it appears to have been *Vivid I* to which Seaman Saunders was then attached for a period of four months less four days.

**The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.*

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently only a shore base and a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting postings during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Saunders had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their cap.

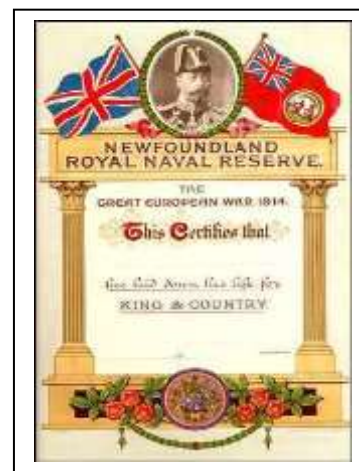
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These establishments were at times divided into sections: the holding barracks at 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Saunders were likely initially to be stationed – as well as potential signallers and telegraphers – to await service on one of His Majesty's ships.



(Right: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))

(Right: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)



Vivid III was apparently – and different sources cite other information – the Royal Navy Trawler Section Division, and it was to there that many Newfoundland seamen were to be attached for service to this type of small vessel.

On April 1 of 1917 Seaman Saunders in his turn was ordered to Vivid III.

But Seaman Saunders was never to set foot on the deck of one of His Majesty's Trawlers as by that time he was surely to be exhibiting the signs of illness and was also surely soon – although no date seems to have been recorded - to be admitted into the nearby Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse.

The son of Joseph Saunders, former fisherman deceased of Beri-Beri on May 19 of 1913, and of Elizabeth Saunders (née Greening*) of Cook's Harbour on the Straits of Belle Isle, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Mary, Amy and to George.



(Right: The sacrifice of Charles Saunders is honoured on both the old and new War Memorials in the community of St. Anthony. – photograph from 2020)

***The couple had married in Cook's Harbour on September 16, 1891.**

Seaman Saunders was recorded as having...died of sickness...on April 25 of 1917 at the age of nineteen years: date of birth in Cook's Harbour, Newfoundland, August 16, 1898 (from only his enlistment papers).

Seaman Saunders served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Seaman Charles Saunders, never on active service, was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service.



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to *criceadam@yahoo.ca*. Last updated – January 20, 2023.