



Leading Seaman Edgar Henry Smith, Number 1204x, is buried in Danygraig Cemetery, Swansea, in the Principality of Wales.

Having decided to enlist into the Royal Naval Reserve during the winter of 1913-1914, Edgar Henry Smith relinquished his occupation of fisherman(?) in the area of the South-West Arm, Random, Trinity Bay, before making his way to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on March 18 of 1914, he reported...*to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below). He thereupon underwent a medical assessment, and was to train for twenty-eight days until April 14 before returning to his home and to his work.**

Following the *Declaration of War* by Great Britain on August 4, 1914, Edgar Henry Smith was to respond once more to the summons from the Newfoundland Naval Authorities and nine days following the British *Declaration of War*, on August 13, was once again to report *to duty* in the capital city.

What exactly were to be his duties on HMS *Calypso* at this time is not clear as he had already in that same year trained for the mandatory twenty-eight day period, had undergone the necessary medical examination and had likely also undergone the formality of attestation, the pledge and oath of allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.



(Right above: *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.*)

(Right: *At the outset of their career, the ‘Calypso-Class’ ships were apparently considered to be superior vessels. Hybrids - powered by both steam and sail - they were able to police the outer reaches of the British Empire most efficiently and economically. The rapid progress in engine technology, however, was to mean that HMS ‘Calypso’ and her sister-ships would soon be out-classed by newer vessels. – This Royal Navy photograph, taken before 1902 when the drill-hall was reportedly built on her upper deck and the funnel removed, is from Wikipedia*)



**In the early days 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.*

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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.



(Right above: Recruits of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) seen here in front of HMS ‘Calypso’. The shed-like superstructure seen behind them had been built onto the ship in 1902 to serve as a drill-hall. Whether the vessel was still ‘Calypso’, or had become ‘Briton’ by this time (see further below) is not clear. – photograph from Newfoundland Provincial Archives via Wikipedia)

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.



A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.

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

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.



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

Following ninety-six days in St. John's, Seaman Smith, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists, embarked on November 18-19 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Carthaginian* which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19th, its reservist passengers unmentioned in the local newspapers.



(Right above: *A relatively elderly vessel, 'Carthaginian' had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life it may be added. – the un-dated photograph of Carthaginian entering St. John's harbour has been donated to the Maritime History Archive web-site by Captain Harry Stone.*)

**It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was at times waived.*

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

Seaman Smith's destination was to be HMS *Vivid I**, a Division of the Royal Navy port and facilities at Plymouth-Devonport on the south coast of England and almost at the other end of the country from Glasgow.

(Right: *A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance – photograph from 2012*)

**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 Smith had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also, as seen above, 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.

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 Smith were likely initially to be stationed – as well as potential signallers and telegraphers - while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

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



Seaman Smith was to spend just some four weeks of service at Vivid I as on that Christmas Eve of 1914 he was transferred to duty with HMS Prince George, a pre-Dreadnought battleship which was soon to be preparing for the upcoming campaign in the eastern Mediterranean, the venture to be known to posterity as Gallipoli, les Dardanelles or Çanakkale depending upon whether one is reading an English, a French or a Turkish history book.*



(Right above: Although built as late as 1895, some ten years later HMS 'Prince George' was already obsolescent as a battleship, due to the advent of the bigger guns, increased armour and more more-powerful engines of the new 'Dreadnought-Class' vessels. During the Great War she was to serve in the Dardanelles primarily as a floating gun-platform and by 1916 was to be relegated to the role of depot ship and un-armed transport. – the photograph is from Wikipedia)

The Dardanelles (Çanakkale Boğazı the Turkish rendition), is the waterway that leads from the Mediterranean and continues - called by other names, Sea of Marmara then Bosphorus - past the venerable city of Istanbul and into the Black Sea, had been extensively mined by the Turks. In this manner they were to prevent the Allied navies' ships from forcing the passage and from thus sailing up to the doorstep of Istanbul, the Turkish capital city at that time.*

Seaman Smith's introduction to Prince George was seemingly made conspicuous by a sentence of five days to be spent in the cells, although the nature of the offence appears not to have been documented among his sparse personnel files. The time in question

seems to have been towards the end of the year of 1914 and the first few days of the following one while the ship was likely still in British waters.

The vessel eventually arrived on March 1 at the island of Tenedos at the mouth of *the Dardanelles*, just prior to the commencement of the Allied naval operations to force a passage (as seen further above) up the waterway perhaps even as far as Istanbul – a pious hope as it was to transpire.

During the course of the almost-entire year which followed, Seaman Smith was to render service on board ship in the following actions: the attack in March of 1915 on Turkish forts defending the narrow waters of *the Dardanelles*; the support with her guns of the French operations of July, 1915; the covering fire of the British evacuation of troops – including the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment – from the *Suvla Bay* in that December; and the final evacuation of British and Anzac forces from the *Gallipoli Peninsula* in January of 1916.



Prince George and Seaman Smith returned to the United Kingdom, in February, a month after the abandonment of the *Gallipoli Campaign*.

(Right above and right: *One of the Dardanelle forts today renovated as a historic site, and showing one of the original German-made Krupp guns which was in action in 1915 – photograph from 2011*)



Seaman Smith was *Mentioned in Dispatches* by the Vice-Admiral Commanding the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron ‘...in recognition for good services in action rendered by Petty Officers and men of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron between the time of landing in the Gallipoli Peninsula in April, 1915, and the evacuation in December, 1915 - January, 1916.’



Back in the United Kingdom, Seaman Smith was officially to leave HMS *Prince George* at the Chatham Dockyards on March 14, 1916, and to report back to HMS *Vivid I* on the morrow. But it was to be another posting of short duration as on April 12-13 he was to be transferred to the naval survey vessel, *Hearty**.



*During the Great War there were three Royal Navy vessels named as such but fortunately for the historian only a single one appears to match the records of Seaman Smith’s service.

This *Hearty* was an elderly ship of one-thousand three-hundred tons, launched in 1885 and then immediately purchased by the Royal Navy. Armed with four quick-firing three-pounder guns, during the time of Seaman Smith's service on board, a period of five weeks and two days, she was engaged in charting the moving sands at the mouth of the River Thames – an area known as *The Nore* - which, of course, was the waterway leading to the Port of London.

On May 20-21 of 1916 he was ordered back once more to *Vivid I* for some eleven months, and for an uncertain number of days at *Vivid III* which was at least partially dedicated to the *Royal Naval Division Trawler Section* – altogether until April 25, 1917 - although what Seaman Smith's duties were to be during all that time is not clear, apart from awaiting another summons to service on board of one of His Majesty's ships.

As of April of 1917 he is next documented as having been on the nominal roll of *Idaho*, a hired yacht which served as a Special Service vessel for the Auxiliary Patrol Base at Milford Haven in Wales as of August of 1916 until February of 1919 and which, during that time, lent its name, *Idaho*, to the base itself.

Seaman Smith's service – with no details of it apparently recorded - lasted there from April 26 of 1917 until June 16 of the same year when he then was to be ordered to return to Plymouth-Devonport and to *Vivid III*. There he was to be on the establishment's books for three weeks and a day before beginning a period of furlough.

By this time he had been in war-time service for almost three years and, as was the case with many of the Newfoundland Naval Reservists, it was decided to grant them a period, usually of about a month, at home. In this respect they were better off than the volunteers of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment many of whom had to await the final months of the War before leave was allowed – some apparently never received any at all.

Seaman Smith's scant personal records show him as being on the nominal roll of HMS *Briton*, the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) drill-ship in St. John's Harbour, from July 9-10 of 1917 until May 2-3 of the next year, 1918*.

**If these dates follow the pattern set by the records of other Newfoundland Reservists, the first one, July 9-10, precedes the time of his travel from the United Kingdom to Newfoundland while the second, May 2-3 does not encompass the return journey. As will be seen, his coming was via Québec City - but his going may have been through either there or Halifax.*

The St. John's newspaper *The Evening Telegram*, in its issue of July 26, 1917, lists the names of thirty-seven Newfoundland Reservists who were to arrive that evening on the trans-Island express train from Port-aux-Basques. They had travelled home from Liverpool on the SS *Corsican*, sailing on July 13 to Québec City, having then taken the train to North Sydney.



(Right above: *The 'Allan Line' steamer 'Corsican' seen on a 1912 post-card. The ship, and the Line, was to be sold to Canadian Pacific in 1917. – from thejourneywest.com web-site)*

One of that number was an E. Smith and given that there appears to have been only a single Newfoundland Reservist Smith with the initial E., is was perhaps Seaman Edgar Henry Smith returning home for a month's furlough. The train drew into the station in the capital city at five-thirty on that afternoon, after which there appears to be little if any further information except to note that a son was to be born to Seaman Smith and his wife Lillian (see further below) in November of 1918.

Given that returning Reservists were normally granted a month's furlough and that he was not to travel back to the United Kingdom until the beginning of the following May, it may be speculated that some of Seaman Smith's time at home was to be spent on duty on board HMS *Briton* – but this is perhaps only speculation.

Upon his return overseas on or about May 2-3 he returned to serve for some three weeks at *Vivid III* on England's south coast. His records show that by the time of his assumption of duties elsewhere on May 25-26, 1918, he had received promotion to the rank of leading seaman.

Those aforesaid duties were to be with *President III*, a further shore-based Royal Navy establishment which had significantly expanded during the war years from its early days as simply HMS *President*.

This Royal Navy facility had initially been in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, one of several Divisions to emerge as the *Great War* progressed, was to deal primarily with finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.



(Right above: *During the period of Seaman Smith's posting to HMS 'President III', the sloop HMS 'Buzzard' moored on the River Thames had taken on the mantle of HMS 'President' - although whether or not Seaman Smith would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

While it is unlikely that Leading Seaman Smith was to become involved with the finances of the Royal Navy, it is recorded in one source – <https://www.saltwire.com> – that he was attached to the *President III* premises in or about the west-country city of Bristol. If so, it was likely at a holding barracks from where seamen could be efficiently dispatched to serve on ships based in nearby ports.

When it was that he was ordered to serve on the sailing-ketch *Tribiskin* is not to be found among Leading Seaman Smith's records. In fact, little information *a propos* the vessel and her loss is to be gleaned from available sources.

The *Saltwire* article referred to in a preceding paragraph cites Leading Seaman as having been assigned the task of gunner, presumably to deal only with any floating mines since hostilities had already ceased, with another Newfoundland seaman on board although Leading Seaman Smith's records show no training as a gunner – and it appears in fact that the aforesaid Newfoundland sailor, John Doyle, was *not* a Newfoundlander but a Scot.

(Right below: *The above photograph is of Padstow Harbour in the English county of Cornwall in December of 1917 and is from twitter.com/padstowharbour/status.)*

The small ketch, based at Padstow in the county of Cornwall (see immediately above) where it had at times served as a local life-boat, was on its way from the Welsh port-city of Swansea with a cargo of coal and bound for Youghal on the south-Irish coast and had only just cleared Swansea Harbour when she foundered.



There appears to have been no evidence found apart from some floating wreckage to suggest why the ship and her entire crew had been lost – either because of the seas, the weather or perhaps a stray mine.

A local newspaper a month afterwards reported that the body of Leading Seaman Smith had washed ashore at Swansea whereupon he was interred where he lies to this day.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Seaman Smith is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the grounds of St. Mark's Anglican Church in the Trinity Bay community of Hodge's Cove. – photograph from 2022*)

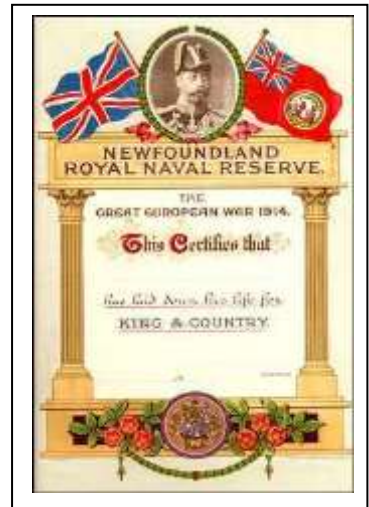
The son of Simon Smith and of Anna Maria Smith (née *Whelan**) of Island Cove, Random, Trinity Bay, he was also oldest brother to Isaac, Edith, Elsie (and perhaps a second Elsie), Belinda, Naomi, Mary, Annie, Maude, Daniel and Eugene.

**The couple married in Hodge's Cove on December 22 of 1892.*

On March 27 of 1918, Leading Seaman Edgar Henry Smith, while in St. John's serving on HMS *Briton*, was married to Lillian Parrott, teacher, from the community of Winterton, formerly *Scilly Cove*. They were to parent a son, Edgar, born in November of that same 1918.

Leading Seaman Smith was recorded as having drowned in the...*sinking of the sailing vessel 'Trebiskin'*...on November 12, 1918, at the age of twenty-four years: date of birth at Island Cove, Newfoundland, June 18, 1894 (from his enlistment papers) although the Newfoundland Birth Register records September of 1895 if not 1896.

(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*)



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(Right: The photograph of Seaman Smith, taken while serving at HMS 'Vivid', is also from the 'saltwire.com' website to which it has been donated by Leading Seaman Smith's nephew, Ross Vivian.



Leading Seaman Smith 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.

Leading Seaman Edgar Henry Smith was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal). His mother and/ or widow eventually received a Canadian Memorial Cross.



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.