



Seaman John Lewis (baptized as *Louis*) Strickland (often found as *Stickland*), Service Number 814x, is buried in the Military Plot of the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in St. John's.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), John Lewis Strickland had initially presented himself for enlistment on November 20 of 1905, whereupon he was to undergo a recorded twenty-eight days of training, terminating in December of that same year.

(continued)

***\*John Lewis Strickland is recorded as having been the five-hundred thirty-fourth volunteer to be registered in the Royal Naval Reserve.***

As with most pre-War volunteers, he had *joined-up* for five years and thus undertook the annual commitment of training for twenty-eight days on five occasions during the following years until 1909. He then saw fit to re-enroll in November of 1910 and thus served again until the early part of the year of 1914. It may well have been at this time that he relinquished his former number – perhaps 1182, the last number is fairly illegible – and adopted 814x, this the service number which he was to carry into the War and by which he was then to be identified on his war-time records.

Then, of course, in that summer of 1914 world events intervened and dictated that he be summoned to fulfil his obligations to the Crown and report for war-time service.

Summoned by Royal Proclamation *to service* just after the onset of hostilities, John Lewis Strickland relinquished his occupation, likely that of fisherman and later that of steward, and reported from his residence in the city, to his ship. There, on August 17 of 1914 – two weeks less a day following the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training vessel, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that above-mentioned mid-August day, John Lewis Strickland was signed on for wartime service\* and it was likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he also attested, pledging his allegiance\*\* to the King-Emperor, George V.



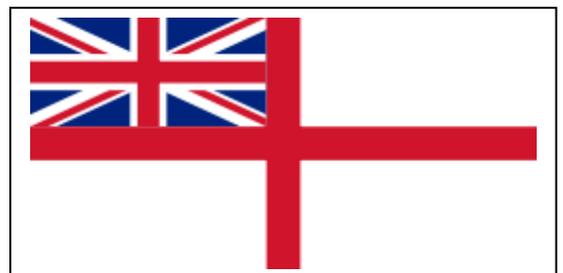
It would also appear that he was to be married during this time (see further below).

***\*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***

***\*Had he done so in 1905 or before May of 1910, it would have been to the preceding monarch, King Edward VII.***

(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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from *the Royal Collection Trust* web-site, taken in or about 1935.)

(Right: *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 at a minimum.***

***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, H.M.S. '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: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)***

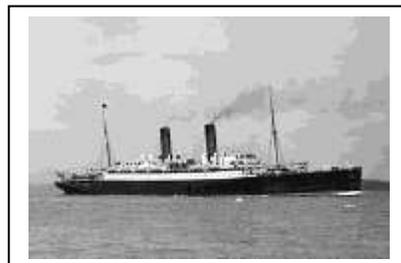
***Following some three months of duties in St. John's – no further training has been recorded - Seaman Strickland, one of a draft of three-hundred five Naval Reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner Franconia on the trans-Atlantic British-bound leg of its commercial route between New York and Liverpool.***



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

Once having arrived in the port-city of Liverpool on November 11-12, it appears that several of the men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases only hours later.

***(Right: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – photograph from Wikipedia)***



It would appear that Seaman Strickland was to be one of this latter category as he was transferred to HMS *Pembroke* upon his disembarkation. *Pembroke* was the Royal Naval shore-based establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was *Pembroke* a barracks – it operated as such from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments – a goodly number during the War of which most not far-removed from Chatham, and which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

*Pembroke I* was the training station for regular seamen and also the location of those holding-barracks from where seamen would sooner or later be attached to one of His Majesty's ships. Thus it was likely *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Strickland was to be posted .

***\*There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but many of whom were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.***

***Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land.***

***Thus the elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured on shore.***



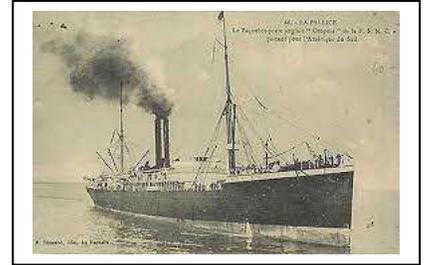
***Which is why Seaman Strickland would likely have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' cap-band.***

**(Preceding page: A few of the impressive buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS ‘Pembroke’ naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010)**

**Seaman Strickland was to be officially attached to *Pembroke* for six weeks and two days\*, until December 20, at which time he was to be transferred to one of His Majesty’s Armed Merchant Cruisers, HMS *Oropesa*.**

***\*This included the days of trans-Atlantic travel.***

**(Right: *The steamship ‘Oropesa’ of some five-thousand three-hundred tons had been built for the Pacific Steam Navigation Company in 1895. Requisitioned by the British Admiralty early in the war, she was converted and armed with six six-inch guns and two three-pounder weapons to serve as an armed merchant cruiser She entered war-time service on November 22 of 1914 and just more than a year later was transferred to French command and re-named ‘Champagne’.***



***Back under the British flag some eighteen months later, on October 9, 1917, the ship was sunk off the east coast of Ireland by the German submarine, U-boat 96 with the loss of forty-seven lives. – The photograph is from the Wrecksite-eu web-site.)***



**(Right: *A six-inch naval gun such as were mounted on ‘Oropesa’ and some of the other armed merchant cruisers – from the Royal Artillery Museum, ‘Firepower’, at Woolwich. – photograph from 2010)***



**(Right: *A photographic example of the type of aforementioned 3-pounder gun as mounted at the beginning of the Great War on HM Armed Merchant Cruiser ‘Oropesa’ – from Wikipedia)***

**HMS *Oropesa* was a vessel of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force conceived in 1912 and in the beginning comprised of elderly and obsolescent light cruisers. It soon was to become evident that these ships were incapable of operating in the conditions with which they were confronted in the northern seas, and by the summer of 1914 the first of His Majesty’s Armed Merchant Cruisers were making their appearance\*.**

***\*Their introduction had been disappointing: the first such vessel, His Majesty’s Armed Merchant Cruiser ‘Oceanic’ had gone ashore on the Shetland Islands in that September and been lost.***

**The armed merchant cruisers were cargo and passenger ships requisitioned by the Admiralty, refitted and armed for the task of forming a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to**

accomplish this these AMC's had to patrol the area of stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland, Iceland and as far north as the Shetland and Orkney Islands, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

Three of the first losses during the War of those Armed Merchant Cruisers – they were used in other theatres as well - were to be vessels of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron: HMS *Viknor* was lost on January 13, 1915, taking with her the entire crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five Newfoundland sailors; only three weeks later HMS *Clan McNaughton* sank and a comparable number of crewmen died, of which twenty-two Newfoundlanders. HMS *Bayano* was to be the next on March 3, eleven of the just fewer than two-hundred lost having been sailors from the Dominion of Newfoundland - to which would be added further deaths in later years, although never again in such numbers on any one occasion\*.

*\*Large losses indeed; however, they were never to be repeated and, on the credit side, during the Great War, the ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were to have inspected just fewer than thirteen-thousand vessels.*

Only some three months into *Oropesa* entering war-time service, in mid-March, ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were to play a role in the sinking of a German submarine in the waters between the coasts of Scotland and Norway. Neither what that role was exactly, nor what had been Seaman Strickland's sub-role, appears to have been recorded.

Then in mid-December of that same year, HMS *Oropesa* became HMS *Champagne*, her name and flag changed, both to French. However, she remained a ship of His Majesty and – although French officers joined her - the complement of some two-hundred who crewed her also remained British – or from Newfoundland.

The port in which Seaman Strickland disembarked from HMS *Champagne* for the last time, on July 2, 1916, is not clear, but from there he was dispatched to another Royal Navy land-based facility, HMS *President III*, although exactly on what date he was to report there *to duty* does not appear among his records.

The above-mentioned Royal Navy establishment, *President III*, had initially been located in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened in 1862 to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, however, was not a vessel but one of several Divisions to evolve as the *Great War* progressed and was to deal primarily with ships' finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.



(Right above: *During the period of Seaman Strickland'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 Strickland would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

In his sparse Service Records there now appears a series of dates to which are appended little information, or none at all, except that they all seem to pertain to Seaman

Strickland's several months of service with HMS *President III* - although one may be reasonably certain that his activities had little to do with the finances of the Royal Navy.

The first in the series is the period from July 3, 1916 – the day after his discharge from *Champagne* – until January 22 of 1917. There is no notation whatsoever in the margins adjacent.

The second such period begins on January 23, 1917, and continues for over nine months until October 30 of the same year. The abbreviations...*Demob...*and...*Remob...*are written alongside, perhaps suggesting that Seaman Strickland was now to enjoy a period of furlough back in Newfoundland. However, as yet any evidence of his return during the year of 1917 has proved to be elusive. The search continues...

Subsequent to that, it would seem that again while the dates have been recorded - October 31, 1917, until December 20, almost two months hence – that the event(s) to which they are associated are not specified except, as seen further above, that it was *HMS President III* under whose authority it (or they) occurred.

As HMS *Briton*, the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve drill-ship in St. John's was, according to Royal Navy Records, the final vessel to which Seaman Strickland was to be attached, the above-noted December 20 may have been the date on which he was to be transferred to her, either physically or at least bureaucratically. Alas! – when the local newspapers of the those latter years of the conflict reported the return of Naval Reservists from overseas, their names were not always included.

Thus Seaman Strickland was surely to report *to duty* on HMS *Briton* and it was surely there that he contracted a case of the influenza which was raging at the time. It was also likely from *Briton* that he was transferred on an unspecified date for treatment at the Emergency Hospital\* in St. John's.

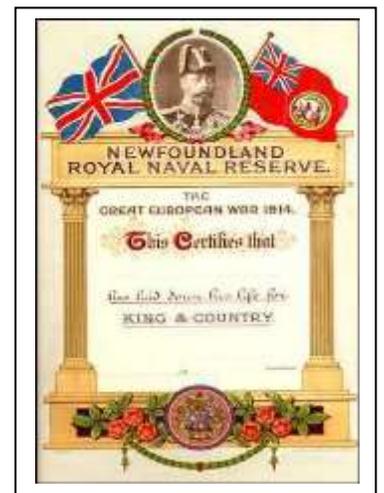


*\*The building used was the Grenfell Mission's King George V Seaman's Institute, a building which still stands on Water Street in the city to this day.*

(Right above: *The caption to the photograph reads: 'Volunteer nurses at the King George V Seaman's Institute in St. John's during the Spanish influenza pandemic'. – from the <http://www.nlhistory.ca> web-site)*

The son Robert Strickland, blacksmith, and of Delilah Strickland (née *Goodyear\** (also found as *Gudger*)) of Fogo, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Hedley-Walter, Florence, Nina-May and to Ralph. On September 14 of 1914, while in St. John's and serving with HMS *Calypso*, he had married Helen Elizabeth Pack Haley (also found variously spelled otherwise).

*\*The couple was married in Fogo on April 21, 1884.*



(Preceding page: *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*)

John Lewis Strickland was recorded as having died of influenza at the *reported* age of thirty-three years in the Emergency Hospital in St. John's on December 12-13 of 1918: date of birth in Fogo, Newfoundland, May 2, 1887 (from Methodist Parish Records and a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics on both of which his name is recorded as *John Louis*).

*Seaman Strickland served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada.*

*For an unknown reason the death of John Lewis Strickland, 814x, has not been recorded in the on-line data of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission nor by the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs Canada.*

(Right: *On December 10 of 1918, Seaman John L Strickland received the Silver War Badge which was awarded... 'To service personnel honourably discharged due to wounds of sickness'. It was to be worn on civilian clothes only. – The image is from the [empiremedals.com](http://empiremedals.com) web-site.)*



Seaman John Lewis Strickland was *officially* entitled to the British War Medal (left) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal)\*.



*\*This above award of medals found in Royal Navy records is blatantly incorrect if indeed Seaman John Lewis Strickland was to serve on HMS 'Oropesa' (HMS 'Champagne') during the time documented in his Service Record. Had he served – and it would seem that he had - in the recorded period of December 1914 until July 1916 he would have been entitled to the 1914-1915 Star (show here to the right).*

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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 19, 2023.

