

STRICKLAND, W.



Seaman Walter Strickland (often found as *Stickland*), Service Number 789x, having no known last resting-place is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Walter Strickland had initially presented himself for enlistment on March 14 of 1910, whereupon he was to undergo a recorded two months of training, terminating on April 10 of that same year.

As with most pre-War volunteers, he had joined-up for five years and was to undergo the required annual training of at least twenty-eight days on five occasions during the following forty-seven months. January and February of 1914 saw his final term of training on *Calypso* before he was to be called to war-time service.

Summoned from home *to service* at the onset of hostilities, Walter Strickland relinquished his occupation as a fisherman and travelled from his residence in the west-coast community of Frenchman's Cove to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. There, on August 25\* of 1914 – three weeks following the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

*\*Elsewhere found as August 17, but there is apparently some confusion in the records between Seaman Walter Strickland (789x) and Seaman John Lewis Strickland (814x but originally 112).*



On that above-mentioned late-August day, Walter 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.

(Preceding page: *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.*)

*\*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 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: 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 her commercial route between New York and Liverpool.**



**(Right: 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, 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*)**



**In the case of Seaman Strickland, this first attachment was to be to the Gunnery School of the Royal Navy, HMS *Excellent*\*, situated on *Whale Island* which guarded the Royal Navy harbour and associated facilities of the English south-coast port-city of Portsmouth at almost the other end of the country.**





***\*The Royal Navy's Gunnery School which had been established in a ship of the same name in 1829, the vessel being permanently moored just outside Portsmouth dockyard. As the years passed the ships were to be replaced, but each in turn was to be named HMS 'Excellent'.***

***(Preceding page: Recruits drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' – from Wikipedia)***

***And as those years passed, the use evolved of the nearby 'Whale (originally 'Whaley') Island' as facilities were constructed on it. In 1885 the Gunnery School was moved from the ship of the time to be re-established on the island itself.***

***It was a move which was to complicate things administratively.***

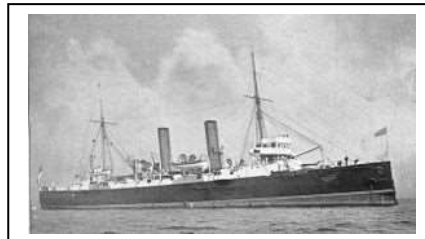
***Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land at a 'stone-frigate', as these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

***Thus the use of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured ashore in naval uniform – and who often were never to set foot on the ship in question.***

***(Right: The Royal Navy Memorial stands on the coast at Portsmouth from where may be seen 'Whale Island' – photograph from 1917)***



***Seaman Strickland was to serve at HMS *Excellent* until February 27 of the following year, 1915. On the morrow he was transferred to HMS *Hermione*, an elderly cruiser brought out of retirement at the onset of the *Great War* to become guard-ship at the port of Southampton not far-distant from Portsmouth and *Whale(y) Island*.***



***(Right above: The photograph of the cruiser HMS 'Hermione' during her more active days is from the 'Wikipedia' web-site.)***

***As seen above, when Seaman Strickland was attached to HMS *Hermione*, the vessel was in use as a guard ship, a duty which was not to necessitate her putting to sea. As such, she was to be responsible for a number of other smaller craft which were to perform duties such as patrolling, the inspection of anti-submarine nets and mine-sweeping the approached of the River Solent and Southampton Harbour. These craft, the facilities on land that serviced them – and of course the guard-ship - were all collectively designated together as HMS *Hermione*.***

***It would appear that that it was to be on one of these other vessels that Seaman Strickland would serve and it is not sure that he ever was to set foot on the deck of HMS *Hermione* herself. His posting was to His Majesty's block-ship *Magda*.***

*Magda*, presumably, was no more mobile than *Hermione*, being strategically positioned to prevent any incursion by German vessels or instruments of destruction. As such she likely had on board only a skeleton crew of which Seaman Strickland was one. What his duties or his daily tasks were do not appear to have been documented, nor is there any record of his newly-acquired skills as a naval gunner having been put to use.

After thirty-two days, Seaman Strickland was to be transferred elsewhere – although the elsewhere was not very far removed – to HMS *Magpie*, a boom\*-defence vessel also at work on the afore-mentioned River Solent.

\*A boom is a barrage suspended from floats and stretched across a waterway to impede the passage of any intruders or other unwelcome visitors.



(Right above: This is HMS ‘Sparrow’, a sister-ship to HMS ‘Magpie’, both of the ‘Redbreast-Class’. They were gun-boats powered, like ‘Calypso’ in St. John’s Harbour, by both wind and steam. ‘Magpie’, launched in 1889, was in 1915 to briefly assume the role of gun-boat once more, but was soon converted to the duties of a depot-ship, and would end the War as such. – the photograph is from the ‘Wikipedia’ web-site.)

As it had been on board HMS *Magda*, service on board *Magpie* appears to have been devoid of everything apart from the daily routines of a ship. While, unlike HMS *Hermione* which was to remain stationary, it would appear that *Magpie*’s work necessitated a certain amount of time at sea – or in fact on the River Solent or her estuary which incorporate not only Southampton but also Portsmouth (HMS *Victory*, see below) and Whaley Island (HMS *Excellent*, as seen above).

But it is unlikely that during the seven months that he spent on board *Magpie*, Seaman Strickland ventured much further out to sea than that. And his next posting which came about on November 1 was just as close: to the Royal Naval shore-based establishment in Portsmouth itself, HMS *Victory*.

Seaman Strickland was transferred to *Victory I* where he served for two months – although what those services were does not appear to have been recorded - until the final day of that year at which time he was ordered to a further land-based Naval facility, HMS *Pembroke I*, sited in the nearby county of Kent and on the River Medway, a tributary of the perhaps better-known River Thames.



During the *Great War* HMS *Pembroke* was to become, as was HMS *Victory*, a series of Divisions each of which for the most part was to specialize in a particular need of the Royal Navy – signals, engine-rooms, financial accounting, for example – of which Division I usually simply implied a holding-barracks where seamen, already qualified, were to await a posting to one of His Majesty’s Ships; such were the *Victory I* and *Pembroke I* facilities to both of which Seaman Strickland was to be attached.

While there, on February 29 of 1916 – it was a leap-year – Seaman Strickland is recorded in his personal Service Record as having received promotion to the rank of (Acting) Leading Seaman, although this appears nowhere else among his scant number of papers or even elsewhere.

Any personal records are then non-existent for almost six months apart from documenting that (Acting Leading) Seaman Strickland was removed from the books of HMS *Pembroke I* on April 2 of that 1916.

During some of the period that followed, however, it appears that he had been granted furlough to travel home to Newfoundland: on March 6, 1916, the *Allan Line* steamship SS *Pretorian*, having sailed from Liverpool on February 24, arrived in the Canadian port-city of St. John, New Brunswick.



On board were civilians, returning Canadian soldiers, British sailors in transit to Halifax and a detachment of eighteen Newfoundland Naval Reservists, Seaman Strickland one of that number, in transit for St. John's, Newfoundland, the first part of which, by train, was to be undertaken by them on that same day, surely to Sydney thence North Sydney for the crossing to the Island.

(Right above: *This un-dated photograph of the 'Allan Line' ship SS 'Pretorian' in the 'Prince's Dock' in the Scottish City of Glasgow is from the web-site 'Tangled Roots and Trees' in which it is shown by courtesy of the Graham Lappin Collection.*)

(Acting Leading) Seaman Walter Strickland is also recorded on the passenger list of the SS *Northland* as one of a party of one-hundred twenty-seven Newfoundland Reservists which was making its way back to the United Kingdom some eight months later\*. The group sailed from Quebec and was documented as having arrived in Liverpool on December 1 of 1916.

Yet during this time while reportedly in Newfoundland he appears to have been transferred on August 30, 1916, by the Authorities in England; on this date he was to become the responsibility of yet another Royal Naval shore-based establishment, HMS *President III*. Perhaps this was a transfer only on paper, yet even so it does not explain the eight months he was to be in Newfoundland – during which time he is, perhaps surprisingly, not even recorded as having been attached to HMS *Briton*.

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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 Service Records there now appears a series of dates to which is appended little information, or none at all, except that these dates all pertain to (Acting Leading) Seaman Strickland's several months of service with HMS *President III* - although one may be reasonably certain that they had little to do with the finances of the Royal Navy.

What it means, of course, is that there is a further gap about which little is known, this one of over ten months, in Seaman Strickland's record.

The first date recorded is the last day of 1916, December 31. There is nothing new at all reported next to it but if, as seems to have happened by the end of his naval career, he was to relinquish that aforesaid promotion – and it could have been by his own choice rather than by that of his superiors – this may have been the date.

Adjacent to the dates January 1, 1917 to October 27, 1917, there is the abbreviation...*Demob. (Demobilized)*, to be followed by...*Invalided...*and then in brackets (*Epilepsy*).

It is possible that Seaman Strickland was to be sent home for treatment during this long period but there appears to be no evidence for it. On the other hand, nor is there any hint of what activities he was to be engaged in during those several months.

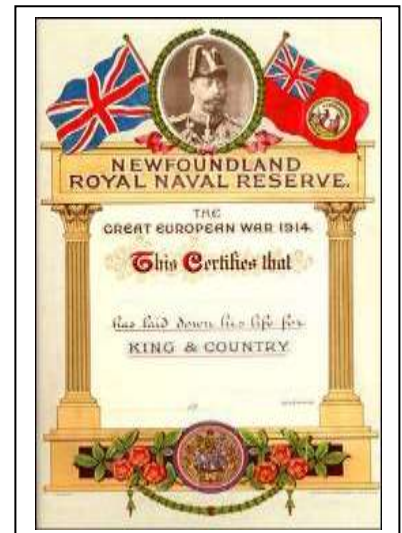


(Right: *The photograph of St. Malo some five years after the end of the Great War is from 'theislandwiki.org' web-site.*)

The final set of dates are October 28, 1917, up until November 17, some three weeks later and it is possible that this is the time alluded to by the use of...*Invalided...(Epilepsy)*...in the margins of the page of his records.

What is finally possible to say with any certainty is that it was on the latter of these two dates, November 17, that Seaman Strickland was to join the small – only six-hundred eight tons – and elderly – launched in 1864 – vessel, the *SS Warsaw*, which was recorded as equipped with at least a single gun for defence purposes.

On December 20 while en route from the French port of St. Malo to Liverpool, she was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-31* while some four miles to the south-east of the coast of Devon within view of the Start Point Light-house. Seventeen of the crew were to perish in the incident.



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The son of Fanny Strickland – some sources record his father as John Strickland; others document him as illegitimate – of Long Cove (later re-named as Frenchman’s Cove), in the Bay of Islands, he was also brother to Caroline and husband to Emily (née *Wheeler*) whom he had married on March 31 of 1913 at John’s Beach – whether the couple was to have children appears not to have been recorded.

Walter Strickland died on that December 20 of 1917 off the coast of Devon in the sinking of the SS *Warsaw*: date of birth in Long Cove (Frenchman’s Cove), Newfoundland, January 19, 1890 (from Royal Navy Records) but also January 19, 1891 from the Birth Register of the (Church of England?) Mission in the Bay of Islands).

*(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)*

*Seaman Strickland 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.*

*(Right: The photograph of Seaman Walter Strickland, Number 789x, of the Royal Reserve, Newfoundland, is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans’ Affairs Canada.)*



Seaman Walter Strickland was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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.