



**Seaman William Alma Kirby, Number 3004x, lies interred in the Salvation Army Cemetery on Blackmarsh Road in St. John's, Newfoundland.**

**Having *answered the call* for volunteers from the naval authorities, William Alma Kirby relinquished his likely occupation of fisherman in the community of Harbour Buffet on Long Island, Placentia Bay, and journeyed to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on December 4 of 1916, he reported...*to duty*...\*on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton* (ex-*Calypso*), moored in the harbour (see below).**

On that December 4 he enlisted into the Reserve, was signed on to serve for the duration of the conflict\* and underwent a medical examination on the same day. William Alma Kirby also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

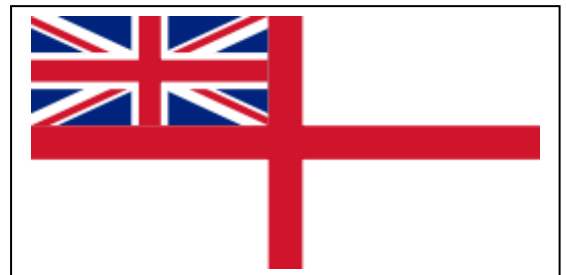


*(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior 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.)*

*(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’ (later ‘Briton’) 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.*



(continued)

**(Preceding page: 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.. – photograph from Newfoundland Provincial Archives via Wikipedia)**

**Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of short-lived 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.**

**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.**



**(Right above: 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.**



**(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, taken of her by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)**





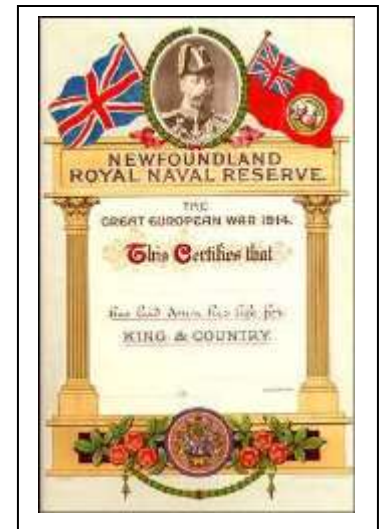
(Preceding page: *The C-Class cruiser 'Calypso' of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia*)

It is not recorded how many days Seaman Recruit Kirby was to spend in training on *Briton*, nor if he was ever to attain the rank of *Seaman*. His records show that he was...*on strength*...from that December 4 until the twentieth day of January of the New Year, 1917, but this logically was to include the time that he would spend under medical care in the *Fever Hospital* in St. John's.

The son of William Kirby, former fisherman to be deceased of paralysis on April 7 of 1921, and of Eliza Jane Kirby (née *Bungy*\* (also found as *Bungey* and *Bungay*)) of Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to Hannah-Chambers, Violet-Hilda-Beatrice, Charles-Bungy (sic) and to Mary-Agnes.

*\*The couple had married on November 12 of 1887 in the Parish of Burin.*

Seaman William Alma Kirby was reported as having...*died of sickness (scarlet fever)*...in the *Fever Hospital* in St John's on January 20, 1917, at the age of sixteen years: however, the date of his birth in Harbour Buffett, Newfoundland, was documented in his service file as having been January 15 of 1899.



(Right above: *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*)

Despite his sacrifice, Seaman William Alma Kirby, having served neither in a theatre of war nor overseas, was eligible for no 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 21, 2023.