

BENNETT. L.J.



Seaman Leonard (also found as simply *Leo*) Joseph Bennett, Number 1331x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman working out of the Southside in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 9 of 1914 Leonard Joseph Bennett reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same November 9 he underwent a satisfactory medical examination and enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below) and was signed on to serve for a single year*. 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.***

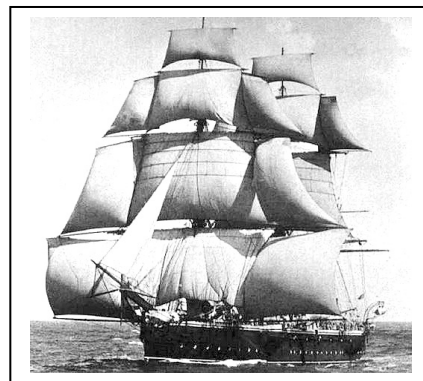
Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion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

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.



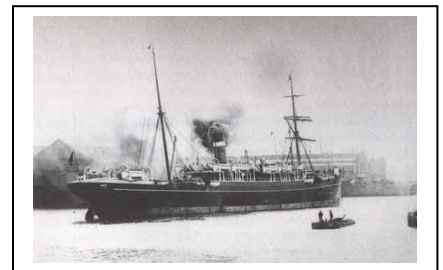
(Preceding page: *H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named Briton in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum*)

Following a reported thirty-eight days of training in St. John's, Seaman Bennett was promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of an Ordinary Seaman. Ten days later, as one of a draft of one-hundred fifty three naval reservists, he embarked on December 17 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Mongolian*, a regular visitor to Newfoundland, which sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow at four o'clock on that same afternoon.



(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: *The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.*)



Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom 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 on or about December 28-29 – perhaps later since *Mongolian* could reportedly have made only twelve knots on her Atlantic crossing.

As seen above, Glasgow was to be where Seaman Bennett's draft's set foot on shore, from where his destination was to be HMS *Vivid I**, the Royal Navy port and facilities of Plymouth-Devonport, at almost the other end of the country.

**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 Bennett 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 caps.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Bennett were initially to be stationed.

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



A month after his arrival at Devonport, on January 19-20 of the New Year, 1915, Seaman Bennett was transferred – even though remaining at Vivid I – to the Trawler Reserve and classified as a deck hand. There he was to await a further five months for a posting to which he was eventually dispatched on May 22.

He was then to serve on the eastern side of the county in the county of Kent, at HMS Ceto in the coastal town and harbour of Ramsgate. His cap-band was to display this change of station – unless he perhaps went directly to his ship.

Prior to the Great War, Ramsgate had been a popular seaside destination and it had also been a thriving fishing centre, both of which had suffered hugely because of German U-boat activity, mine-laying and, later, bombing raids. It was in order to counter the submarines and mines that the Admiralty created the Dover Patrol for which it requisitioned a number of fishing-boats, drifters and tugs, armed them, and placed Navy personnel on board.



(Right above: Drifters and other small vessels lined up at the quay-side of Ramsgate Harbour during the early days of the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk)

Thus HMS Ceto came into being at Ramsgate, a base where Seaman Bennett was to be...taken on strength...on that May 22 of 1915.

At some point after having reported to HMS Ceto, perhaps almost at once, Seaman Bennett was to become a crew-member of a drifter, perhaps HMS Achievable, a vessel at times engaged in patrolling, escorting, and the search for and the destruction of enemy mines.

(continued)

(Right: *Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the Great War: these were for the most part contact mines. U-boats were also used for this purpose – from the NavWeaps web-site*)



There was nothing particularly conspicuous about *Achievable*. Perhaps constructed mainly of wood, she was just another hired drifter, Admiralty Number 212. She had been built in 1913, weighed some ninety tons and had been registered as LT.57. in the fishing town of Lowestoft further up the coast. No longer simply a fishing-boat, she was now to carry armament comprising a single three-pounder gun.

(Right: *The Royal Navy Drifter 'Cheery' of the same class as 'Achievable' which was to survive the conflict, the photograph showing a small gun mounted on her fore-deck – photograph from Wikipedia*)



(Right below: *A photographic example of the type of afore-mentioned 3 pounder gun as mounted on HM Drifter Achievable – from Wikipedia*)



She had come into service in early September of 1914, some eight months before Seaman Bennett stepped onto her deck. Her career was unremarkable – she was to witness the destruction of a sister drifter by an enemy mine but that appears to have been all. Thus the three months of Seaman Bennett's service, from May 22(?) until August 18, were also without incident.

Seaman Bennett was thereupon posted elsewhere: to *Pembroke I*, another land-based naval establishment, known as '*stone frigates*', further along the River Thames towards London and in the naval town of Chatham.

(Right above: *Some 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*)



What exactly were Seaman Bennett's duties at *Pembroke I* for the seventy-three days that he was to spend there is not clear; they were likely those of the continued training undergone by the ordinary seamen posted there, and of waiting since *Pembroke I* was amongst other things a holding barracks for sailors waiting to be attached to one of His Majesty's ships.

(continued)

For Seaman Bennett this moment came at the end of October and on the first day of November he was reporting to HMS *Pekin*, the *Auxiliary Patrol* shore-base in the east-coast fishing port of Grimsby which had come into being in 1907. As seen further above, the base and its personnel was named for a ship, in this case a single trawler HMT *Pekin* (also found as *Peken*) to which all its naval personnel, including Seaman Bennett, were nominally attached. However, the ship on which he was to serve for some five weeks, until December 8, was not *Pekin* but *Greyhound*.

The problem for the historian is that there were two *Greyhounds*, one a destroyer and one a converted paddle-steamer, both apparently operating out of the fishing port of Grimsby at the time of Seaman Bennett's attachment there.

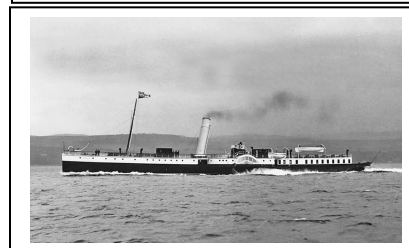
The 'C'-Class destroyer HMS *Greyhound*, launched in 1900 had been based at Dover for the first year of the *Great War* and had been employed with the 6th Destroyer Flotilla on anti-submarine and counter-mining patrols as well as other duties. In the late summer and early autumn of 1915 she had been involved in operations off the Belgian coast before, in that November of 1915, the ship had been re-deployed to the 7th Destroyer Flotilla further north up the English coast in the area administered by the *Humber Patrol*.

Some of the *Patrol's* operations were directed from Grimsby and it is not impossible that the destroyer HMS *Greyhound* was served by Seaman Bennett during his period of service at HMS *Pekin*.

(Right: The photograph taken in 1906 of HMS *Greyhound* is from the Wikipedia web-site.)



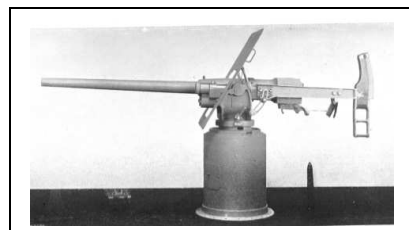
The other *Greyhound* – in fact the vessel seems to have been named *Greyhound II* – was far removed from being a quasi-modern warship; she was a twenty year-old paddle passenger-steamer whose flattish bottom and small draught, plus high speed and manoeuvrability made her highly suitable for coastal patrolling and work in shallower waters.



Built in 1895, she was requisitioned in 1915, converted and armed with two six-pounder guns for her new, wartime role and came into service with the *Auxiliary Patrol* in Area IX operating out of Grimsby on October 1 of that same year. She survived the conflict.

(Right above: The image of a peace-time *Greyhound II* is from the clydeships.co.uk web-site via Google.)

(Right: A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss 6 pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the paddle-steamer 'Greyhound II'. White Ear – from Wikipedia)



In whichever of the two ships he was to serve, his posting was to prove of short duration for, on the above-mentioned December 8, Seaman Bennett was transferred once more.

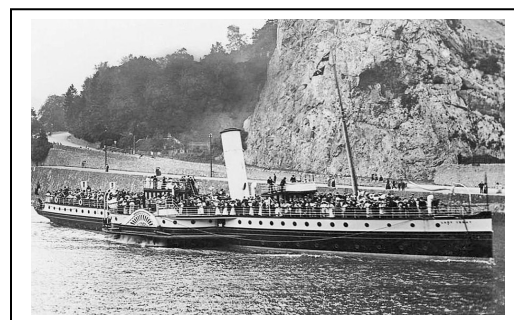
On this occasion it appears to have been to the East Anglian coastal town of Harwich to which he was ordered, a harbour used by the cross-Channel ferry services to the Belgian port of Ostend. During the *Great War* warships from Harwich were employed to protect the northern approaches to the Dover Straits and also the estuary of the River Thames. To that end a considerable number of light cruisers, and destroyers were organized into the several flotillas of the *Harwich Force*, a fleet to which were added several submarines and auxiliary vessels including minesweepers.

Several of these latter ships were paddle-steamers requisitioned to become mine-sweepers and very similar to the above-mentioned *Greyhound II*. Seaman Bennett was to join the crew of the recently-built – in 1911 - *Lady Ismay* on December 9, 1915, almost a full year after she had gone into war-time service.



(Right: The photograph of ‘*Paddle minesweepers, Harwich, 15th April 1918*’ is from the *Imperial War Museum* and found on the ‘*Harwich & Dovercourt a time gone by*’ web-site.)

Report of the sinking of the *Lady Ismay*: *The ‘Lady Ismay’ in the morning of December 21 with six other paddle minesweepers to sweep the area to the south-west. The visibility being poor, around noon three of the vessels separated and left for Harwich. Their wireless signal sent to alert the remaining four ships, including the ‘Lady Ismay’, not having been received, these vessels slipped sweeps at 1500 hours (3 o’clock p.m.) and in order they, ‘Westward Ho’, ‘Cambridge’, ‘Lady Ismay’, and ‘Glen Avon’ headed for Longsand Light Vessel*, off the town of Clacton, Essex, to the south of Harwich.*



(Right above: The image of a peace-time ‘*Lady Ismay*’ is from the *clydeships.co.uk* web-site via Google.)

The first two paddlers passed the Light Vessel on the starboard side but the tide forced the ‘Lady Ismay’ to pass on port hand as she set course for the Light Vessel. At around 1540 hours she struck a mine amidships beneath the forward coal bunker and sank within a minute. The mine had been laid some days earlier by UC-3 (a U-boat).

*Seventeen ratings were lost, only those on deck survived. She went down so quickly that the survivors stepped into the lifeboats. The ‘Glen Avon’ stopped astern and rescued some of the men with her boats; the other two minesweepers turned back although ‘Cambridge’ apparently also lowered her boats to pick up survivors and destroyed confidential papers which were floating on the water. – adapted from a report originally from *Naval-history.net* and found on the ‘*Harwich & Dovercourt, a time gone by*’ web-site*

**A floating light-house*

(continued)

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

The son of William Bennett, former fisherman deceased of apoplexy on July 24 of 1919, and of Agnes Bennett (née Healey*, deceased from a goitre on May 5, 1919), likely residents of the Southside, St. John's, he was brother to at least Benedict, Patrick, William (see**below), John, Lucy-Agnes, Clifford-Joseph, Michael, Catherine and to Thomas-Leo.

*The couple was married in St. John's as early as October 30 of 1873.

(Right below: A family memorial which stands in Belvedere Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of Seaman Leonard-Joseph Bennett and that of his brother Private William Bennett. – photograph from 2015)

Seaman Bennett died on December 21 of 1915, as a result of the sinking of the paddle-minesweeper, *Lady Ismay*: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, August 20, 1886 (from his enlistment papers).

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



**William Bennett enlisted in St. John's on March 11 of 1915, departed for overseas service a month later and arrived in the United Kingdom on May 2-3 of that same year. Having trained in Scotland until that November, he was then a soldier of the 1st Re-enforcement Draft from Ayr which sailed to join the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which by that time was serving at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

(continued)

Having survived the final weeks of the Gallipoli Campaign, Private Bennett was to sail with the 1st Battalion to France where the Newfoundlanders were to be stationed on the Western Front in the vicinity of a hamlet appropriately named Hamel which was facing a village on the German-occupied side of the line. The name of the village was Beaumont.

Private Bennett was reported as...missing in action...at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916, while serving with 'A' Company during the fighting of the first day of...First Somme. Six months later, on December 31, he was officially...presumed dead.



His full story is found elsewhere amongst these files.

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 22, 2023.