



Seaman Llewelyn Butler, Service Number 2823, is buried in Woodstock Faith United Church Cemetery on the Baie Verte Peninsula, Newfoundland.

Having decided to answer the call of the Naval Authorities for volunteers, Llewelyn Butler was to make his way from his place of residence on the Little Bay Islands to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. There on May 28, 1917, he reported on

board HMS *Briton*, the Drill Ship of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) which was moored there in the harbour.

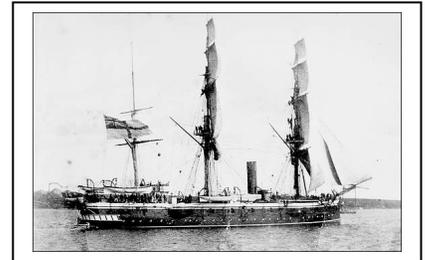
It was on that same spring day, May 28, that Llewelyn Butler enlisted, was engaged for the *Duration of the Conflict*, and underwent a medical assessment which pronounced him to be...*in every respect a fit and proper person to be enrolled in the Royal Naval Reserve*. It would have been on or about this date as well that he was to have attested, 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.)

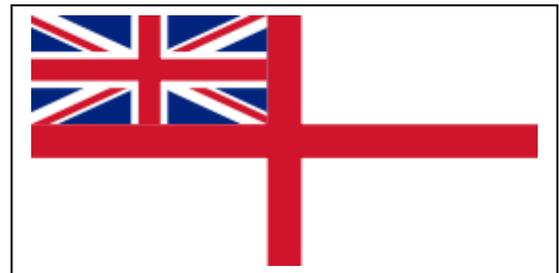


He was then likely to have undertaken the requisite twenty-eight day period of training - although there appear to be no dates of such in his papers - on board His Majesty's Ship *Briton* which, until the previous year, had been HMS *Calypso* (see below).

(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.**

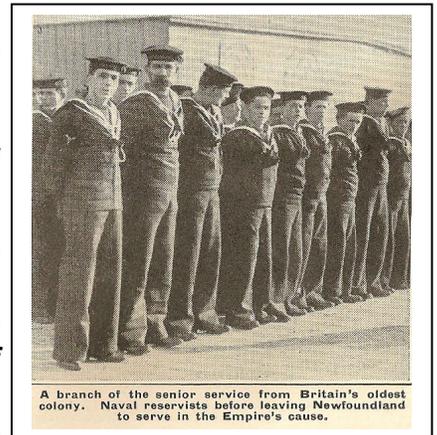
(Preceding page: Recruits of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) seen here in front of HMS 'Calypso'. The shed-like superstructure seen behind them had been built onto the ship in 1902 to serve as a drill-hall. Whether the vessel was still 'Calypso, or had become 'Briton' by this time (see further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

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.

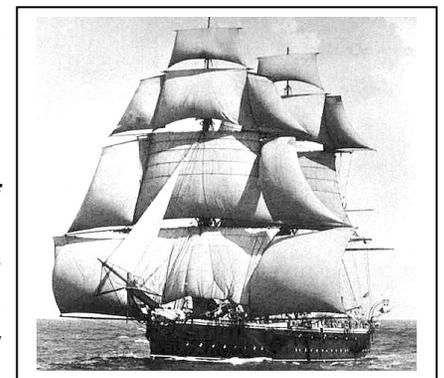
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.



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

(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.



(continued)

(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)*



(Right: *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 appears to have been on Christmas Day of 1917 that Seaman Butler, one of a small draft of perhaps a dozen Reservists, boarded a train in St. John's for the trans-Island journey of some twenty-four hours to Port aux Basques. From there the detachment was to take the Reid Newfoundland Company steamship the *SS Kyle* late on that Boxing Day evening for passage to North Sydney where the vessel arrived at five o'clock in the morning of December 27.

Having concluded the necessary immigration and medical formalities, Seaman Butler and his fellow Reservists were to take another train, on this occasion to Halifax.

However, there appears to be no further information available pertaining to the remainder of Seaman Butler's journey, this perhaps at least partially explained by the events in Halifax three weeks prior: the *Halifax Explosion*.

On December 6 two ships, the Norwegian *Imo* and the French *Mont Blanc* had collided in the harbour, as a result of which the *Mont Blanc* had caught fire. She was laden with explosives and the subsequent explosion - reportedly the largest man-made explosion in history up until that time - devastated both the port and the city. More than seventeen-hundred were killed and nine-thousand hurt.



The down-town and waterside areas of the city were devastated and to add to the misery of the now-homeless, a major winter storm was unleashed upon them on the following day.

(Right above: *A view of an obliterated Halifax with its harbour in the distance, the photograph taken two days after the incident. – from 'Wikipedia')*



(Right above: *HMCS 'Niobe' – on which several Newfoundland Reservists were serving at the time - had sent one of its boats to the aid of 'Mont Blanc' before the ship exploded; when she did, all of the boat's crew were killed, as were some of those on board 'Niobe' itself – with several more hurt. 'Niobe' was damaged in the blast but was able to continue her functions in a diminished manner. – The photograph of a damage Niobe is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.)*

The importance of Halifax Harbour to the war effort meant that the return of some semblance of normal maritime traffic was a priority: within a week *some* shipping was already sailing from there and by the end of December most piers were in operation and by January had been repaired.

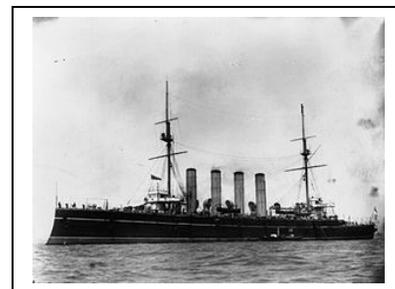
In the meantime, however the smaller east-coast Canadian ports of Saint John and Sydney had to shoulder extra duties, the transport of troops to the United Kingdom originally scheduled to pass through Halifax being one of them.

Seaman Butler's draft of Reservists may well have been affected in this manner.

When he did eventually arrive in the United Kingdom, Seaman Butler, was attached to a Royal Navy land-based establishment, *Vivid III**, the Division responsible for the Royal Naval Trawler Section in which many Newfoundlanders were to serve. There is, however, nothing in the records to show that during this period Seaman Butler was to serve on one of His Majesty's trawlers. He was likely therefore, to have spent time in a holding-barracks awaiting orders – for some months until June 9-10 of 1918.

**In fact, his sparse Service Records show that Seaman Butler had been...‘on the books’...of ‘Vivid III’ since he had stepped onto the train in St. John’s on that Christmas Day of 1917.*

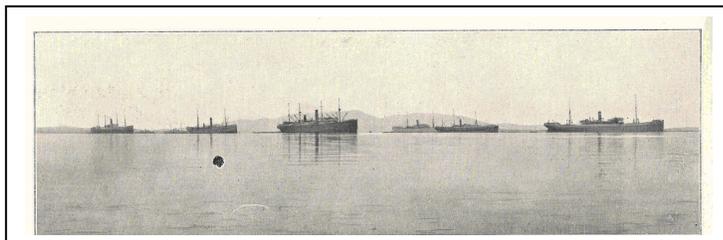
On that last-mentioned June 10, Seaman Butler was attached to HMS *Europa*, an elderly cruiser which by this time had been withdrawn from the fray and was serving as flag-ship of the Commanding Officer of the Royal Navy Base and flotilla operating out of *Mudros Bay (Mudros Harbour)* on the Greek Island of Lemnos. She was also the Depot Ship of the Base itself.



When he was to join his ship is not clear as it is obvious that Seaman Butler did not leave the area of Portsmouth-Devonport, England, on June 9 to take up his duties on Lemnos on the morrow. Neither is there any information as to exactly what those duties may have been – although he may have been attached to *Europa* herself as no subsidiary ships are named* in his records.

**A picture of the time shows at least fourteen smaller ships to have been the responsibility of HMS ‘Europa’.*

(Right below: *Mudros Bay – its tiny harbour seen here full to capacity in 1915 with Allied shipping during the ‘Gallipoli Campaign’ – was also the base of a great number of medical facilities. – from Illustration)*



Seaman Butler was to spend some nine months with HMS *Europa*. During that time he had seen the end of the fighting against the Turks – Mudros is only a few kilometres from Turkish territory and some fifty from the Dardanelles, the waterway which leads to the

Black Sea and which passes by Istanbul (the Turkish capital city at that time) on the way. And then of course he had still been serving there when the Armistice of November 11, 1918, came into effect.

Even though the *Great War* had come to a conclusion, there was still naval work to be done, perhaps the most essential of which was to be the neutralization of the thousands of mines which had been laid during the war years. Hundreds of the trawlers of the Royal Navy still had a job to do.

On March 18 of 1919, Seaman Butler was transferred, although he was to remain in Mediterranean waters. He was sent to the Island of Malta, a British possession at the time*, to serve at the Royal Navy establishment there: HMS *Egmont*. He would serve there for seven weeks less a day.

**Malta became independent in 1964.*

(Right: *The image of the Grand Harbour, Valetta, Malta, seen here just prior to the Great War is from a vintage post-card.*)



HMS *Egmont* was the shore-based establishment at Valetta from which British naval operations were directed during the Great War. As can be seen from a glance at a map of the area, Malta in the centre of the Mediterranean is a position of great strategic importance; this also implies that a great amount of naval activity was to emanate from there, up to and even after the Second World War until the island became independent in 1964.

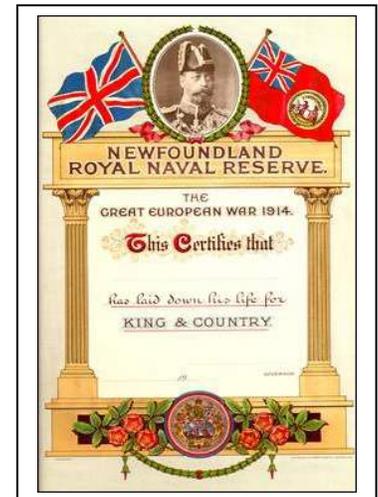


HMS *Egmont* was in fact a castle known in English as the *Fort Saint Angelo* which formed a part of the fortifications which still encircle the harbour, defensive constructions built some four hundred years before, when the island was a possession of the *Knights of the Order of Saint John*.

(Right above: *A part of the Fort Saint Angelo complex in Valetta's Grand Harbour as it still exists – photograph from 2011*)

It was to be not long after that second Mediterranean posting that Seaman Butler must have begun to exhibit the symptoms of illness as on May 6 of that 1919 he was transferred back to HMS *Briton* in Newfoundland. Once again there is no certainty as to the date on which he reported back to the ship, although two dates are suggested: September 19 of 1919 and then January 15, 1920. In either case he was ill and was to finally be invalided from service, perhaps on the afore-mentioned September 19.

(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*)



The son of Eleazer Butler, fisherman, and of Susannah (known as Susie, née *Eveley**) of the Little Bay Islands, he was also brother to James-Baxter, Mary-Ann, Fanny-Ethel, Lavinia-Jane, Adelaide-Horatia(?), Rebecca, Rex and Malcolm.

**The couple had married on September 11, 1884, at Baie Verte.*

Seaman Llewelyn Butler passed away on April 26 of 1920 at North-East Pacquet, Newfoundland; most sources record tuberculosis (*phthisis*) as the cause of death, but the Newfoundland Vital Statistics cite, perhaps surprisingly, shell-shock: date of birth on the Horse Islands, White Bay, Newfoundland, April 24, 1899, (from his enlistment papers).

Seaman Butler 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 Llewelyn Butler was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (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. Last updated – January 22, 2023.