

CHAPE, J. SERVED AS AVERY, J.



Jack Chafe (served as Seaman Jack Avery, Number 1825x) 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 in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on June 22 of 1915 Jack Chafe (Avery) reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).



On that same June 22 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service and also underwent the required medical assessment on the same day. 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.*)



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****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, 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.

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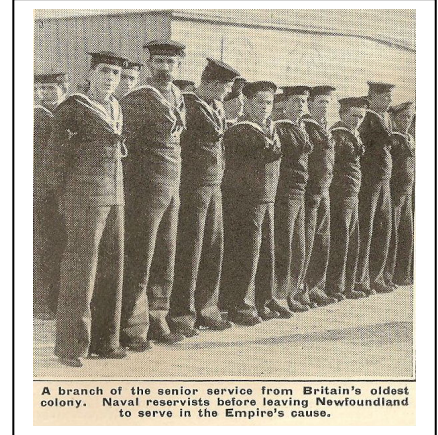
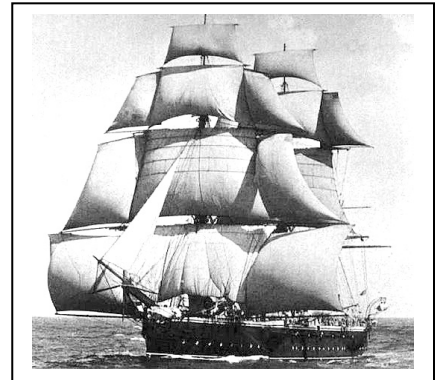
(Right below: *HMS 'Calypso' is seen here in full sail. The vessel was to be re-commissioned 'HMS Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – The Royal Navy photograph dated 1898 is by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum)*

Ninety-two days* after having been...*taken on strength*...on 'Calypso', his sparse Service Records document that it was on September 22, having by that time been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit*, that the now-Seaman Avery was on his way to the United Kingdom.

**It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.*

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

The date of departure may in fact have been September 23, the day after an *entertainment* had been held for a *large number of Reservists* by the local Board of Trade. The naval personnel had then crossed the island by train to embark onto the SS *Kyle* for passage on the night of September 24-25 from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, to arrive there at ten minutes past five in the morning.

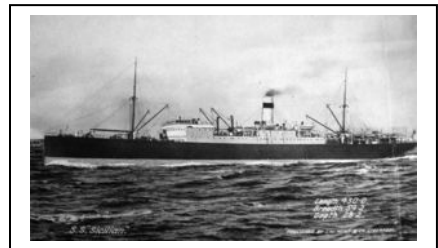


The *Kyle's* passenger manifesto records a contingent on one-hundred forty-two reservists – Seaman Jack Avery among that number - then undertaking the onward journey at twenty past seven a.m. after a medical inspection, via Halifax to Québec on the *Intercontinental Railway* where the draft boarded ship for the trans-Atlantic passage.

The *Discharge Register Royal Naval Reserve* appears adamant that the draft was now to board the SS *Sicilian* in Québec but there appears to be no further information in this regard available *a propos* the Newfoundland contingent*.

(Right below: *The image, likely in peace-time, of the 'Allan Line' ship 'Sicilian' is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

**While fairly accurate records have been kept for troop-transports, 'Sicilian' was not to be requisitioned as such and thus continued her commercial runs between Montréal, Québec and the United Kingdom. Any precise records of her whereabouts and doings during the war-time period are rare indeed – any of late September, 1915, are even more elusive.*



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Having arrived in the United Kingdom towards the end of the first week of that October of 1915, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Avery, the destination was to be *Pembroke* .

*HMS Pembroke** was the Royal Navy establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

Pembroke I was the training station and holding-barracks for regular seamen and it was likely *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Avery was to be attached.

**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 who 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 ashore.

This was where at this time Seaman Avery would have worn an HMS ‘Pembroke’ cap-band.

However where he was to work during all the weeks that were to follow, and what Seaman Avery’s work and duties exactly were to be, is not to be found among his papers.

(Right above: Some of the impressive buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was a part of 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)

His Service Records show that after having been attached to HMS *Pembroke* for those nine months – until June 22-23 of 1916 – that Seaman Avery was to have been transferred to a second Royal Navy land-based facility: HMS *President III*.

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Apart from functioning as a training-station for the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve – its original purpose - and as a holding-barracks, HMS *President* during the conflict was to evolve into a major accounting base for the Royal Navy; by the end of the *Great War* there were six different Accounting Divisions with offices not only in London – where *President* as a training-ship – a real ship - had originated in 1862 – but in several other venues in southern England.



(Right above: *The sloop HMS 'Buzzard', seen here moored on the Thames Embankment in 19106, was to become the headquarters-ship of HMS 'President' – and therefore also adopted the name – in 1911, the vessel to serve as such until the year 1918. – photograph from 'Wikipedia'*)

Wherever it was that he was now to serve during the period of June 23, 1916, until January 31 of the following year, 1917*, Seaman Avery was to remain attached to HMS *President III*.

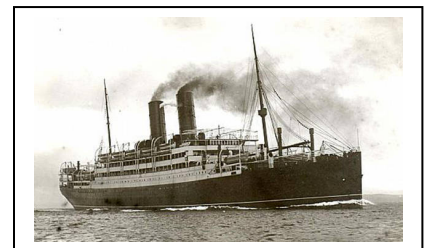
**The fact that there is no record of any service on a vessel by Seaman Avery during these two lengthy periods spent at Pembroke and at President III does not preclude the possibility that during 1916 he was to be attached to one or more of His Majesty's ships – but not before 1916 as he was not eligible for the 1915 Star. Nor is there any evidence of his having been granted a prolonged furlough. However, there was still plenty of Navy work to be done on shore.*

There appears not to be a great amount of information available about the *Anchor Line* ship the SS *Transylvania* apart from that of her eventual loss to a German U-boat in the Mediterranean on May 4 of 1917. The sinking of the vessel with the loss of some four-hundred lives was one of the most tragic of such incidents during the *Great War*.

Her construction had been completed just following the outbreak of the *Great War* and the Admiralty immediately decided to requisition her for use as a troopship. In May of 1915 she was commissioned as such, her capacity at the time being set at 1, 379 passengers plus crew.

The Admiralty, however, was to decide that 3,060 plus crew was a more appropriate figure and it was with this number of troops on board that the ship sailed on May 3, 1917, from Marseille en route to Alexandria – a second source has Salonika as the destination although this may have been a stop along the way for the disembarkation of the troops – in the company of two Japanese destroyers.

It was on the morrow while not far off-shore in the *Gulf of Genoa* that the ship was struck at an interval of some twenty minutes by two torpedoes. The second torpedo eliminated any hope that the ship could be beached and saved, and it also thus ensured the loss of over four-hundred of those on board.



Seaman Jack Avery (*Chafe*) was one of three naval personnel serving on *Transylvania* at time and was one of those lost. His body was not recovered.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of the SS 'Transylvania', perhaps taken during her sea-trials, is from the uboat.net web-site via Google.*)

(Right below: *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 Albert Chafe, former fisherman deceased on February 23, 1899, and of Eliza Ann Chafe (née Avery*) of Petty Harbour before Flower Hill, St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Amelia-Maria, Walter-Chesley, Daniel-Leonard, Alfreda-Ann, Alexander and to William-George – of all the children, Jack was apparently the youngest.

**The couple was married in St. John's on November 14 of 1882.*

Seaman Jack Chafe (born Avery) died in the sinking of the *Transylvania* on May 4, 1917, at the reported age of twenty-two years: date of birth in St. John's – although perhaps in Petty Harbour as were his siblings - Newfoundland, December 14, 1895 (this date from only his enlistment papers).



Seaman Chafe (Avery) served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as is cited in some sources. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records him as two seamen: Chafe, as a Canadian which, of course, he was not; and Avery as serving with the United Kingdom which he did. The latter is perhaps officially correct since he signed on as Avery and was in the Royal Navy.

Seaman Jack Chafe (Avery) was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to 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. Last updated – January 22, 2023.

