



Seaman George Coates, Number 1147x – a number he appears to share with a seaman Leo Kelly, he to be discharged as medically unfit -, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

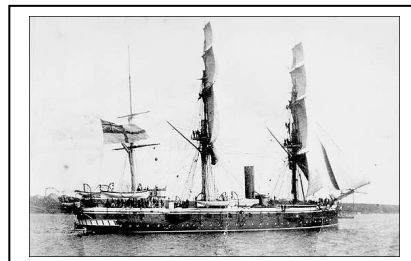
Having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman and travelled from the community of Fogo to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 13 of 1914, he – his records document him as an *Old Reservist* - reported...to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below), George Coates enlisted – or re-enlisted - on that same date.

The date of any original enlistment does not appear among his papers, only that of the aforementioned November 13 when he enlisted or re-enlisted into the Reserve (see further below) and was signed on for a single year's war-time service* - although a second, usually reliable, source records a five-year term; he then underwent a satisfactory medical assessment ten days afterwards. He also likely attested – unless he had already previously done so - at this same time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.



(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 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 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.**



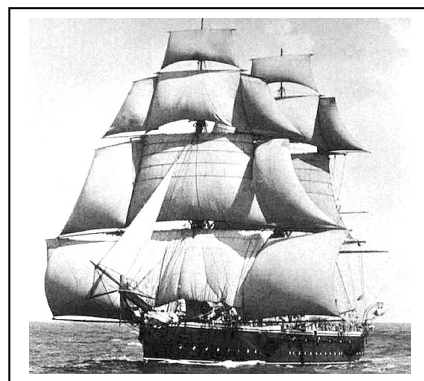
Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of short-lived local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion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

(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)*

(Right: *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)*



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: *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, 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.

Following a mere five days of training* in St. John's, Seaman Coates, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists, embarked on November 18-19 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Carthaginian* which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19th, its reservist passengers un-mentioned in the local newspapers.



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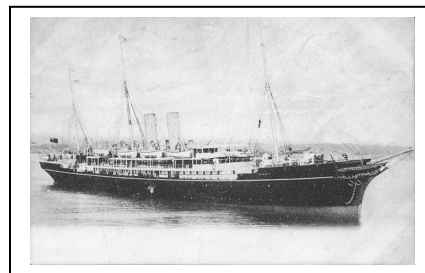
(Preceding page: *A relatively elderly vessel, 'Carthaginian' had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life. – The un-dated photograph of Carthaginian entering St. John's has been donated to the Maritime History Archive web-site by Captain Harry Stone.*)

**It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the compulsory twenty-eight day training period, either partially or totally, was oft-times waived.*

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

It would seem that Seaman Coates was one of those ordered to immediately join his ship, HMS *Viknor*, the vessel apparently at the time based on the River Tyne in north-east England. She was not to leave port until December 28 and not to join her squadron (see below) until January 1.

The Armed Merchant Cruiser *Viknor* was an elderly ship, obsolete and apparently under-powered with a top speed of only fourteen knots. In her earlier lives she had firstly been, as of 1888, the SS *Atrato*, before then having been re-named as the SS *Viking* in 1912. Upon the outbreak of the *Great War* in 1914 she had been requisitioned by the British Admiralty and baptized on a third occasion as HMS *Viknor*.



(Right above: *The luxury cruise-liner 'Atrato' seen here in her pre-War condition – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

'*Viknor*' was to be attached to the 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally comprising out-of-date warships which, unable to cope with the elements, by that January of 1915 had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–liners carrying a few guns as elderly as some of the ships on which they were mounted.

The ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling for a fight. Their job was to form a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to accomplish this these vessels had to patrol the stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

In early January the ships of the *Northern Patrol* stopped a Norwegian vessel, the *Bergensfjord*, and transferred a number of persons, one of them a suspected spy, to *Viknor*, she then being ordered to proceed to Liverpool with her prisoner.

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From what is known about *Viknor*, she was hardly a vessel fit for the task at hand and January and February of 1915 were to apparently be particularly stormy. What is more, a German counterpart, the steamship *Berlin*, had recently been reported in the area sowing mines – one of which had already sunk the British battleship *Audacious* some three months before.

Thus it still remains a bit of a mystery as to what happened to *Viknor* although it appears to be that either she fell victim to the bad weather or that she was sunk by a mine. All that may be sent with any great certainty is that there was not to be a single survivor: of the crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), all were to perish*.

**Her wreck was found off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, in the year 2006, but no firm conclusion was to come about as to the cause of the ship's sinking.*

The son of Philip Coates, former courier, deceased of heart failure on January 17, 1921, and of Emma Coates (née *Woolridge**, deceased of general debility on November 4 of 1906), of the community of Fogo, Seaman Coates was also brother to Harry**, to Thomas and to Amelia.

**The couple had married in Fogo on February 7 of 1881.*

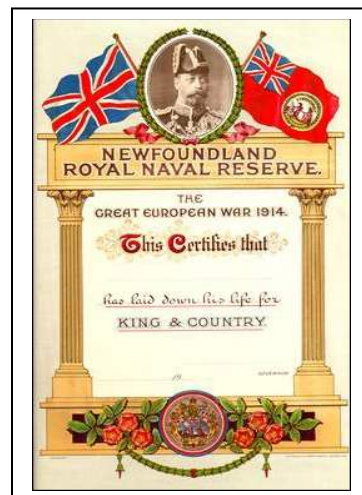
(Right above: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)

Seaman George Coates drowned on that January 13, 1915, at the recorded age of twenty-nine years: date of birth in Fogo, Newfoundland, October 7, 1886 (from Newfoundland Vital Statistics and the Newfoundland Birth Register) – also found as April (or February) 1 of that same year in his Service Record and enlistment papers.

(Right above: The War Memorial in the community of Fogo honours the sacrifice of George Coates. – photograph from 2014)

Seaman Coates 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 George Coates was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



*****Leading Seaman Harold Coates, Number 2130x, enlisted into the Naval Reserve in mid-July of 1916 and crossed to the United Kingdom on the ship 'Sicilian' in late August-early September of that same year.***

While there he was based on four occasions at various shore establishments, one of these periods having been for a month at HMS 'Excellent', the Royal Navy Gunnery School where he was promoted to the rank of Leading Seaman.

He was also attached to two ships: for some eight weeks to the monitor HMS 'Terror'; and for less than two months to the requisitioned Finnish ship 'Hermes'.

Leading Seaman Harold Coates died when the vessel was lost, reportedly on April 28 of 1917, during a voyage to deliver a cargo of coal to Russia. Having no known final resting-place he, like his brother, is honoured on a bronze beneath the Caribou at Beaumont-Hamel.

A more complete account of Leading Seaman Harold Coates' all-too-short war-time contribution is to be found elsewhere among 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.