

HMS *Calypso* (1883)



HMS *Calypso*

History



United Kingdom

Name	HMS <i>Calypso</i>
Builder	HM Dockyard Chatham
Cost	Hull: £82,000; machinery: £37,500 ^[1]
Laid down	1881
Launched	7 June 1883
Commissioned	21 September 1885 (first commission)
Renamed	HMS <i>Briton</i> , 15 February 1916
Reclassified	Training ship, 2 September 1902
Fate	Sold 7 April 1922; burned off Jobs Cove near Embree, NL

General characteristics ^[1]

Class and type	<i>Calypso</i> -class corvette
Displacement	2,770 long tons (2,810 t)
Length	235 ft (71.6 m) pp
Beam	44 ft 6 in (13.6 m)
Draught	19 ft 11 in (6.1 m)
Installed power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •6 boilers •4,023 ihp (3,000 kW)
Propulsion	4-cylinder J. and G. Rennie compound-expansion steam engine driving a single screw
Sail plan	Barque rig ^[Note 1]
Speed	13.75 knots (25.47 km/h; 15.82 mph) powered; 14.75 knots (27.32 km/h; 16.97 mph) forced draught
Armament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •4 × BL 6-inch (152.4 mm) Mark II 26 calibre guns •12 × BL 5-inch (127.0 mm) guns •6 × QF Nordenfelt guns •4 × Gardner machine guns •2 × 14-inch (360 mm) torpedo carriages
Armour	Deck: 1.5 in (38 mm) over machinery



H.M.S. Calypso, sketched by a young Robert Falcon Scott in 1883

HMS *Calypso* was a corvette (designated as a third-class cruiser from 1887) of the Royal Navy and the name ship of its namesake class. Built for distant cruising in the heyday of the British Empire, the vessel served as a warship and training vessel until 1922, when it was sold.

Originally classified as a screw corvette, *Calypso* was also one of the Royal Navy's last sailing corvettes but supplemented an extensive sail rig with a powerful engine. Among the first of the smaller cruisers to be given steel hulls instead of iron, the hull nevertheless was cased with timber and coppered below the water line, as were wooden ships.

Unlike *Calliope*, the more famous member of the class, *Calypso* had a quiet career, consisting mainly of training cruises in the Atlantic Ocean. In 1902 the warship was sent to the colony of Newfoundland and served as a training ship for the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve before and during the First World War. In 1922 *Calypso* was declared surplus and sold, then used as a storage hulk. Its hull still exists, awash in the Bay of Exploits south of Embree in Newfoundland.



Under full sail (1898)

On 26 June 1897 *Calypso* was present at the Review of the Fleet off Spithead held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. Paid off into reserve at Devonport in 1898, it was no longer considered a fighting ship by the turn of the century, and it was felt it could best be employed in training naval reservists for service at sea.

Training ship



Wharf side at St. Johns. The shed like structure behind the reservists is a drill hall erected atop *Calypso's* gunwale. Boat davits are shown on port side of vessel (upper left) and at stern (far right); the aft port gun is sponsored out from the hull (right of top rows of sailors).

Image from Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador

On 3 September 1902 *Calypso* was placed back into commission under the command of Commander Frederick Murray Walker, and was sent across the Atlantic to become a training ship for the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve (RNR), which trained men for service in the Royal Navy. The Reserve had been founded in 1900 as an experiment to assist the Admiralty in the manning of ships, and to enable the Newfoundlanders to assist in the defence of the empire, training their seafarers in the winter months when the fishery was not worked. As the result of this trial, the Admiralty agreed to provide a vessel, and the colony agreed to pay for the refit, as well as an annual subvention to support the training programme.

The location of the vessel was controversial, with the community of Argentia preferred as a substitute for the colonial capital of St. John's. Reasons for this proposal included both a desire to protect the larger city from the conjectured debaucheries of sailors, and to protect the reservists, many of whom were married, from the temptations (including prostitution) which might be available in the city. In a time of tensions between Britain and France, Argentia also had the benefit of being closer to the French territory of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and it was felt beneficial to have a British military force in proximity to the French territory in the event of a dispute. These objections were felt to be outweighed by cost, convenience, and accessibility of staff to the colonial government, and St. John's was chosen to host the ship.

Calypso arrived at St. John's on 15 October. The vessel was hulked; the masts were removed, as was the funnel from the boilers, and a drill hall was erected on the weather deck. Without sail or working boilers the vessel could no longer go to sea and was permanently moored wharf side at the western end of the St. John's harbour.

Prior to the outbreak of war candidates had to be fishermen or sailors, and the RNR maintained a reserve strength of 500–600 men. By 1914, over 1,400 seamen had been trained, and more than 400 answered the call to arms on the outbreak of the Great War. The Reserve provided crew for ships of the Royal Navy, including over 100 seamen taken aboard HMCS *Niobe* a month after the start of the war, the first group of Newfoundlanders to go to war. It also provided home defence, including manning coast artillery at the entrance to the St. Johns harbour, and the protection of Newfoundland's shore and shipping. *Calypso* and a small, slow armed patrol vessel were the colony's only warships, and *Calypso* could not go to sea.

In 1916, *Calypso* was renamed HMS *Briton*, and the former name was given to a new light cruiser laid down in that year, which entered service in 1917.^[33]

Before the war the owner of the dock where *Calypso* was berthed had sought the vessel's removal. The matter was held in abeyance during the war years, but after the conclusion of hostilities the subject arose anew. Relocation would have been a significant expense to the Admiralty, and the Colonial Office was informed that the dominion would accept complete withdrawal of the vessel. By 1922 naval estimates were being slashed and the Washington Naval Treaty limited the size of fleets. The Admiralty therefore summarily discontinued the Newfoundland RNR, and there being no further need of the ship, *Briton* was made available for disposition.

Later use, and legacy



A 6-inch gun from HMS *Calypso* on display at Fort Nelson



The derelict hull of *Briton* being used for salt storage. August 1955. Lewisporte, Newfoundland.

Briton was sold in 1922 and was used in St. John's for the storage of salt. In 1952 the hulk was moved to Lewisporte harbour. Some thought was given to preservation, but in 1968 it was towed to a coastal bay near Embree, and burned to the waterline.^[39] The hull still is there, awash in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. The cruiser's anchor sits outside a local inn, and other artefacts are in museums.

A 12lb deck gun was removed in 1965 and taken to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #12 in Grand Falls, NL and was positioned on the front of the Legion building. A 12lb shell that was removed from that same gun in 1965 as well as a 5" shell from *Calypso* was turned over to the RCMP for disposal as it has been suspected to still be live. Those two shells from the *Calypso* sat on a shelf in the Branch 12 Military Museum for over 35 years in plain view and accessible to everyone. (From the Historical Committee, Royal Canadian Legion, Grand Falls Branch #12, NL)

These remnants are not the sole remaining legacy. *Calypso*, created as a ship of war, has given its name another training institution, but one with peaceful purposes. Inspired by the traditions of the ship where Newfoundlanders once trained to be competent and able seamen for the Royal Navy, the Calypso Foundation of Lewisporte trains developmentally disabled individuals to become productive workers and live independently. This charitable foundation carries on the name of HMS *Calypso*.

In the final chapter of James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom recalls having had a brief affair with a sailor from *Calypso* in Gibraltar circa 1886.

<https://www.heritage.nf.ca/first-world-war/gallery/royal-naval-reserve/index.php>