



reminiscing

DISPATCHED TO SEE THE KING

How reservists from Southwest Arm, NL,
got invited to King George V's coronation

BY LESTER GREEN



ON May 6, 2023, the world witnessed the coronation of Charles III and his wife, Camilla, as King and Queen of the United Kingdom and the other Commonwealth realms. While many of us watched this one from afar, a century ago the only way to see a British coronation was to be there in person. And in 1911, several young men from Newfoundland and Labrador did just that.

For a week in June 1911, there was much rejoicing and celebration around the accession of George V and his wife Mary to the throne, held on June 22. Local newspapers of the day reported that the citizens of the colony of Newfoundland were also in the festive mood.

George was not born to be king. His older brother Albert was. George dreamt of a career in the Royal British Navy. However, with the untimely death of Prince Albert on January 14, 1892, due to pneumonia, Prince George became next in line for the throne. He ended his naval career to prepare for his future role as head of the United Kingdom. Prince George married Princess Mary Teck, his brother's former girlfriend, on July 6, 1893.

George's father, King Edward VII, died at Buckingham Palace on May 6, 1910. Preparation began immediately for the coronation the following year. Due to Prince George V's keen interest in the Royal Navy, he requested that the British fleet be present for this occasion. Invitations were sent throughout the Empire for colonies to send a detachment. They would be guests of His Majesty's government during their stay.

The *Evening Telegram* reported on March 30, 1911, that the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists had received such an invitation. This article was followed by another published on June 3, which reported that 20 reservists of HMS *Calypso* had been selected and would be sailing from St. John's harbour aboard the SS *Mongolian* that night. Among the article's published names were two Southwest Arm sailors: James Crann (Cramm) of Queen's Cove and Seaman William Peddle of Hodge's Cove.

William had enlisted with the reserve shortly after marrying Ethel on December 29, 1905. He completed and signed his first commitment papers for enlistment in March 1906. He re-enlisted on March 13, 1914, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. For the next six years, William completed 28-day sessions, mainly during the spring or fall around the summer fishery. By the time of the coronation of King George V, he had completed 168 days of naval training. James signed his enlistment papers in March 1908 and had several years completed before being chosen to represent the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve at the King's coronation.

After their arrival in Liverpool, the Newfoundland reservists prepared for the ceremonies with approximately 60,000 other soldiers and sailors from the British Empire for the inspection of the Grand Fleet.



William Peddle of Hodge's Cove (above) and James Crann from Queen's Cove (below) set sail for England in 1911 to take part in King George V's coronation celebrations.





Soldiers and sailors who attended the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary were presented with medals as a souvenir of that special day.

On June 24, King George V and Queen Mary attended the coronation review of the fleet at Spithead, near the naval base at Portsmouth. The Royal couple and their party manoeuvred through the maze of ships aboard the royal yacht, *HMV Victoria and Albert*. In attendance were 167 warships manned by thousands of representatives from the Royal Navy Empire, and 187 ships of foreign navies. The ships were arranged in five rows strung over 10 kilometres. The cheering crowd onshore was estimated at a quarter-million souls. For the small contingent of Newfoundland sailors, particularly James Crann and William Peddle, from tiny communities, observing such a display of royalty while representing the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve must have been a proud moment.

During a special ceremony on June 30 at Buckingham Palace, 300 recipients were given a special medal as a personal souvenir of the coronation by King George V. Later, the medals would be distributed to all soldiers and sailors who attended, including the Newfoundland contingent. On July 1, the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve coronation contingent left Liverpool aboard the *SS Carthaginian* and arrived in St. John's harbour on July 9.

When the First World War began in 1914, 16 of those who had represented the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve at King George V's coronation were called to serve, including Seaman William Peddle and Seaman James Crann. Both served until the end of the war and returned home. ☐