

Lieutenant Commander Martin Eric Nasmith VC, RN Honoured with Blue Plaque at Birth Place

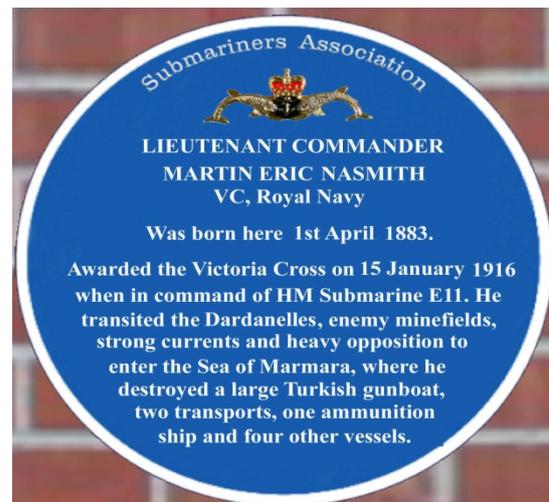


L - R - Middleses Standard Bearer, National Standard Bearer, Mr Simon Cooper, Mrs Katie Cooper, Reverend David Cooke, Deputy Mayor of Richmond-Upon-Thames, Admiral Sir James Perowne & Medway Towns Standard Bearer

As part of the Submariners Association initiative the third Blue Plaque commemorating a WWI Submariner and VC holder was placed on his Birth Place, 136 Castelnau, Barnes, London, SW13 9ET on Saturday 11 April 2015.

Approximately 60 guests, which included members of the Dunbar-Nasmith family, friends and relatives of Simon and Katie Cooper (*owners of the property*), the Deputy Mayor of Richmond-Upon-Thames (*Councillor Peter Buckwell*) joined veteran and serving submariners including RASM, Rear Admiral Parr CB for the ceremony.

The commemoration service was led by the Reverend David Cooke (*St Helen's Holy Trinity, Barnes*). Our Chairman, Jim McMaster welcomed everybody to the event and our President Admiral Sir James Perowne KBE gave a detailed description of Lieutenant Commander Martin Eric Nasmith career and the deed which led to his award of the VC. This was followed by the unveiling of the plaque by the Admiral and Mr Simon Cooper.



Lieutenant Commander Martin Eric Nasmith was born 1st April 1883 the address of which was originally 13 Castelnau Gardens, Bridge Road, Barnes. However, this was later renamed Castelnau and the number changed to 136. He was educated at Eastman's Royal Naval Academy, Winchester and HMS Britannia at Dartmouth and joined the Royal Navy at the age of 14 in 1897 gaining the rank of Lieutenant in 1904.

One early event in his career often gave him pause to ponder in later life. In May 1912, King George V was in HMY Victoria and Albert III in Weymouth Bay to witness Fleet manoeuvres. Because of heavy fog, the program was disrupted, and the King expressed the desire to dive in a submarine. On Wednesday 8 May, he embarked on HM Submarine D4, under the command of Lieutenant Nasmith, and (*in the words of the Times*) "made a lengthy run in her when she was submerged". What made the occasion all the more remarkable was the presence on board of his second son, Prince Albert, who was to become King George VI, Captain Roger Keyes, Inspecting Captain of Submarines and former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour.

Nasmith's diary records that "*We remained under water for ten to 15 minutes, during which time he showed great interest in the proceedings, periscope in particular.*" The

Navy News article from July 2012, records that Nasmith often wondered what would have happened to the course of 20th century history had he sunk that day, a not unreasonable thought, given that he had very nearly sunk in the Solent in 1905 whilst in command of HM Submarine A4.



It was during WWI, that at the age of 32 and when in command of HM Submarine E11 he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

During the period 20 May–8 June 1915 he managed to penetrate the heavily guarded Dardanelles, which included numerous minefields, short batteries and patrolling Turkish gun boats and enter the Sea of Marmara, whereupon he destroyed one large Turkish gunboat, two transports, one ammunition ship, three store ships and four other vessels.

What was even more remarkable is that during his exit of the area and when he had safely passed the most difficult part of his homeward journey he received information that a cargo of coal was heading towards Istanbul from the Black Sea. Realising that coal was essential for the morale of the besieged city, Nasmith turned back.

When the coal-carrying ship came into sight of the docks, a welcoming committee of municipal Turkish grandees soon formed, along with a happy crowd – water, electricity and rail transport had all suffered due to a

lack of coal. Hardly had the ship berthed than it mysteriously blew up before the eyes of the astounded crowd. Nasmith successfully slipped out again.

Nasmith conducted combat operations in the Sea of Marmara for a three month period. When his torpedoes ran low, he set them to float at the end of their run, so that he could recover them should they fail to hit a target. On one occasion he trimmed down by the bow and recovered the torpedo through his stern tube. The torpedo was then dismantled and manhandled through the submarine to the forends, whereupon the crew re-assembled it. It is understood that he only did this once and all other torpedoes were recovered through the bow tubes, torpedo stern first.

At one point, he captured a sailing dhow, and lashed it to the conning tower of E11 as camouflage, and went on to capture an ammunition ship using small arms. His penetration of the Golden Horn was the first time an enemy ship had done so in over 500 years. He also attacked a railway viaduct.

Nasmith's First Lieutenant, Guy D'Oyly-Hughes, and Second Lieutenant, Robert Brown, were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, and all the rest of the crew were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. Nasmith was promoted to Commander immediately and to Captain a year later.



Later in the war, Nasmith was in charge of the Seventh Submarine Flotilla in the Baltic and Senior Naval Officer at Reval (*later Tallinn*), and was appointed CB in 1920 for that service. That year he also married Beatrix

Justina Dunbar-Dunbar-Rivers and legally changed his name to Dunbar-Nasmith.

He was captain of HMS Iron Duke 1921–24. He was appointed Commandant of the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, in 1926 and held the office of Aide-de-Camp to HM King George V between 1927 and 28 and Rear Admiral Submarines from 1929 until 1931. He became Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Station in 1932 and invested as Knight Commander, Order of the Bath (K.C.B) in 1934. He held the office of Second Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Personnel in 1935 and at the outbreak of WWII the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth and Western Approaches from 1938 to 1941. He served as Flag Officer in charge of London from 1942 and retired in 1946.

In retirement he became Vice Chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission. He was also appointed Vice-Admiral of the United Kingdom, a ceremonial position, and he became President of the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust. In 1955 he was invested as a Knight Commander, Order of St. Michael and St. George (K.C.M.G.) and held the office of Vice-Lord-Lieutenant (D.L.) of Morayshire in 1957.

Beatrix and Martin had three children: Evelyn and David who have unfortunately passed away and Sir James who attended the ceremony.

Martin Eric Dunbar-Nasmith died on 29 June 1965 at age 82 at Glen Rothes, Rothes, Morayshire, Scotland. He was undoubtedly a remarkable man.

The unveiling ceremony was completed by the Reverend David Cooke by blessing the plaque and reading the Naval Collect. This was followed by the Chairman presenting Simon and Katie Cooper with a Submariners Association Crest, a book of Submariners Poems, a set of Dophins and a framed picture containing a copy of the birth certificate of Lieutenant Commander Nasmith VC.

The Dunbar-Nasmith family also presented Simon and Katie Cooper with a picture containing three photographs, one of E11 returning from patrol, the Crew of E11 and a copy of the first periscope picture taken by Nasmith with a Brownie Box camera.

Following completion of the event all guests were invited by Simon and Katie Cooper for tea and cakes in their rear garden which was very much appreciated by all who attended.

In summary it was a great day, everybody appeared to enjoy themselves and the rain stayed away.



The Submariners Association would like to thank all serving and submariner veterans that attended the ceremony and in particular, the National Standard Bearer (*Trevor Thomas*), members of Middlesex and Medway Towns Branches together with their Standard Bearer's (*Jack Bradley & Robert Clarke*).

It is planned that the next Commemorative Blue Plaque will be unveiled in September 2015 and will be either Lieutenant Commander Boyle or White VC's.

Author:

*Lieutenant Commander Sandy Powell –
Member National Management Committee
Submariners Association.*