

**Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford VC,  
RN Honoured with Blue Plaque at Exeter  
Cathedral School**



*(L-R) Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB RN (President SM Assoc), Mr Jim McMaster (Chairman SM Assoc & the Very Reverend Dr Jonathan Draper conducting the service.*

As part of the Submariners Association initiative the sixth Blue Plaque commemorating a WWI Submariner and VC holder was placed at the Cathedral Choir School, Exeter on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

Approximately 120 guests, which included the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Devon *Commodore Jake Moores OBE, DL, RN*; the High Sheriff of Devon *Mrs. A.M. Gilbert*; the Chairman of Devon County Council *Cllr. Andrew Moulding*; Deputy Lord Mayor of Exeter *Cllr Peter Holland*; the Headmaster of Exeter Cathedral Choir School *James Featherstone* and members of the Sandford family, joined veteran and serving submariners including the President of the Submariners Association, *Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB*; the Chairman *Mr. Jim McMaster* and the National & Exeter Standards for the ceremony. The event was also enhanced by the Commanding Officer of HMS Trenchant, Commander Watts and a contingent of the crew who formed the honour guard.



*Unveiling of Plaque by Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB RN & Mr Ernest Sandford (Nephew of Sandford VC).*

The commemoration service was led by the Dean of Exeter Cathedral the Very Reverend Dr Jonathan Draper. The Association Chairman also welcomed everybody to the event and the President Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB provided further information on Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford VC Naval career & citation for the award of the VC.

This was followed by the unveiling of the plaque by the President of the Submariners Association and the Nephew of Sandford VC, Mr. Ernest Sandford.



*The Dean blesses the plaque.*

Richard Douglas Sandford was born on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1891. He was the son of the Venerable Ernest Grey Sandford the Archdeacon and

Chancellor of Exeter and Ethel Maria Rushcombe (Poole) who at the time lived in the Chancellors house No.15 Cathedral Yard, Exeter. His great-grandfather was Daniel Sandford, the Bishop of Edinburgh and his brother was Brigadier Daniel Sandford.



*Exeter Branch Submariners Association & National Association Standards.*

Educated at Clifton College he joined the Royal Navy at HMS Britannia (Naval Training Ship) on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1904 at the age of 12. He was promoted Midshipman on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1908 and was appointed to the Twin Screw Battleship HMS Hibernia. He was promoted to Sub-Lieutenant on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1911 and appointed to the Torpedo Boat Destroyer HMS Mohawk on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1911 and on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1913 he took up a new appointment on the Cruiser HMS Duke of Edinburgh additional for 'Engine Room Training'.

In September 1913 he volunteered for service in submarines and was promoted to Lieutenant on the 30 October 1913. Whilst waiting to join submarines he was appointed to the Battle Cruiser HMS Invincible for one month between 24<sup>th</sup> November and 21 December 1913.



*Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford VC, RN Blue Commemorative Plaque mounted at 15 Cathedral Close, Exeter (Exeter Cathedral Choir School)*

In January 1914 Sandford was appointed to HMS Dolphin 'for Submarine Training' and then to HMS Forth the Submarine Depot Ship on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1914. He then returned to HMS Dolphin and HMS Forth for various duties whilst standing by HM Submarine W1 which was being prepared for transfer to the Italian Navy. Following this he was appointed to HMS Dolphin for Submarine G6 as First Lieutenant on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1916.

His next appointment was to the Submarine Depot Ship HMS Arrogant for Submarine C34 for four months between August and December 1916. From C34 he was then appointed to HMS Fearless (12<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla) for Submarine K6 on the 14 December 1916 again as First Lieutenant whereupon he remained until January 1918.



*HM Submarine C3*

In March of 1918 he was appointed to the Submarine Depot Ship HMS Maidstone (9<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla) for Submarine C3 in Command. It was whilst he was the Commanding Officer of C3 that he won his



VC. With a specially selected skeleton crew he participated in the Raid on Zebrugge on the night of 22/23<sup>rd</sup> April 1918 during which he destroyed the viaduct when he drove his submarine, which had been prepared with explosives, into the viaduct before setting the fuse and abandoning the submarine. Richard was seriously wounded during the operation and was admitted to the Royal Naval Hospital at Deal with wounds to his left thigh and right hand.

His VC was gazetted on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1918 and the following citation was published:



Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford VC, RN.

***For most conspicuous gallantry: This officer was in command of Submarine C3 and most skilfully placed that vessel in between the piles of the viaduct before lighting his fuse and abandoning her. He eagerly undertook this hazardous enterprise, although well aware (as were his crew) that if the means of rescue failed he or any of his crew were in the water at the moment of the explosion, they would have been killed outright by the force of such explosion. Yet Lieutenant Sandford disdained to use the gyro steering, which would have enabled him and his crew to abandon the submarine at a safe distance, and preferred to make sure, as far as was humanly possible, of the accomplishment of his duty.***

Following his recovery he was appointed to HMS Dolphin for 'Periscope Course' on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1918. On completion of his course he was then appointed to Submarine C30 in Command on the 25 August 1918.

In October 1918 he returned to the 'Periscope School' prior to being appointed to the Submarine Depot Ship HMS Thames additional for Submarines. However, very soon after taking up his appointment he was diagnosed with typhoid fever.

Richard Douglas Sandford died at the age of 27 at Eston Hospital, North Yorkshire on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1918, and 12 days after the signing of the Armistice.

He is buried in Eston Cemetery in Yorkshire in Grave No: JU709. His Victoria Cross and other medals are on display at the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth.



He was a remarkable very brave man and an inspiration to all submariners

The unveiling ceremony was completed by the Dean of Exeter Cathedral by blessing the plaque and reading the Naval Collect. This was followed by Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB presenting the Dean with a framed picture of Sandford, the Plan of Attack at Zebrugge, HM Submarine C3, Career History and a picture of the Plaque



*Dean of Exeter Cathedral with presentation picture.*

He also presented a framed picture to Mrs. Philippa Langdon with a copy of Sandford VC Birth Certificate, pictures of the Plaque, HM Submarine E.3 and Career History.

At the end of the ceremony all guest were invited to the Cathedral Chapter House for Tea and Biscuits courtesy of the Cathedral.

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

The Submariners Association would like to thank the Dean of Exeter Cathedral for allowing the plaque to be mounted at the Cathedral Choir School and for providing an excellent reception in the Chapter House for the guests following the ceremony. In addition we would also like to thank all serving and submariner veterans that attended the ceremony and in particular, HMS Trenchant, the National Standard Bearer and members of the Exeter Branch with their Standard Bearer

Finally, the Submariners Association would like to thank Matt Round Photography for providing a selection of photographs, Emma Vine and Jonny Tichin from Exeter Cathedral for assisting with the organisation for the event and lastly Mrs. Philippa Langdon &

Claire Sandford for their untiring assistance in organising the Sandford Family members that attended.



*Mrs. Philippa Sandford & Mr. Ernest Sandford with presentation picture.*

It is planned that the next Commemorative Blue Plaque will be unveiled in May/June at Knockinaam Lodge, Portpatrick to commemorate Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn VC, RN.

**Author:** *Lieutenant Commander Frank (Sandy) Powell – Member National Management Committee Submariners Association.*