

Lieutenant Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn VC, DSO,RN Honoured with Blue Plaque at Knockinaam Lodge, Portpatrick, Stranraer.**



President Submariners Association address. (L-R) W.Scotland Standard, Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB RN (President SM Assoc), Mr Jim McMaster (Chairman SM Assoc), Reverend Colin Plumb & Belfast Standard.

As part of the Submariners Association initiative the seventh Blue Plaque commemorating a WWII Submariner and VC holder was placed at Knockinaam Lodge, Portpatrick, Stranraer on Saturday 3rd June 2017.

Approximately 50 guests, which included the Lord Lieutenant of Wigtonshire *Mr. John Ross CBE, DL Esq*; the Leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council *Cllr. Elaine Murray*; Lieutenant Commander & Mrs. Orr-Ewing, members of the staff of Knockinaam Lodge and members of the Wanklyn 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 West of Scotland and Belfast Standards for the ceremony. The event was also enhanced by a contingent of serving submariners from HMNB Faslane who formed the honour guard.



Unveiling of Plaque by Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB RN & Mr Ian Wanklyn (Wanklyn VC Son).

The commemoration service was led by the Reverend Colin Plumb. The Association Chairman also welcomed everybody to the event and the President Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB provided further information on Lieutenant Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn VC, DSO**, RN 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 Wanklyn VC son, Mr. Ian Wanklyn



Blessing of the plaque.

Malcolm David Wanklyn was born on 28th June 1911 in Kolkata, India. His father William was a successful businessman and engineer who served in the Army during the First World War and whom as a boy lived not far from here in Knockdolian, Ayrshire with the McConnell family. Owing to William's business interests and military career the family moved on numerous occasions around the country and it was whilst living at Moynes Court at Mathern near Chepstow that Malcolm met someone that would have a lasting and significant effect on his chosen career path. This was Lieutenant Alec Anderson, the only son of his mother's eldest sister, who's Destroyer had just rammed and sunk a German U-Boat off the Irish coast and the ship was being repaired. His stories about the war and the glamour of the clash with the enemy enthralled young Malcolm to such an extent that he never deviated from his chosen course.



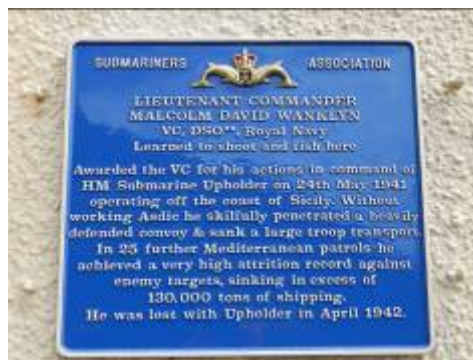
Serving Submariners from HMNB Faslane who formed the honour guard

At the end of the First World War the family moved house again to Knockinaam which was prompted by his father's new posting to Scotland as Inspector of Munitions. The family remained at Knockinaam for five years in which time Malcolm became a keen and proficient angler and was fond of shooting and boating. As a young man he preferred to be thought of as Scottish and he developed a close affinity for the country and people.

At the time of the move to Knockinaam, Malcolm was sent off to Parkfield Preparatory School at Heyward's Heath, Sussex with his two elder brothers Jack and Peter. With his two brothers already established on the school roll as "Major" and "Minor" he was promptly named as "Wanklyn Minimus".

Whilst he appeared a rather quiet and at times withdrawn person he applied himself to his studies with a burning ambition to join the Royal Navy. However, a perceptive master at the school noticed that he was colour-blind and which would have dashed his chances of joining the Navy if it had been discovered. He was therefore taught by the master to distinguish the difference in colours by the amount of light it reflected to such an extent that he was able to pass the selection board and accepted to join the Royal Navy at the age of 14 in 1925.

On graduating from Dartmouth Naval College and finishing top of his class in five subjects, he was assigned as a midshipman on 1 May 1929. By 1931 he had been promoted Sub-Lieutenant and following service in both the battleship *Marlborough*, battle cruiser *Renown* and completion of his navigation courses at HMS *Excellent*, Whale Island, Portsmouth he joined submarines in 1933.



*Lieutenant Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn VC, DSO**, RN
Blue Commemorative Plaque mounted at Knockinaam Lodge,
Portpatrick, Stranraer*

Following intensive submarine training at HMS *Dolphin*, he was promoted Lieutenant and in September he served in the submarine *Oberon*, which was part of the Mediterranean Fleet. In early 1934 he accompanied his new post on trips around the Mediterranean with visits to Gibraltar, Malta, Algeria, France and Italy. In October 1934 he transferred to HMS L56 based at Portsmouth. He then spent a year on board before becoming the boat's First Lieutenant. For the majority of 1937/8 he served aboard HMS *Shark* as her First Lieutenant and patrolled around Gibraltar during the Spanish Civil War. On one occasion, the submarine encountered a German U-boat. The two submarines watched each other from a distance of one nautical mile without taking action.

Whilst based at Malta, Wanklyn married his girlfriend Elspeth (Betty) Kinloch at the Holy Trinity Church, Sliema, on 5 May 1938. Wanklyn invited all the officers and men who formed a guard of honour. In those days it was not usual for officers to mix with the lower ranks but Wanklyn showed no prejudice.

Wanklyn returned to Gosport in July 1939 and became the First Lieutenant and Second-in-Command of HMS *Otway*. At the outbreak of WWII Wanklyn was deployed to Malta on 2 September and thence to Alexandria on 2 October. On Christmas Day the vessel docked in Marseilles and Wanklyn was ordered to London to commence his command course.

On the 8th January 1940 he was appointed to HMS *Dolphin* for the Commanding Officer's Qualifying Course – 'the Perisher'. Following successful completion his first Command was Submarine H32 which he joined on 5th February 1940. This was followed by Submarine H31 'In Command' on 15th May 1940.

highest decoration (he also won a DSO**), was usually seen as an award for sustained gallantry of the highest order. Wanklyn's citation was published in the London Gazette on the 6th December 1941 as was as follows:

HM Submarine Upholder

To exert pressure on German Naval Forces Wanklyn undertook a North Sea patrol on 14 July whereupon he sank UJ-126 a German Submarine Chaser which was followed by a sustained counterattack with 8 depth charges directed at the submarine.

In August 1940 he was appointed In-Command of HMS *Upholder* which was at the time being built by Vickers Armstrong Ltd in Barrow-in-Furness. Following completion and work up he sailed via Gibraltar to join the 10th Submarine Flotilla based in Malta.

HMS *Upholder* had a short but very successful wartime career carrying out 25 Mediterranean patrols. It was in this theatre, operating out of Malta that Wanklyn gained his fearsome reputation, but he made a slow start and his first patrols were largely unsuccessful. This led his superiors to wonder if this clever, quiet man with a gift for mathematics had what it takes to be a successful captain. However, during his sixth patrol, the 'Wanklyn Touch' became apparent and using a combination of innate skill and inspired tactical awareness, he went on to success after success. Not only was he a renowned attacker but was also cool and calm in defence.

Counterattack was almost inevitable after a successful sinking and *Upholder* survived 38 depth charges after sinking a cruiser, 33 after being spotted attempting to intercept troopships on a very calm day and 48 in 8 minutes after sinking a tanker. Of the 36 attacks he made, 23 were successful. The most daring sank the large liner-troopship *Conte Rosso* on 24 May 1941.

It was for that specific action that Wanklyn was awarded the Victoria Cross although this, the

*Lieutenant Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn VC, DSO**, RN.*

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the grant of the VICTORIA CROSS for valour and resolution in command of His Majesty's Submarine Upholder, to: Lieutenant Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn, D.S.O., Royal Navy.

On the evening of the 24th of May, 1941, while on patrol off the coast of Sicily, Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn, in command of His Majesty's Submarine Upholder, sighted a south-bound enemy troop-convoy, strongly escorted by Destroyers. The failing light was such that observation by periscope could not be relied on but a surface attack would have been easily seen. Upholder's listening gear was out of action.

In spite of these severe handicaps Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn decided to press home his attack at short range. He quickly steered his craft into a favourable position and closed in so as to make sure of his target. By this time the whereabouts of the escorting Destroyers could not be made out. Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn, while fully aware of the risk of being rammed by one of the escort, continued to press on towards the enemy troop-ships. As he was about to fire, one of the enemy Destroyers suddenly appeared out of the darkness at high speed, and he only just avoided being rammed. As soon as he was clear, he brought his periscope sights on and fired torpedoes, which sank a large troop-ship. The enemy Destroyers at once made a strong counterattack and during the next twenty minutes dropped

thirty-seven depth-charges near Upholder.

The failure of his listening devices made it much harder for him to get away, but with the greatest courage, coolness and skill he brought Upholder clear of the enemy and safe back to harbour.

Before this outstanding attack, and since being appointed a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn had torpedoed a tanker and a merchant vessel.

He has continued to show the utmost bravery in the presence of the enemy. He has carried out his attacks on enemy vessels with skill and relentless determination, and has also sunk one Destroyer, one U-boat, two troop-transports of 19,500 tons each, one tanker and three supply ships. He has besides probably destroyed by torpedoes one Cruiser and one Destroyer, and possibly hit another Cruiser.

Throughout his period in command of *Upholder* Wanklyn also sank 119,000 tons of enemy merchant shipping carrying vital supplies and reinforcements to the German 'Afrika Korps' in North Africa. His total amount of tonnage sunk was in excess of 130,000 tons.

Wanklyn was killed along with his crew when *Upholder* was lost on her 25th Mediterranean patrol, becoming overdue on 14th April 1942. Mr Francesco Mattesini, Naval Historian accredited to the Italian Navy Historical Office, has provided some details which might explain how *Upholder* was lost:

On 14 April 1942 a submarine was detected by the air escorts while approaching a convoy in the Tripoli area. The planes were 2 Messerschmitt and 2 Dornier. They attacked the submerged

boat and within a very short time sighted a dark patch surfacing, indicative of leaking oil. The planes dropped smoke floats on the position 34°47'N, 16°55'E. No further sound or echo was obtained after this time. Despite British claims that Upholder should have been far away, there is no submarine report of this attack. The visual contact was definite and there is reasonable certainty of a sinking or severe damage, therefore it is thought this attack might account for Upholder's demise. The previously reported attack by Torpedo Boat Pegaso was not only 100 miles away from Wanklyn's patrol area, but has since been positively proven to be a dolphin identified by a plane overhead but the observer's report has only been recently discovered in the Italian Naval archives by Mr. Mattesini.

Wanklyn was the Allies' most successful submariner in terms of tonnage sunk. And in the words of his Squadron Commander, Commander Simpson: "I have lost a friend and adviser who I believe I knew better than my brother.....His record of brilliant leadership will never be equalled. He was by his very qualities of modesty, ability, determination, courage and character a giant among us. The island of Malta worshipped him. This tribute is no overstatement".



Wanklyn Family (three Generations) with Mr John Ross (Lord Lt Wigtonshire) & Councillor Elaine Murray

With the loss of *Upholder* and for her outstanding contribution to the War effort the following Official Admiralty Communiqué was issued:

“The Board of the Admiralty regrets to announce that HMS Submarine Upholder (Lt Cdr M.D. Wanklyn VC,

*DSO**) has been lost. Next of kin have been informed. It is seldom proper for their Lordships to draw distinction between different services rendered in the course of Navy duty, but they take this opportunity of singling out those of Upholder under the Command of Lieutenant Commander Wanklyn for special mention.*

She was long employed against enemy communications in the Central Mediterranean, and she became known for the uniform high quality of her services in that arduous and dangerous duty. Such was the standard of skill and cool intrepidity set by Lt Cdr Wanklyn and the officers and men under him, they and their ship became an inspiration not only in their own Flotilla, but to the fleet of which it was a part, and to Malta, where for so long it was based. The ship and her company have gone, but their example and inspiration remain”

The unveiling ceremony was completed by Reverend Plumb blessing the plaque and reading the Naval Collect. This was followed by Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB presenting the owner of Knockinaam Lodge staff with a framed picture of Wanklyn, the crew of HM Submarine Upholder, Career History and a picture of the Plaque

He also presented a framed picture to Mr. Ian & Mrs. Penelope Wanklyn with a copy of Wanklyn citation, pictures of the Plaque, HM Submarine Upholder.



Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB presentation to Ian Wanklyn

At the end of the ceremony all guest were invited for Tea and Biscuits courtesy of Knockinaam Lodge.

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 owner, for allowing the plaque to be mounted at Knockinaam Lodge and providing an excellent reception on the lawns of the lodge 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 the serving submariners from HMNB Faslane, the Standard Bearer's from the West of Scotland and Belfast Branches and members of the branches who attended.

The Submariners Association would like to thank Knockinaam Lodge staff members their assistance in the organisation of the event.

Finally, **David Ibbotson, Proprietor of Knockinaam Lodge, said;**

“We are delighted to help honour the memory of submarine Commander Wanklyn in this way. Knockinaam Lodge was the childhood home of this brave man, awarded the Victoria Cross, and it is fitting that his significant contribution is recognised permanently with a blue plaque to commemorate his life here, at a place which was meaningful to him, in the Rhins of Galloway.”



Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour CB presentation to Knockinaam Lodge

Author:

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