

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER EDWARD COURTNEY BOYLE VC



LORD ASHCROFT'S "HERO OF THE MONTH"

By 1915 Lieutenant Commander (later Rear Admiral) Edward Boyle was one of the most experienced submarine officers in the Royal Navy. It was his involvement in the Dardanelles Campaign that led to the award of the Victoria Cross.

EDWARD COURTNEY Boyle was born in Carlisle, Cumberland, on 23 March 1883. He was the son of a lieutenant-colonel, also called Edward, who served in the British Army's Pay Department. Boyle Jnr was educated at Cheltenham College and, from May 1898, HMS *Britannia* where, as a cadet captain, he was a fine athlete, excelling on the rugby pitch.

Early in his Royal Navy career he was singled out for submarines and on 4 July 1910 Boyle joined the depot ship *Thames* for instruction as a sub-lieutenant. Within five months of his arrival, he was promoted to full lieutenant and given his first command, a Holland boat – an early type of submarine – aged only 21.

Other commands followed and, after the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, and by then a lieutenant-commander, Boyle was appointed in October to command the new HMS *E14*, one of three submarines sent to the Dardanelles in March 1915.

On 14 April 1915, Boyle was part of a select group of naval officers gathered on board the battleship HMS *Queen Elizabeth* to discuss whether it might be possible for a submarine to penetrate the mine-infested Narrows and to reach the Sea of Marmara. In his book, VCs

of the First World War: *The Naval VCs*, Stephen Snelling described the Sea of Marmara as 'a stretch of water regarded by the Turks as their own private lake'.

After an early failure by another submarine, *E14* made her way past the Gallipoli beach-head in the early hours of 27 April. 'I think really that we were all resigned for the worst and hoped for the best', wrote Edward Stanley, the submarine's first lieutenant. Boyle, who was calmness personified, stood alone on the open conning tower because he wanted to travel as far as possible on the surface. Only when the enemy shells starting dropping nearby did he take his submarine under the water.

Boyle took *E14* to 90 feet and passed under one minefield before rising to 22 feet. Time and again, he passed beneath patrol boats that were hunting the submarine down. But, eventually, he reached the Sea of Marmara where Snelling wrote: 'The cat and mouse game had begun.'

The first full day in the Marmara was a troubled one as the submarine was repeatedly forced to dive after attracting enemy fire. The next day went better after Boyle spotted four enemy destroyers at 12.30 hours, then, just 45 minutes later, two troopships with three escorting destroyers.



▲ HMS *E14* pictured heading towards the Dardanelles Strait en route for the Sea of Marmara. A variety of shipping, including the new French submarine *Mariotte*, can be seen in the background. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; H10318)

As soon as *E14*'s periscope was raised, the destroyers spotted and came towards her, firing as they advanced. From a range of just under a mile, *E14* fired at one of the transport ships, hitting its target.

Over the next few days, the cat and mouse game continued. Twice on 30 April *E14* came under attack and was forced to make a swift dive. The next day, Boyle decided to sink a patrol boat because 'they were always firing at me' and he achieved his task, sinking a small minelaying-gunboat *Nour-el-Bahr*. When a larger gunboat appeared on the scene, Boyle fired again, but the torpedo did not run straight and it missed its target.

On 10 May, *E14* had its biggest breakthrough. The crew had been swimming when a destroyer was spotted and so everyone scrambled back on board and the submarine dived. The first destroyer passed overhead, followed by a second one and two transport ships.

Boyle lined up his targets: the first torpedo missed the first transport ship but the second torpedo hit the second transport, causing a huge explosion. The ship that had been hit, *Guy Djemal*, a former White Star liner, had

a cargo of field guns and 6,000 troops bound for Gallipoli.

With the ninth of his ten torpedoes, Boyle had caused more damage than a brigade of Allied troops on the peninsula and all Turkish ships realised they were no longer safe in the Sea of Marmara. On 17 May, *E14* was ordered home, mission accomplished.

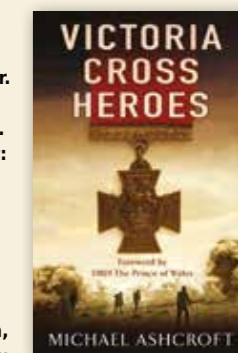
The voyage home saw near misses after skirmishes with enemy ships but when *E14* surfaced in safe waters, close to the crew of a cheering French battleship, her 22-day patrol was over and her achievements were widely acclaimed. She was only the second British submarine to penetrate the Narrows and the first to make it safely back.

Within just 24 hours, news reached Boyle that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross: the announcement was made formally in *The London Gazette* on 21 May 1915. The following year, Boyle was made a Knight of the Legion of Honour by the French and was awarded the Italian Order of St Maurice and St Lazarus.

Boyle, who was promoted to commander at the height of his fame, was loaned to the Australian Navy after the war before being given a number of commands. He retired a day after being

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

► Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book *Victoria Cross Heroes* is largely based on his VC collection. For more information, please visit: www.victoriacrossheroes.com Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museums, London. For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit: www.lordashcroftmedals.com For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



► A group photograph of the crew of HMS *E14* as she came out from the Dardanelles Strait. Standing at the top of the conning tower are, from left to right: Lieutenant Reginald Wilfred Lawrence, Lieutenant Commander Edward Courtney Boyle, and Lieutenant Edward Geldard Stanley. Lawrence and Stanley were both awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, whilst all of *E14*'s ratings were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; G00247)

promoted to rear-admiral. After the outbreak of the Second World War, however, Boyle returned to the Active List before retiring once and for all in 1943.

In his retirement, he lived at the Sunningdale Hotel in Berkshire, where he was a keen member of the local golf club. A childless widower, he died at Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot, on 16 December 1967, after being knocked down by a lorry on a pedestrian crossing. Boyle was 84.

Boyle's VC is on display at HMS *Dolphin*, Gosport, Hampshire, the headquarters of the 1st Submarine Squadron, after being donated by his family in 1988. ☺



◀ HMS *E14* negotiates the Turkish mines when passing through the Dardanelles Strait, 27 April 1915. At this point in the campaign, Boyle was only the second British submarine commander to have successfully taken his vessel through into the Sea of Marmara. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



◀ The final moments of the Turkish troopship and transport *Guy Djemal*. The original caption states: 'On one occasion when Commander Boyle in the *E14* came up to the surface to take his bearings while making his way into the Sea of Marmara, he saw through his periscope the reflected image of a Turkish gunboat. He immediately edged his vessel round, took aim, then gave a couple of orders and 300lbs of gun-cotton was tearing towards the hapless Turkish gunboat. In a few seconds the submarine rocked to a terrific explosion.' (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



▲ Lieutenant Commander Boyle pictured on the deck of HMS *E14* when the submarine was under way at sea, circa 1915. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; G00337A)

SKILL

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS • INITIATIVE
LEADERSHIP • SACRIFICE • ENDURANCE

THE MANY Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Although Lieutenant Commander Edward Courtney Boyle's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of 'Skill':

"Wisdom, sound judgement and technical knowledge are the hallmarks of Skill. It is about using resources to greatest effect usually under intense pressure. For many involved in bomb disposal, while a single movement might start the clock ticking, the puzzle still has to be solved, the game won. Perseverance is everything."