

= William Edward Sanders =

William Edward Sanders VC , DSO ( 7 February 1883 ? 14 August 1917 ) was a New Zealand recipient of the Victoria Cross ( VC ) , the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces .

Born in Auckland , Sanders took up a seafaring career in 1899 . He initially worked aboard steamships before transferring to sailing ships working around New Zealand waters to enhance his career prospects . After the outbreak of the First World War , he earned a master 's certificate in late 1914 . He then served in the Merchant Navy working aboard troopships until April 1916 , when he was commissioned in the Royal Naval Reserve . He completed his military training in the United Kingdom after which he served aboard the Helgoland , a Q @-@ ship which operated against German submarines . He performed well on his first two patrols and was given his own command , HMS Prize , in February 1917 . He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions while on his first patrol as captain , when the Prize engaged and saw off a German U @-@ boat that had earlier attacked and damaged his own ship . He was killed in action during the Prize 's fourth patrol when his ship was sunk by a U @-@ boat . His Victoria Cross was presented to his father and is currently held by the Auckland War Memorial Museum . Several memorials exist to Sanders ' memory , including the Sanders Cup , a sailing trophy for 14 @-@ foot ( 4 @.@ 3 m ) centerboard X @-@ class yachts .

= = Early life = =

William Sanders was born in the Auckland suburb of Kingsland on 7 February 1883 . His father , Edward Helman Cook Sanders , was a boot maker , who with his wife Emma Jane Sanders ( née Wilson ) , would have three more children . His maternal grandfather was a sea captain and worked for the family 's shipping company .

Sanders attended Nelson Street School but in 1894 , when his family moved to Takapuna , he shifted to Takapuna School . The school was close to Lake Pupuke , where he learned to sail . He earned the nickname Gunner Billy for his exploits with a small cannon that a classmate brought to school . He left school at the age of 15 , and due to the influence of his parents was apprenticed to a mercer in Auckland . He was not particularly interested in the profession and , desiring a career at sea , would go down to the wharfs to inspect the berthed ships and chat with their captains and crewmen .

In 1899 , Sanders joined the Kapanui as a cabin boy . An officer on the ship , a coastal steamer which worked the coast north of Auckland , was an acquaintance and advised Sanders of the availability of a position on board as a cabin boy , which he promptly applied for . He remained with the company that operated the Kapanui for three years . In 1902 he joined the Aparima , operated by the Union Steam Ship Company , which traded between New Zealand and India . He transferred to the NZGSS Hinemoa in 1906 as an ordinary seaman . The Hinemoa was a government steamer which serviced lighthouses along the New Zealand coast and depots on offshore islands .

With his seafaring career to date spent working on steamships , Sanders decided to spend time under sail with the Craig Line . At the time , steam was looked down upon by seafarers with sailors being regarded as more skillful . After taking his mate 's certificates , he sailed aboard the Joseph Craig . However , the ship foundered on the Hokianga bar on 7 August 1914 .

= = First World War = =

During the early part of the war , Sanders worked as second mate on the Moeraki . He also sat for his Masters certificate , passing with honours on 7 November 1914 . He was then discharged from the Moeraki in December and applied for the Royal Naval Reserve . However , he was not called up and in the interim served as a Merchant Navy officer on the troopships Willochra and Tofua .

After repeated pleas to authorities , Sanders traveled to London and on 19 April 1916 was finally appointed an acting sub @-@ lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve . After a period of time at the

HMS Excellent training facility on Whale Island , he was granted a position on the Helgoland , a Q @-@ ship operating against German submarines in the Western Approaches .

Q @-@ ships were merchant ships crewed by Navy personnel and bearing hidden weaponry . When attacked by U @-@ boats , a portion of the ship 's crew ( referred to as a panic party ) would appear to evacuate the vessel , sometimes setting smoke fires to simulate damage . This would encourage its attacker to approach and when the U @-@ boat was close enough , the Q @-@ ship 's guns would become operational and open fire , hopefully destroying the submarine .

The Helgoland was a Dutch brigantine armed with 12 @-@ pounder guns and a machine gun . Sanders , second in command to fellow New Zealander Lieutenant A.D. Blair , helped oversee its conversion to a Q @-@ ship . On its first patrol in September 1916 his ship participated in two actions against U @-@ boats , and on its second the following month , it again engaged two U @-@ boats . During the first engagement , the Helgoland was becalmed , without engines and extremely vulnerable . Surrounded by three submarines and with limited manoeuvrability it was forced to reveal its identity early in the engagement . On this occasion a screen concealing one of the guns jammed ; Sanders and Blair exposed themselves to potential gun fire from the U @-@ boat being attacked in order to cut away the screen with axes and crowbars .

= = = HMS Prize = = =

His conduct on the Helgoland resulted in a promotion to lieutenant for Sanders , and he was also recommended for command of his own ship . In February 1917 , he was appointed captain of HMS Prize , a three @-@ masted topsail schooner that was sailing under the German flag when it was seized in 1914 and converted to a Q @-@ ship in early 1917 . At midnight on 30 April 1917 about 180 miles south of Ireland , in the Atlantic , the Prize was attacked by a U @-@ boat , the U @-@ 93 commanded by Edgar von Spiegel von und zu Peckelsheim . It was genuinely badly damaged by shellfire from the U @-@ boat 's deck guns . Sanders , remaining under cover , moved about the vessel reassuring his men .

After the ' panic party ' had taken to the boats and the ship appeared to be sinking , the U @-@ boat approached to within 80 yards of her port quarter , whereupon Sanders ordered the White Ensign hoisted and the Prize opened fire . Within a few minutes the submarine was on fire and her bows rose in the air , whilst the Prize was further damaged . The U @-@ boat disappeared from sight , and was believed to have been sunk by the crew of the Prize and by several of the German crew ( including her captain ) who had been blown or jumped into the sea . However , neither of the crippled ships had sunk , with the Prize being towed in flames back to Kinsale . The U @-@ 93 struggled back to the Sylt nine days later .

Badly damaged , the Prize had to spend several weeks being repaired . During this time the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Jellicoe offered Sanders command of a destroyer of his choosing , which he declined . He returned to sea in May with the Prize conducting a second patrol for three weeks . Sanders was wounded slightly in an action on 12 June , in which the Prize was fired at 30 times by the U @-@ boat being attacked . His award of the Victoria Cross ( VC ) for his actions on 30 April was gazetted in June , while he was at sea on a third patrol . Because the use of Q @-@ ships such as the Prize were still secret , the published details of his award when it was gazetted simply read

In recognition of his conspicuous gallantry , consummate coolness , and skill in command of one of H.M. Ships in action .

The Prize was lost on its fourth patrol , Sanders having been promoted to lieutenant commander . On 14 August 1917 , UB @-@ 48 spotted the Prize . The Q @-@ ship was recognised by the captain of the U @-@ boat , who had been warned by the survivors of U @-@ 93 and did not approach the Prize too closely . Instead , it remained submerged and fired two torpedoes into the sailing ship , blowing her to pieces . Rescue craft were unable to find a trace of her crew when they arrived in the area , long after the U @-@ boat had escaped .

= = Medals and legacy = =

Sanders , a bachelor , died without knowledge of the award of a Distinguished Service Order ( DSO ) for his actions on 12 June 1917 . The emergence of correspondence with his first Q @-@ ship commander , A.D Blair , makes it clear that he at least knew of his VC prior to his death , even if he had not received it . In June 1918 , Sanders ' father received his son 's VC and DSO from the Governor @-@ General of New Zealand . Sander 's VC , the only one awarded to a New Zealander serving in the navy , and DSO is on display at the Auckland War Memorial Museum .

There are many memorials to Sanders , including an exhibit of photographs and his citations at Takapuna Primary School , which he attended , a bronze tablet in the church at Milford Haven , the home port of the Prize , and The Sanders Memorial Scholarship at the University of Auckland for children of members of the Royal Navy or the Mercantile Marine . The best @-@ known memorial is the Sanders Cup for interprovincial competition between 14 @-@ foot ( 4 @.@ 3 m ) centerboard X @-@ class yachts , still contested to this day .