

Sir David Martin

(20 January 1989 – 7 August 1990)

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Sir David Martin, the 34th Governor of New South Wales, held office for just 565 days, from 20 January 1989 to 7 August 1990. Yet, in that short time, “the people’s Governor” touched so many in New South Wales that his resignation, and death three days later, triggered notable displays of public grief. Martin’s openness about his terrible asbestos-related illness, which struck him down so swiftly at just 57 years, partly explains the reaction. More likely, it was the mettle of the man himself, and the manner in which he deported himself as Governor, which so affected those who knew him, and those who merely knew of him.

He did have one prior claim to fame, or notoriety. His great, great, great grandfather on his mother’s side was George Johnston, the one-time commander of the “Rum Corps”.¹ Young George, whose Scottish clan records can be traced to Annandale in the 13th century, had fought with the Royal Marines in the American War of Independence at the age of 12, and later battled against the French in the East Indies. Sailing with the First Fleet on the *Lady Penrhyn*, he was reputedly the first man ashore at Port Jackson in 1788. Major Johnston of the NSW Corps played a key role in quashing the Castle Hill Rebellion of 1804, and in January 1808 arrested Governor Bligh at Government House, thereafter ruling the Colony for three months with his assumed title of Lieutenant-Governor. Cashiered while in England for deposing Bligh, he returned to New South Wales, married Esther Abrahams – the Jewish milliner and unmarried convict mother he had met on board the *Lady Penrhyn* – and lived out his days as a farmer and grazier. Robert, one of his three sons by Esther, had joined the Royal Navy in 1805, the first Australian-born man to do so.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

Notes

- 1 For Johnston's life and career, see Yarwood, AT, "Johnson, George (1764-1823)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 2, MUP, Melbourne, 1967, pp 20-2; and Ritchie, J (intro), *A Charge of Mutiny*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1988.
- 2 Stenmark, M, *Sir David Martin: A Man of Courage and Dedication*, Simon and Schuster, Sydney, 1996, p 15.
- 3 Martin's widow later commented that she had never asked him about the four years of his childhood when he did not know his father's fate. *Sun Herald*, 16.11.2008.
- 4 For Martin's early years and later life see Stenmark, *Sir David Martin*, and Sir David Martin Research Project, *A Call to Duty: The Story of Rear Admiral Sir David Martin "The People's Governor"*, Sydney City Mission, Sydney, 1995.
- 5 White, M (ed), *We Were Cadet Midshipmen: RANC Entrants 50 Years On*, Grinkle Press, Queanbeyan, 2006, p 18.
- 6 Stenmark, p 44.
- 7 Personal communications, Mike Fogarty (former Lt, RAN), 17.12.2008, 23.12.2008.
- 8 *Sunday Telegraph*, 5.8.1990.
- 9 Interview: Nick Greiner, 12.12.2008; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21.1.1989.
- 10 Frame, T, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19.1.1989.
- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21.1.1989.
- 12 *Daily Mirror*, 10.8.1989.
- 13 Interview: Greiner, 12.12.2008.
- 14 *Newcastle Herald*, 5.5.1990.
- 15 *Daily Telegraph*, 18.4.1989; *Daily Mirror*, 25.7.1989.
- 16 *Daily Mirror*, 10.5.1990; *Daily Telegraph*, 17.5.1990.
- 17 See, for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11.8.1990.
- 18 *Sun-Herald*, 12.8.1990. For an extended comment by the Premier, see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25.5.1990; *Daily Telegraph*, 7.8.1990. See also the condolence debate in the NSW Parliament, New South Wales *Parliamentary Debates*, 14.8.1990, pp 5697-706; 4.9.1990, pp 6670-85.
- 19 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17.8.1990.
- 20 *Daily Telegraph*, 1.9.1990.
- 21 *Daily Telegraph*, 1.9.1990.