

BLACK SHEEP

Flight Sub Lieutenant Gerald Ewart 'Gerry' Nash B Flight 10 Squadron RNAS

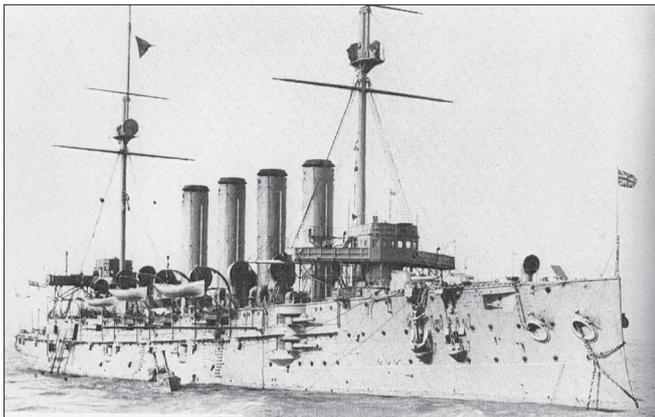
by Stewart K. Taylor

Gerald Ewart 'Gerry' Nash was born on 12 May 1896 at Saltfleet, Ontario. His father operated a fruit farm on the outskirts of Stoney Creek, a village close to the south east environs of Hamilton, the setting for his son's rural boyhood. Gerry attended Stoney Creek Public School and in 1907 continued his learning at Hamilton collegiate. For three years prior to World War One he studied at Hamilton's Business College. The city of Hamilton in the early war years could not be considered part of the aviation milieu; its location at the western perimeter of Lake Ontario too far afield for the Curtiss School aircraft based at Long Branch, near Toronto, to fly over. Therefore, it was more by word of mouth and aviation references in the Hamilton newspaper that young Nash developed a yearning to fly.

Not long after the Toronto 'dailies' inserted a notice in their 5 April 1915 editions, inviting applications for the RNAS, Gerry learned of this. He wanted to get into the war as a pilot and submitted his name to the Department of Naval Services in Ottawa. On account of an unexpected interest and a flood of requests the Curtiss Company's flying schools at Long Branch and Toronto Island, which opened in May 1915, could not accommodate all those applicants who passed

HMCS Niobe. Well past her prime, the 1897-launched, 11,000-ton, former RN cruiser was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy in September 1910. She almost ran aground in the following year, requiring repairs that took nearly 18 months to complete. She joined the RCN's 4th Cruiser Squadron on contraband patrol off New York but was paid off in September 1915 to become a depot and instructional ship in Halifax harbour. She accommodated the first group of Canadian candidates for the RNAS, who became known as the 'Niobe Gang'.

:The Ships of Canada's Naval Forces 1910-1981



*Probationary Flight Sub Lieutenant Gerald Ewart 'Gerry' Nash, at Redcar late April 1916.
:Canadian Forces*

the interview and physical examination. Other schools in the United States that offered flight training were at capacity as well when he was informed of his acceptance. Fortunately for him and his family he was not required to spend money on subsistence in Toronto while waiting his chance to sign a contract with the Curtiss School. He remained at home in Stoney Creek until Admiral C.E. Kingsmill, the Chief RNAS recruitment officer in Canada, received authorisation from the British Admiralty to form a company of the Royal Naval Canadian volunteer Reserve for those hopeful trainees, of which Nash was one, who had not finished training or had failed to find enrolment in a school.

He was just one of only eighteen to accept what became known as the 'Niobe Option'. On 25 November 1915, a train left Toronto for Halifax carrying Nash and four others. In charge of the five-man party, all holding the rank of 'Able Seaman' was Petty Officer Raymond Collishaw. By the end of January 1916 their stay on board

the veteran ex Royal Navy cruiser, HMCS *Niobe*, anchored in Halifax Harbour became history. It is doubtful if any of the *Niobe* gang absorbed much of the onboard makeshift gunnery instruction that also included very elementary courses in field exercises, such as musketry and machine guns, before going overseas. Like the first three to leave early in January 1916, Nash kindly accepted the free, expense paid train ride to and

'The Niobe Gang'. Aboard HMCS Niobe in Halifax Harbour, November 1915, the future 10 Sqn RNAS pilots were: front row, PFSL A.C. 'Art' Dissette (extreme left), PFSL R. 'Colly' Collishaw (2nd from left), PFSL Q.S. 'Quin' Shirriff ((2nd from right), PFSL G.E. 'Gerry' Nash (extreme right); rear row, PFSL C.E. 'Pat' Pattison (extreme left).

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