

## BIOGRAPHY

# Corporal Bill (Willy) Henry Apiata VC NZSAS

Bill (Willy) Henry Apiata (pronounced A-pea-a-ta) was born on 28 June 1972 in Mangakino in the Waikato. His birth certificate carries the first name "Bill" but he is known as Willy.

His father is a Maori New Zealander and his mother a Pakeha New Zealander, his parents are separated and he is close to his mother but has not had contact with his father for several years. Bill has three sisters and is the third youngest in the family.

Bill spent the early years of his life in Northland before moving to Te Kaha in the eastern Bay of Plenty. At Te Kaha he attended the Whanau-a-Apanui Area School which he left on the day of his fifteenth birthday.

At the age of 16, his mother sent Bill to live with relatives in Auckland; he is close to this family.

Bill has a four year old son with his partner of seven years. Though separated from his partner Bill is a devoted father who spends every weekend he can with his son.

Bill affiliates to the Nga Puhi iwi (tribe) through his father, but as he has spent so much time in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, he feels very strong affiliation to Whanau-a-Apanui, which is also the iwi of his partner. Bill's home marae is Tukaki Marae in Te Kaha.

Bill enlisted into the New Zealand Army on 6 October 1989 as a Territorial Force (TF), or part time, soldier in the Tauranga based Hauraki Regiment of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment. He was encouraged to join by friends already in the TF.

Bill first became aware of the New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) when, as a TF soldier, he acted as a member of the enemy party for a NZSAS training exercise. In 1996 while still in the TF he attempted NZSAS selection but was not successful.

From July 2000 – April 2001 he served in East Timor as a member of New Zealand's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Group as part of the United Nations operations there. When he returned to New Zealand in April 2001, he became a full time soldier, transferring to the regular force of the New Zealand Army.

In November 2001 he attempted and passed NZSAS selection and attended the NZSAS training cycle in early 2002. On completion of the training cycle he was made a member of the NZSAS.

Since joining the Army, Corporal Apiata has set himself a high standard and consistently managed to achieve it. He is regarded as a role model by his peers, and has won awards or received above average results on every military training course he has attended.

The NZSAS now lay claim to having two of the most highly decorated New Zealand soldiers ever, in their ranks. In 1974, Sergeant Murray Ken Hudson was posthumously awarded the George Cross, (the equivalent of the VC for acts not involving an enemy action), for bravery during a grenade training incident in Waiouru. Sergeant Hudson was a former member of the NZSAS and had served operationally with the unit in Borneo in 1966.

Corporal Apiata's medal ribbons, worn on his left breast, are:

- Top row: The Victoria Cross for New Zealand, The New Zealand Operational Service Medal.
- Bottom row: The New Zealand East Timor Medal, The United Nations East Timor Medal and The New Zealand General Service Medal for Afghanistan.
- On his right breast he wears the emblem of the US Presidential Unit Citation.