

FACT SHEET

The Victoria Cross

Background

The Victoria Cross (VC) was created by Queen Victoria in 1856 to recognise acts of gallantry in the presence of the enemy by members of the armed forces, regardless of rank. It enjoys a precedence before all other honours and awards.

New Zealand is not the only Commonwealth country to have retained the VC as its senior gallantry award. In 1991 the Queen of Australia instituted the 'Victoria Cross for Australia', and in 1993 the Queen of Canada instituted the 'Victoria Cross for Canada'. The New Zealand and Australian crosses are identical in both design and metal composition to the British cross.

Awards of the Victoria Cross

The VC has been awarded 1,356 times since 1856 and Corporal Apiata's is the first to a serving member of the SAS anywhere in the Commonwealth.

Since the end of World War Two, the VC has only been awarded 13 times:

- The Korean War, 1950-53 (Four British recipients, two posthumous)
- Confrontation with Indonesian forces in Borneo, 1966 (One British recipient)
- The Vietnam War, 1965-69 (Four Australian recipients, two posthumous),
- The Falklands War, 1982 (Two British recipients, both posthumous)
- Iraq, 2004 (One British recipient)
- Afghanistan, 2006 (One British recipient, posthumous).

Corporal Apiata becomes the 14th recipient and the first commonwealth recipient since Australian Warrant Officer Keith Payne received the award in 1969.

There are 13 living VC recipients, including Corporal Apiata. Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, British Army, who received his award for gallantry in Iraq in 2004, is the only other recipient still serving in the military.

A History of New Zealand Recipients

- The VC has now been awarded to 22 New Zealand military personnel (including Corporal Apiata).
- Captain Charles Upham is the only combat soldier, and only the third ever recipient to have been awarded a second VC (VC and Bar).
- The first member of the New Zealand military to win the VC was English born, Major Charles Heaphy, serving with the Auckland Rifle Volunteers during the New Zealand Wars in 1864.

- The first New Zealand born recipient was Captain Henry Cecil Dudgeon D'Arcy (born at Wanganui on 11 August 1850), who was awarded the VC in 1879 for an act of gallantry while serving with the British Army during the Zulu Wars.
- Farrier Sergeant Major William James Hardham was the first New Zealand born recipient who also won his VC for service with New Zealand military forces. The award was made for Hardham's gallantry during the Boer War in 1901, when he rescued a wounded colleague under enemy fire.
- There were 11 VCs awarded to New Zealanders in World War One (1914-1918). All were to members of the New Zealand Army; three were awarded posthumously.
- In World War Two (1939-1945), there were nine awards of the VC to eight individuals. Of the nine awards, six were to members of the New Zealand Army, three to members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Two were posthumous awards, one to an officer in the Army and one to an officer in the Air Force.
- The first VC to be won by a Maori was awarded posthumously to 2nd Lieutenant Moana-nui-a-Kiwa Ngarimu for gallantry in North Africa in 1943.
- Five VCs have been awarded to people born in New Zealand but serving with either the British or Australian forces at the time of the award.
- 14 VCs were awarded to British military personnel for gallantry in New Zealand during the New Zealand Wars between 1860 and 1866.
- One of the most famous VC recipients connected with New Zealand was Bernard, Lord Freyberg, who commanded the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force in World War Two and later served as Governor-General of New Zealand. Freyberg received his VC for gallantry during the first Battle of the Somme in 1916, while serving with the British Army. He was raised and educated in New Zealand.

Manufacture

The VC is cast in gunmetal from guns captured from the Russian Army during the Crimean War. The metal is chemically treated to give a dark bronze finish. The rank, name, and unit of service of the recipient is engraved on the reverse of the suspender bar and the date of the act or acts for which the cross is awarded is engraved on the central portion of the reverse.

The Victoria Cross for New Zealand is manufactured by the London jewellers Hancock and Co, who have made the VC since its inception.

For further information on the history of the VC see:

<http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server.php?show=ConWebDoc.941&navId=00g003>

For further information on the manufacture of the VC see:

http://www.hancocks-london.com/victoria_cross.htm

For further information on New Zealand recipients of the VC see:

The Victoria Cross by PP O'Shea (pages 558-561) in ***The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History***, Edited by Ian McGibbon, published by Oxford University Press in 2000.

In the Face of the Enemy by Glyn Harper and Colin Richardson, published by Harper Collins in 2006.

Where the Prize is Highest by G Bryant, published by Collins in 1972.