

# Some Facts about the Victoria Cross



The Victoria Cross is Britain's highest award for gallantry in action in presence of the enemy and can be awarded to any serviceman or woman of any rank.

It was instituted by Royal Warrant of 29 January 1856, made retrospective to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854. Prior to this conflict the Sovereign had no means of rewarding junior officers and other ranks in the army and navy for 'signal acts of valour or devotion in the presence of the enemy'.

There have been various changes to the conditions for award of the VC since 1856, with members of the Colonial Forces in New Zealand and other parts of the Empire being included in 1867 and the Indian Army in 1911. The conditions applying now were instituted by Royal Warrant of 30 September 1961, with the Twelfth Clause being revised by Royal Warrant of 22 July 1997.

The present Warrant states that the VC "shall only be awarded for conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy".

## **General Information**

Victoria Crosses are cast from the gun metal (bronze) from two Chinese cannon captured from the Russians at Sevastopol during the Crimean War. The bronze is treated chemically to obtain the uniform dark finish. Some 358 ounces of the metal remains, enough for a further 85 crosses.

Queen Victoria was intimately involved in the design, which she expressly wished to be simple and unpretentious. She also chose the motto, 'For Valour', which she substituted for the original proposal, 'For the Brave', in case anyone should conclude that only the brave men in battle were those who won the Cross.

All VCs have been, and are still, manufactured by Messrs Hancocks, now called Hancocks & Co (Jewellers) Ltd of 1 Burlington Gardens, London W1X 2HP. The company was established in 1849.

Replacements of VCs is permitted in instances of loss or theft. In some instances also, duplicates were prepared. This gives rise occasionally, and usually prior to sale, of more than one Cross being found to be in existence. Since 1916 miniature VCs have been worn instead of the full-sized medals with evening or mess dress.

## **Technical Information**

*Description:* A bronze cross pattée and not a Maltese cross as erroneously described in the Warrant of institution and of most people ever since.

*Obverse:* A lion passant gardant standing on the Royal Crown; and below, on a scroll, the words FOR VALOUR. The cross has a raised edge, 3/16 inch wide, with a beading of the same width and at that distance running round inside.

*Reverse:* A raised circle in the centre and the same beaded edges and lining as the obverse.

*Size:* 1.375 inches across.

*Ribbon:* 1.5 inches wide.

The colour originally dark blue for the navy, and red (crimson) from the army.

In 1918, following the the creation of the Royal Air Force, a red ribbon was adopted for all awards irrespective of the Service of the recipient.

*Suspension:* A loop at the top of the cross is joined by a ring to a Roman 'V' which is part of a straight flat suspender ornamented with laurel leaves. The ribbon is threaded through a slot at the top of the suspender.

*Naming:* The recipient's name, rank, and unit are hand-engraved at the back of the suspender, the date of the act, which gained the award, is engraved in the circle at the centre of the reverse.