

The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest military decoration awarded for 'valour in the face of the enemy' to members of the armed forces of Commonwealth countries. It was introduced in 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour acts of valour during the Crimean War.

Originally the VC was not available to colonial troops, even those serving under British command. This restriction was removed in 1867 following a recommendation for recognition of the gallantry of Charles Heaphy of the Auckland Volunteer Rifles in 1864.

A total of 23 VCs have been awarded to New Zealand military personnel, including two won by Charles Upham. The most recent recipient was Willie Apiata in 2007. He is the first, and so far only, recipient of the Victoria Cross for New Zealand, which was instituted in 1999 to replace the British Victoria Cross.

The Victoria Cross for New Zealand was created during a revamp of the New Zealand honours system in the 1990s. As part of the changes eight distinct New Zealand gallantry and bravery awards were created to replace more than 20 British honours.

New Zealand was the third Commonwealth nation to create its own VC, following Australia (1991) and Canada (1993). While the appearance of the medal is identical to the original British design, the criteria for the award have been amended slightly to ensure that New Zealanders involved in peacekeeping operations are also eligible.

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