

The Victoria Cross

Significance

The Victoria Cross is the pre-eminent award for acts of bravery in wartime and is Australia's highest military honour.

It is awarded to persons who, in the presence of the enemy, display the most conspicuous gallantry; a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice; or extreme devotion to duty.

History

The Victoria Cross was created by Queen Victoria in 1856 and made retrospective to 1854 to cover the period of the Crimea War.

Until the Victoria Cross for Australia was created in 1991, Australians were eligible for the Victoria Cross and other awards under the Imperial system of honours.

The Imperial Victoria Cross has been awarded to ninety six Australians. Ninety one received the Victoria Cross while others serving with Australian forces and five Australians received the award while serving with South African and British units.

Australians were first recognised for their gallantry in the Boer War and more recently during the Vietnam War.

Australians have been awarded the Victoria Cross in the following conflicts:

- 6 in the Boer War 1899-1902
- 64 in World War I 1914-1918
- 2 in North Russia 1919
- 20 in World War II 1939-1945
- 4 in Vietnam 1962-1972

Nine of the crosses awarded in World War I were for Australians at Gallipoli.

Past recipients

Ninety six Australians have been awarded the Imperial Victoria Cross. No recipients had been awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia.

The first Australian to be awarded a Victoria Cross was Captain Sir Neville Howse VC KCMG CB KStJ during the Boer War (1900). He also served in World War I and later as Commonwealth Minister for Health, Defence and Repatriation.

The most recent recipient of the Victoria Cross was Warrant Officer Keith Payne VC OAM for gallantry during the Vietnam War (24 May 1969). Under heavy enemy fire Payne instigated a daring rescue of more than forty men, many of them wounded, and led the party back to the battalion base.

Victoria Cross for Australia



The Victoria Cross for Australia was instituted in the Australian honours system by Letters Patent on 15 January 1991.

It replaced the British or Imperial Victoria Cross.

How it is awarded

The Governor-General awards the Victoria Cross, with the approval of the Sovereign, on the recommendation of the Minister for Defence.

The Victoria Cross may be awarded posthumously.

The post-nominal entitlement for the Victoria Cross is VC.

A subsequent award of the Victoria Cross to the same person is made as a bar to the Cross. They are also entitled to the post-nominal VC and Bar. The Victoria Cross is designed in the form of the Maltese Cross: in the centre of the medal is a lion guardant standing upon the Royal Crown.

The words "For valour" are inscribed below. The Victoria Cross is suspended from a bar by a crimson ribbon. On the reverse of the cross the date of the act of bravery is inscribed, along with the name, rank, and unit of the recipient.

The award of the Victoria Cross for Australia has been awarded to Corporal Mark Donaldson SASR for most conspicuous acts of gallantry in action on 2 September 2008, in Afghanistan; and to Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith SASR for most conspicuous gallantry in action on 11 June 2010, in Afghanistan.