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The Victoria Cross

THE QUEEN has been pleased, by an instrument under her Royal Sign Manual, of which the following is a copy, to institute and create a new Naval and Military decoration, to be styled and designated "The Victoria Cross", and to make the rules and regulations therein set forth under which the said decoration shall be conferred.

VICTORIA, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, etc., to all to whom these presents shall come, greeting.

WHEREAS, We, taking into Our Royal Consideration, that there exists no means of adequately rewarding the individual gallant services, either of officers of the lower grades in Our Naval and Military Service, or of warrant and petty officers, seamen and marines in Our Navy, and non-commissioned officers in Our Army.

AND, WHEREAS, the third class of Our Most Honourable Order of the Bath is limited, except in very rare cases, to the higher ranks of both services, and the granting of Medals, both in Our Navy and Army, is only awarded for long service or meritorious conduct, rather than for bravery in action or distinction before an enemy, such cases alone excepted where a general medal is granted for a particular action or campaign, or a clasp added to the medal for some especial engagement, in both of which cases all share equally in the boon, and those who, by their valour, have particularly signalled themselves, remain undistinguished from their comrades.

NOW, for the purpose of attaining an end so desirable as that of rewarding individual instances of merit and valour, We have instituted and created, and by these presents for Us, our Heirs and Successors, institute and create a new Naval and Military Decoration, which we are desirous should be highly prized and eagerly sought after by the officers and men of Our Naval and Military Services, and are graciously pleased to make, ordain and establish the following rules and ordinances for the government of the same, which shall from henceforth be inviolably observed and kept.

Firstly.

It is ordained that the distinction shall be styled and designated “The Victoria Cross”, and shall consist of a Maltese cross of bronze, with our Royal crest in the centre, and underneath with an escroll bearing the inscription “For Valour”.

Secondly. It is ordained that the Cross shall be suspended from the left breast by a blue riband for the Navy, and by a red riband for the Army.

Thirdly.

It is ordained that the names of those upon whom We may be pleased to confer the Decoration shall be published in the *London Gazette*, and a registry thereof kept in the Office of Our Secretary of State for War.

Fourthly.

It is ordained that anyone who, after having received the Cross, shall again perform an act of bravery, which, if he had not received such Cross, would have entitled him to it, such further act shall be recorded by a bar attached to the riband by which the Cross is suspended, and for every additional act of bravery an additional bar may be added.

Fifthly.

It is ordained that the Cross shall only be awarded to those officers and men who have served Us in the presence of the enemy, and shall have then performed some signal act of valour or devotion to their country.

Sixthly.

It is ordained, with a view to placing all persons on a perfectly equal footing in relation to eligibility for the Decoration, that neither rank, nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstance or condition whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery, shall be held to establish a sufficient claim to the honour.

Seventhly.

It is ordained that the Decoration may be conferred on the spot where the act to be rewarded by the grant of such Decoration has been performed, under the following circumstances:

- (1) When the fleet or army in which such act has been performed is under the eye and command of an admiral or general officer commanding the forces.
- (2) Where the Naval or Military force is under the eye and command of an admiral or commodore commanding a squadron or detached Naval force, or of a general commanding a corps or divisions or brigade on a distinct and detached service, when such admiral or general officer shall have the power of conferring the Decoration on the spot, subject to confirmation by Us.

Eighthly.

It is ordained where such act shall not have been performed in sight of a commanding officer aforesaid, then the claimant for the honour shall prove the act to the satisfaction of the captain or officer commanding his ship, or to the officer commanding the regiment to which the claimant belongs, and such captain, or such commanding officer, shall report the same through the usual channel to the admiral or commodore commanding the force employed in the service, or to the officer commanding the forces in the field who shall call for such description and attestation of the act as he may think requisite, and on approval shall recommend the grant of the Decoration.

Ninthly.

It is ordained that every person selected for the Cross, under Rule 7, shall be publicly decorated, before the Naval or Military force or body to which he belongs, and with which the act of bravery for which he is to be rewarded shall have been performed, and his name shall be recorded in a general order together with the cause of his especial distinction.

Tenthly.

It is ordained that every person selected under Rule 8 shall receive his Decoration as soon as possible, and his name shall likewise appear in a general order as above required, such general order to be issued by the Naval or Military commander of the forces employed on the Service.

Eleventhly.

It is ordained that the general orders above referred to shall from time to time be transmitted to Our Secretary of State for War, to be laid before Us, and shall be by him registered.

Twelfthly.

It is ordained that, as cases may arise not falling within the rules above specified, or in which a claim, though well founded, may not have been established on the spot, We will, on the joint submission of Our Secretary of State for War and of Our Commander-in-Chief of our Army, or on that of Our Lord High Admiral, or Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in the case of the Navy, confer the Decoration, but never without conclusive proofs of the performance of the act of bravery for which the claim is made.

Thirteenthly.

It is ordained that in the event of a gallant and daring act having been performed by a squadron, ship's company, or detached body of seamen and marines not under fifty in number, or by a brigade, regiment, troop or company in which the admiral, general, or other officer commanding such forces may deem that all are equally brave and distinguished, and that no special selection can be made by them, then in such case the admiral, general, or other officer commanding, may direct that for any such body of seamen or marines, or for every troop or company of soldiers, one officer shall be selected by the officers engaged for the Decoration, and in like manner one petty officer or non-commissioned officer shall be selected by the petty officers and non-commissioned officers engaged, and two seamen or private soldiers or marines shall be selected by the seamen, or private soldiers, or marines engaged, respectively for the Decoration, and the names of those selected shall be transmitted by the senior officers in command of the Naval force, brigade, regiment, troop, or company, to the admiral or general officer commanding, who shall in due manner confer the Decoration as if the acts were done under his own eye.

Fourteenthly.

It is ordained that every warrant officer, petty officer, seaman or marine, or non-commissioned officer, or soldier who shall have received the Cross, shall, from the date of the act by which the Decoration has been gained be entitled to a special pension of 10 pounds a year, and each additional bar conferred under Rule 4 on such warrant or petty officers, or non-commissioned officers or men, shall carry with it an additional pension of 5 pounds per annum.

Fifteenthly.

In order to make such additional provision as shall effectually preserve pure this most honourable distinction, it is ordained that, if any person be convicted of treason, cowardice, felony, or of any infamous crime, or if he be accused of any such offence, and doth not after a reasonable time surrender himself to be tried for the same, his name shall forthwith be erased from the registry of individuals upon whom the said Decoration shall have been conferred, and by an especial Warrant under Our Royal Sign Manual, and the pension conferred under Rule 14 shall cease and determine from the date of such Warrant. It is hereby further declared, that We, Our Heirs and Given Successors, shall be the all judges of the circumstances requiring such expulsion; moreover, We shall at all times have power to restore such persons as may at any time have been expelled, both to the enjoyment of the Decoration and Pension.

Given at Our Court at Buckingham Palace, this twenty-ninth day of January, in the nineteenth year of Our reign, and in the Year of Our Lord, 1856.

By her majesty's command,
(Signed) Panmure
To Our Principal Secretary of State for War.

On August 10, 1858 the *London Gazette* announced that by a further warrant under her Royal Sign Manual, her Majesty was pleased to direct that the Victoria Cross should be conferred, "subject to the rules and ordinances already made, on Officers and Men of Her Majesty's Naval and Military Services, who may perform acts of conspicuous courage and bravery under circumstances of extreme danger, such as the occurrence of a fire on board ship, or the foundering of a vessel at sea, or under any of the other circumstance in which, through the courage and devotion displayed, life or public property may be saved."

On 8th July, 1859 a supplemental Warrant was announced in the *London Gazette* stating:
"The Queen having been graciously pleased by a Warrant under her Royal Sign manual, bearing date 13th December 1858, to declare that Non-Military Persons who, as Volunteers, have borne arms against the Mutineers, both at Lucknow and elsewhere, during the late operations in India, shall be considered as eligible to receive the decoration of the Victoria Cross, subject to the rules and ordinances, etc. etc. . . . provided that it be established in any case that the person was serving under the orders of a general or other Officer in Command of troops in the Field; her Majesty has accordingly been pleased to signify her intention to confer this high distinction on the undermentioned gentlemen, etc. etc."

Qualification Required for the Decoration of the Victoria Cross.

Victoria R.

Royal Warrant.

WHEREAS doubts have arisen as to the qualification required for the decoration of the Victoria Cross, and whereas the description of such qualification in Our Warrant of 29th January, 1856, is not uniform. Our will and pleasure is that the qualification shall be “conspicuous bravery or devotion to the country in the presence of the enemy”, and that Our Warrant of 29th January, 1856, shall be read and interpreted accordingly.

IT IS OUR further will and pleasure that Officers and Men of Our Auxiliary and Reserve Forces (Naval and Military) shall be eligible for the decoration of the Victoria Cross under the conditions of Our said Warrant, as amended by this Our Warrant.

Given at our Court at Osborne, this 23rd day of April, 1881, in the forty-fourth year of Our Reign.

By Her Majesty's Command,

Hugh C. E. Childers.

A further Warrant appeared in 1881 which included as eligible for the Decoration members of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, provided that they were serving under a general or other officer in command of troops in the field.

A Warrant dated 18 July, 1898 authorised the increase of the Victoria Cross pension from 10 pounds to 50 pounds per annum, the condition to be satisfied in such cases being inability to earn a livelihood, in consequence of age or infirmity occasioned by causes beyond an Annuitant's control.

On 8 August, 1902 a Warrant was issued by King Edward VII providing for posthumous awarding of the Victoria Cross, reading:

“The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the Decoration of the Victoria Cross being delivered to the representatives of the undermentioned officers, non-commissioned officers and men who fell during the recent operations in South Africa, in the performance of acts of valour which would, in the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in the Field, have entitled them to be recommended for that distinction had they survived:”