

The George Cross

The nature of World War Two and its conduct had brought war to the civilian population. This led to many outstanding acts of gallantry by civilians for which existing awards were quite inappropriate.

King George VI instituted the George Cross on 24 September 1940. It was announced that the award was for civilians 'only for acts of the greatest heroism or the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger'. Further, the standard for the award was as high as, and its status equal to, the Victoria Cross. It was also to be awarded to members of the services whose acts of gallantry were not in the face of the enemy.

The plain silver cross, suspended from a plain blue ribbon, bears a representation of St George and the Dragon surrounded by the words "For Gallantry". The naming details of the recipient are engraved on the back, along with the date of the award.

The George Cross superseded the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for Gallantry (EGM). Those living holders of the EGM were to exchange it for a George Cross. In 1971 the Albert Medal (AM) was discontinued and the living holders of that medal could exchange it for the George Cross. Since 1965 all living recipients became entitled to a special pension for life.

Throughout the Commonwealth there have been 152 direct awards of the George Cross including two to New Zealand Army personnel; Lance Corporal David Russell, GC., and Sergeant Murray (Ken) Hudson, GC. Both were posthumous awards.

Eligible exchange awards ie EGM and AM number 244, making a total of 396 George Cross awards.

