

The Victoria Cross

During the Crimean War of 1854-56, attention was drawn to the lack of appropriate awards for gallant conduct in action. Whilst there were a number of awards available, some were limited to senior ranks, some related to promotion, and others were service rather than gallantry related, eg for 'Meritorious Service'. It soon became clear that a new award was required.

In January 1855 public discussion, parliamentary debates and correspondence between the Duke of Newcastle and Prince Albert, saw the birth of the idea for a new decoration which could be open to all ranks of the Navy and Army - the Victoria Cross with the motto 'For the Brave'.

The first proof (sample) was made of copper and was rejected by Queen Victoria as being "ugly". On 5 February 1855 the Victoria Cross was instituted by Royal Warrant. On 5 May 1856, the Queen received the final sample with the Motto 'For Valour'. The ribbon was crimson for the Army and blue for the Navy, though this would change in 1918 to just the crimson of the Army for all services. The Victoria Cross is cast in sand, hand chiselled and engraved.

The first Victoria Crosses were cast from the cascabels taken from the Russian guns captured at Sebastopol during the Crimean War. These guns are still displayed on the edge of the Parade Ground at the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, England.

To date 1357 Victoria Crosses have been awarded including 4 to civilians.

