

WHY WE FLY THE FLAG - THE VICTORIA CROSS

Instituted 29th January, 1856

We fly the Flag on the Canadian Club Staff tomorrow (29th January), because we desire to keep in remembrance the institution of the Victoria Cross, which took place on January 29th, 1856.

It had long been felt that a distinctive token was wanted to meet the individual acts of heroism in the Navy and Army, and this impression was strengthened by the numerous deeds of valour by which the struggle for Sebastopol, in the Crimean War, had been rendered illustrious. The matter was brought to an issue by the Counsel of Prince Albert, the beloved consort of Queen Victoria, and the establishment of the Victoria Cross was the outcome of it. The Royal Warrant which authorized it was carefully worded so as to give the very highest value to the decoration. It said: "The Cross shall only be awarded to those officers or men who have served us in the presence of the enemy, and shall have performed some signal act of valour or devotion to their country."

The Cross, which has sometimes been wrongly described as a "Maltese Cross," is really what is known in Heraldry as a "Cross pattee." It is of bronze, made from cannons captured at Sebastopol. It is one and two-fifth inches square, and weighs 434 grains. In the centre of the Cross is the Royal crest, underneath which is an escroll bearing the legend, "For Valour." It is attached by a V to a bar, on which is engraved a spray of laurel. The reverse of the Cross, which is quite plain, has an indented circle in the centre, on which is inscribed the date of the act of bravery. The name of the recipient is put on the back of the bar. When won by a sailor it has a blue ribbon, whereas a soldier has a red ribbon.

At first the V.C. was not given to commissioned officers, only to non-commissioned officers and men. By another Warrant, bearing date December 13th,

1858, it was declared that non-military persons, who as volunteers, had borne arms against the mutineers in India, should be considered eligible to receive the V.C. By another Warrant, dated April 23rd, 1881, it was made possible for officers of any grade to win this much-coveted decoration. On August 8, 1902, King Edward made it possible for the Cross to be given even after the death of the hero who had won it.

The V.C. carries along with it an annuity of £10 a year to warrant officers, seamen and marines, non-commissioned officers and privates; and for each additional bar £5 a year is added to the annuity.

Strange to say, the only occasion upon which there has been a deviation from the principles laid down in the original Warrant was when, in 1866, it was given in Canada to Timothy O'Hea, who succeeded in extinguishing a fire in an ammunition van, during the Fenian Raid.

The first act of bravery for which it was given was performed by Mr. Lucas, a mate on H.M.S. "Hecla," during war-like operations in the Black Sea, in 1854. The British Fleet was bombarding the fortress of Bomarsund, and a live shell was thrown upon the deck of the "Hecla" by the enemy. Without a moment's hesitation, Mr. Lucas coolly picked up the shell, and threw it overboard. He was immediately promoted lieutenant, and later was awarded the silver medal of the Royal Humane Society.

The first distribution of the V.C. took place in Hyde Park, London, on June 26th, 1857. Sixty-two brave men paraded at a nearly hour. Twelve were from the Royal Navy, two from the marines, five from the cavalry, five from the artillery, four from the engineers and the remainder from the line. The popular favorite was Lieut. John Knox, who, after greatly distinguishing himself, lost his arm in the attack on the Redan.

More than 100,000 spectators were