

1898.

## NEW ZEALAND.

## THE NEW ZEALAND CROSS

(APPLICATION FOR, BY MR. H. WRIGG): PAPERS ADVERSE TO BESTOWAL.

*Return to an Order of the House of Representatives dated the 31st day of August, 1898.**Ordered, "That there be laid before this House copies of all correspondence adverse to the bestowal of the New Zealand Cross upon Mr. Harry Wrigg."—(MR. CARSON.)*

Colonel McDONNELL to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Wellington, 10th March, 1898.

I beg leave to call your attention to a local that appeared in the *Evening Post* of the 24th ultimo, which reads as follows:—

"Mr. Harry Wrigg, at one time in the Public Works Department in Wellington, and now a resident of Auckland, is to receive the New Zealand Cross for distinguished services during the Maori war."

It is unnecessary for me to say that this public intimation of the Government's intention to decorate Mr. Wrigg with the New Zealand Cross has caused a very great amount of astonishment, indignation, and disgust, not only among the present holders of the New Zealand Cross, but also among Volunteers, who rightly consider it their bounden duty to protect the dignity of this much-prized decoration.

I, as an old officer, personally have known this man ever since he first joined the Militia some thirty years ago. Had he on any occasion ever exhibited any "marked bravery in action" I must necessarily have heard the circumstances commented upon. Wrigg's name, to my knowledge, or the knowledge of the many men I have spoken to, and who have been with him during his Militia career, has never been mentioned as a "foremost man."

If, after the expiration of upwards of thirty years, Wrigg's "conspicuous bravery in action" for the first time is announced to his astonished comrades, where is the finality of these investigations for these decorations to cease?

I therefore, on behalf of myself and other holders of the New Zealand Cross, many of whom have authorised me so to do, together with a large section of the Volunteers throughout this Island, most respectfully petition that you, as Defence Minister of New Zealand, will not permit Her Majesty's most prized military decoration to be prostituted, and to be made a reward for political services rendered.

I remain, &amp;c.,

THOMAS McDONNELL,

Lieut.-Colonel, New Zealand Militia, Wanganui.

The Hon. the Defence Minister, Wellington.

Mr. W. LINGARD to the UNDER-SECRETARY for DEFENCE.

SIR,—

Wellington, 12th March, 1898.

I telephoned to you yesterday asking you if you would oblige by letting me know whether it was correct, as stated in the *Evening Post*, that a Mr. Wrigg, of Auckland, was about to receive the New Zealand Cross. To this you replied that it was correct, but on my asking you for particulars you declined to furnish me with same, referring me for any information that I might require to the *Gazette*.

As, necessarily, you must have known Mr. Wrigg's name and the information I desired to obtain did not appear in that paper, am I to presume that the department you represent does not desire to have the circumstances surrounding the recommendation for this decoration looked into?

On behalf of myself and other holders of the New Zealand Cross, who one and all received these decorations or were recommended for them a quarter of a century or more since, and also on behalf of many old Volunteers who saw active service in the sixties, I am requested to inform you that we unanimously consider the reopening of claims after a lapse of thirty odd years is quite contrary to all military procedure, and totally dissimilar to the precedent laid down by Her Majesty the Queen in connection with the presentation of the Victoria Cross.

I am also desired to ask you if you would oblige by letting me know by whom Mr. Wrigg was recommended for this decoration, the date on which Mr. Wrigg was recommended, and the particulars of the conspicuous bravery for which Mr. Wrigg is thus to be decorated? Waiting your reply,

I remain, &amp;c.,

Sir Arthur Douglas, Defence Department.

W. LINGARD, N.Z.C.

Mr. W. LINGARD to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Wellington, 12th March, 1898.

I understand that it is the intention of the Government to confer the New Zealand Cross on Mr. Harry Wrigg, of Auckland, for carrying a certain military despatch through a hostile district in the year 1867.

I beg leave to most respectfully protest against the presentation of this decoration to Mr. Wrigg, on the following grounds:—

In response to a letter received by you last year requesting that you would confer the New Zealand Cross on certain men whose claims to the decoration were unanimously recognised by all old Volunteers, your official reply was "that no more decorations were to be issued—that the list was closed," which reply was accepted by all as final.

That, as it is now more than thirty years since Mr. Wrigg could possibly have performed this "conspicuous bravery," I would respectfully submit that, had he deserved the decoration, he would either have received it before this or have been recommended for it at the time, and the surrounding circumstances must necessarily have been known to all Volunteers.

Your official notice that Mr. Wrigg is to be presented with this decoration has greatly surprised not only Volunteers generally, but also those men who were actually his camp companions in June, 1867, who, although acknowledging that Mr. Wrigg was a good Volunteer, for the first time and after a lapse of thirty years now learn that he ever exhibited personal "conspicuous bravery." I am assured that the official despatches you have in your possession, date June, July, and August, 1867, must show that prior to Mr. Wrigg carrying the despatch for which he is now to be decorated, and also a few days after his so doing, several despatches were carried by other men and under similar circumstances backwards and forwards over the very same country.

If Mr. Wrigg had exhibited any "conspicuous bravery" by carrying the despatch in question his name must necessarily appear in the despatches received by your department directly after same, probably in either the month of July or August, 1867, and such despatches must still be in your possession.

Had Mr. Wrigg's name ever been mentioned in any despatch as having shown "conspicuous bravery" all his comrades, and Volunteers generally, must have heard of same.

Any action of personal bravery during the time of war is invariably the camp topic of conversation among all Volunteers and soldiers, and I therefore most respectfully suggest that Mr. Wrigg's name, and this particular action, would have been thoroughly well known and discussed in every camp in the North Island had he distinguished himself in any conspicuous manner.

I have myself been associated with the New Zealand Forces, and have seen more or less active service between the years 1863 and 1869, and, moreover, I have had the great honour of having the distinction now under discussion conferred upon myself: therefore, I feel it my duty, as far as is in my power, to protect the decoration.

I unhesitatingly assert that there are a large number of fine brave fellows as thoroughly, and very probably more, deserving of the New Zealand Cross than those lucky few who did receive it. No Volunteer who took part in the late Maori war would have ever objected to these men receiving the decoration, as their names and their many heroic actions were thoroughly well known, publicly discussed, and acknowledged by all throughout the length and breadth of New Zealand while the war was actually going on. Not so Mr. Wrigg's name. As far as "conspicuous bravery" is concerned he is a stranger to all; his name is unknown.

I take the liberty of enclosing you a cutting relative to the Victoria Cross, and I once more most respectfully request that you will reconsider Mr. Wrigg's "personal" application before finally conferring upon him a decoration which, if thus bestowed, will immediately reduce the value of the New Zealand Cross held by those upon whom it was conferred a quarter of a century or more since.

I remain, &c.,

W. LINGARD, N.Z.C.

The Hon. the Defence Minister, Wellington.

#### EXTRACT.

At a military dinner given in London some few years since, Colonel Egerton, C.B., who was himself twice highly recommended for the Victoria Cross, but who did not receive it, is reported to have said that political influence and money had procured every imaginable title and honour conferable in Great Britain at the present time with the one solitary exception of the decoration of the Victoria Cross, which, thank God, was still wholly and solely a military distinction, and quite beyond the control of politics or capital. If once the service allowed the decoration to be prostituted by anything approaching political influence, then the highest incentive to bravery of the British soldier would cease to exist—the now much-prized Cross would become a "valueless bauble." Any person deserving of the title "man," not to say soldier, should as jealously protect the purity of the military decoration as he should be loyal and true to Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. W. LINGARD to the UNDER-SECRETARY for DEFENCE.

DEAR SIR,—

Wellington, 22nd March, 1898.

I wrote to you on the 12th instant requesting you, on behalf of several old Volunteers, to let me know by whom Mr. Wrigg was recommended for the New Zealand Cross; the actual date on which Mr. Wrigg was first officially recommended; the particulars of the conspicuous bravery for which Mr. Wrigg is recommended for this decoration; but, so far, I have had no reply whatever to this letter. In addition to the above questions I am now desired to ask you, Whether Mr. Wrigg's name was ever mentioned at the time of the war in any despatch as showing "conspicuous" bravery; the date of such despatch, if any; and the name of the officer who signed

such despatch? I may add that I am representing a large number of old Volunteers, some of whom served through the year 1867 immediately beside Mr. Wrigg, and all of whom express unfeigned surprise at this proposed decoration for an act of bravery by them unknown and unheard-of until thirty-odd years after the war.

Waiting your reply,  
Sir Arthur Douglas, Defence Department, Wellington.

I remain, &c.,  
W. LINGARD.

Captain PREECE to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Palmerston North, 24th March, 1898.

I have the honour to state that I have heard with surprise that it is the intention of the Government to award the decoration of the New Zealand Cross (which is the equivalent of the Victoria Cross) to one Harry Wrigg, a late cornet, for some supposed act of valour in carrying despatches between Opotiki and Tauranga in the year 1867.

I would most respectfully request that you may make every possible inquiry into this matter, and that the Government should pause before degrading this honourable military order by awarding it lightly for services which do not merit so high a distinction.

I submit that had the services rendered by this gentleman been of such a nature as to warrant any special recommendation he would have been recommended for special favour by the officers in command in their despatches to the Government at the time; also, that the Victoria Cross or the New Zealand Cross would not be recommended by any military commanding officer unless the special act of bravery took place under fire. The mere carrying of despatches where there was a possibility of being fired at by the enemy would not justify the award. If this were the case the Victoria Cross in the Imperial army would become a very common and worthless order.

Had the services of this gentleman been of the nature which would justify his being recommended for special distinction by the commanding officer his name would have been well known amongst the Colonial Forces.

There is no doubt that there are officers and men both in the New Zealand Forces and the Imperial army who have done acts of valour under fire which would justify the award of the Victoria or New Zealand Cross. I do not, however, think that there is a single instance on record of the Victoria Cross having been awarded after a lapse of thirty years.

In conclusion, I would again urge that this honourable decoration should not be rendered valueless by being given for any service except conspicuous bravery in the field, such as carrying a wounded comrade under fire, leading a forlorn hope, or some act which inspires men with confidence when wavering in an attack or covering a retreat when under fire.

I have, &c.,

G. T. PREECE, Captain, N.Z.M., N.Z.C.

The Hon. the Defence Minister, Wellington.

R. SHEPHERD to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Beresford Street, Auckland, 28th March, 1898.

I have the honour to forward extracts from Order in Council, 10th day of March, 1869, re New Zealand Cross:—

“Fourthly, the distinction shall only be conferred upon those officers or men who, when serving in the presence of the enemy, shall have performed some signal act of valour or devotion to their duty, or who shall have performed any very intrepid action in the public service; and neither rank nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstance or condition whatever, save merit of conspicuous bravery, shall be held to establish a sufficient claim to the honour.

“Fifthly, the distinction shall be awarded by the Governor only. It shall not be claimed by any individual on his own account, but the claim must be made in favour of the person considered to be entitled to it by the commanding officer of the Force or district to which such person belonged, and the Governor shall call for such description and attestation of the act as he may think requisite.”

I was serving in the 68th Light Infantry stationed at Tauranga at the time Mr. Wrigg is supposed to have performed some act of valour when carrying despatches from Major St. John to Colonel Harrington, and I did not then hear at that or any other time of the said claimant having done anything to entitle him to the high distinction of the New Zealand Cross.

I also served under Colonel Harrington and Major St. John in several engagements on the East Coast, and I firmly believe if Mr. Wrigg had done anything worthy of special notice both these officers would have reported it.

I have, &c.,

R. SHEPHERD, N.Z.C.,

Late Sergeant, Armed Constabulary.

The Hon. T. Thompson, Minister of Defence, Wellington.

W. J. RAVEN and OTHERS to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Wellington, 29th March, 1898.

We, the undersigned old Volunteers and Imperial service men, who took part in the Maori wars between the years 1860 and 1870, do most respectfully petition you that, before finally conferring the New Zealand Cross on Mr. Harry Wrigg, you would reconsider the matter, and further investigate his claims prior to actually presenting him with the decoration, on the following grounds:—

Mr. Wrigg's name being totally unknown to his most intimate campaign comrades as ever having displayed any marked conspicuous bravery, and they and ourselves never having seen any notice whatever intimating that he was applying to have this decoration, it did not admit of our lodging a protest against the presentation before now, as otherwise we would have done. We respectfully submit that a personal application for this decoration would not be made by any man deserving of such a distinction. No act of conspicuous bravery could possibly have been displayed by any Volunteer during the war, without it being publicly known and daily discussed, not only by the men belonging to that particular company, but by all and every Volunteer, and in every camp throughout the Island, and it would unquestionably have been noticed by Press correspondents.

Mr. Wrigg's name was never mentioned during the war, as far as those who were with him at that immediate time are aware, except as an ordinarily good man; and, as no reference whatever is made to him by any of the Press correspondents, it is absolutely impossible that he can have exhibited any "conspicuous bravery."

Moreover, we respectfully claim that Mr. Wrigg's name cannot have appeared in any of the military despatches, otherwise it would have been publicly known at the time; and if his name is not honourably mentioned in the despatches it is undeniable proof that he cannot have displayed "conspicuous bravery."

Undoubted evidence can be produced proving that in the year 1870 Colonel St. John had never up to that date recommended, or even contemplated recommending, Mr. Wrigg for this or for any other decoration.

Also, strong *prima facie* evidence can be adduced proving that it was not till several years after the war that Mr. Wrigg himself for the first time conceived the idea of applying for the decoration. For obvious reasons we must most respectfully decline to minutely criticize in writing Mr. Wrigg's claims, or the evidence of the gentleman who, we are given to understand, was instrumental in supporting Mr. Wrigg's claim to this decoration; but we are prepared to be examined under oath by any Commission that you may appoint, and the proofs that we can produce will be of such a nature that we feel assured you will reconsider the actual presentation, despite the fact that the matter is already gazetted.

We would draw your attention to your notice of last year, when you wisely decided that no further decorations whatever were to be issued—"that the list was closed"; and we would now respectfully request that you adhere to that determination.

Finally, we would most respectfully ask you if you would inform us on what date Mr. Wrigg was first officially recommended for the decoration, if ever, and by whom; the date on which he first applied for it himself; and the names of those persons whose evidence assisted Mr. Wrigg in convincing you as to his action of conspicuous bravery.

EDWIN BEZAR, late Colour-sergeant, 57th Foot, and Sergeant-major of Volunteers for twenty-four years.

WILLIAM JAMES RAVEN, late Jackson's Forest Rangers, Sergeant-major E Battery, Christchurch.

H. M. L. ATCHERLEY, late Colour-sergeant, No. 2 Company, 1st Waikato Regiment.

CHARLES HASLEM, late Artificer, C.T.C. and 3rd Waikato Regiment.

MICHAEL LANDRES, late 57th Regiment.

EDWARD HUTCHINGS, late Trumpeter, Colonial Defence Force.

JOHN WILLIAMS, 1st Waikato Regiment (Pitt's Four Hundred).

ROBERT EVANS, Superintendent, Local Transport Corps, and Volunteer Officer, East Coast Expeditionary Force.

JAMES WALDEN, late Wellington Rifles.

JOHN ROBINSON, Wanganui Rangers.

JAMES MALCOLM MAY, Wanganui Rifles.

WILLIAM BUCK, C.D.F.

PETER GARBES, late Wellington (Captain Buck's Company).

E. H. BEAL, late Engineer Volunteer, Waikato and Tauranga, 1863 to 1867.

C. O. MONTROSE, late 40th Regiment, formerly of the Waikato, 1860 to 1865.

Many other veterans are in complete sympathy with this petition, but are precluded from signing it through their connection with the Civil Service of the colony, but further petitions from other parts of the colony will be presented later on.

The Hon. the Defence Minister, Wellington.

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