

Victoria Cross Online



EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to the ^{43rd} edition of Victoria Cross Online Magazine.

This month's edition will continue with the next two in the Royal Air Force Victoria Cross recipients' series. It will tell the stories of Donald Garland VC and Thomas Gray VC.

There is also news of the recent renovation of the grave of James Clarke VC by the Victoria Cross Trust.

There is also news from Canada with the unveiling of the Hall of Valour in Saskatchewan.

There is also the news of the re-dedication ceremony of the grave of Thomas Wilkinson VC who lies at rest in York Cemetery.

There is also the amazing news of the Lottery funding for the planned new museum for the Worcestershire Regiment in Worcester.

There is also news of two new VC memorials, one in Italy due to be unveiled at the time of going to press for Kamal Ram VC, and one unveiled in Australia for Richard Norden VCfA.



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The RAF VCs

Donald Garland VC



Donald Edward Garland (1918-1940) was born on 28th June 1918 in Ballincor, County Wicklow, Ireland, the fourth son of Doctor P. J. Garland CMG and his wife, Renee. They also had a daughter, and tragically would lose all four of their sons during the war.

Donald was educated at the Cardinal Vaughan School, Kensington, and then became a clerk in the office of an insurance company briefly, while awaiting the result of his application to join the RAF. Accepted for a short service commission on 12th July 1937, he undertook elementary flying training at Hamble and was confirmed in rank as a Pilot Officer on 5th September before starting his Service training at No 2 Flying Training School. On graduation on 7th May 1938, he was posted to his first unit, No 12 Squadron, based then at Andover, and still in the process of complete conversion from biplane Hawker Hind bombers to the new monoplane Fairey Battle light bomber aircraft. Promoted to Flying Officer in 1939, Garland was serving in B Flight when 12 Squadron was alerted for an imminent move to France at the end of August 1939.

When the Germans invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, Operation Panther was begun – to transfer all Battle Squadrons to the Continent. No 12 Squadron's 17 Fairey Battles flew into Barry-au-Bac, and settled in quickly, and on 17th September flew the first operational sorties. During the icy winter, few missions were completed, and it was not until March 1940, sorties over German held territory began. Finally, on 12th May, the 12 Squadron was selected for a vital mission, to destroy two bridges at Vroenhoven and Velwezelt. Garland was selected to lead the three Battles to attack the Velwezelt bridge, while Flying Officer Norman Thomas led the three Battles against Vroenhoven bridge. Garland was accompanied by his observer, Thomas Gray, and rear gunner, L.R. Reynolds.

He stayed below the cloud base at 1,000 feet and on reaching the Veldwezelt area started a shallow bombing run through an inferno of anti-aircraft fire – from an estimated 300 guns – only to be blasted to the ground. Behind him, Pilot Officer McIntosh began his run, but his petrol tank was hit and he scraped a forced landing and survived, as a POW. The third Battle, piloted by Sergeant Fred Marland, released its bombs but was then hit and crashed. When the smoke cleared, parts of the bridge had been destroyed mostly by Garland's bombs.

ROYAL AIR FORCE.

The KING has been graciously pleased to confer the Victoria Cross on the under-mentioned officer and non-commissioned officer, in recognition of most conspicuous bravery:—

Flying Officer Donald Edward GARLAND
(40105).

563627 Sergeant Thomas GRAY.

Flying Officer Garland was the pilot and Sergeant Gray the observer of the leading aircraft of a formation of five aircraft that attacked a bridge over the Albert Canal which had not been destroyed and was allowing the enemy to advance into Belgium. All the air crews of the squadron concerned volunteered for the operation and, after five crews had been selected by drawing lots, the attack was delivered at low altitude against this vital target. Orders were issued that this bridge was to be destroyed at all costs. As had been anticipated, exceptionally intense machine gun and anti-aircraft fire was encountered, and the bridge area was heavily protected by enemy fighters. In spite of this the formation successfully delivered a dive bombing attack from the lowest practicable altitude and British fighters in the vicinity reported that the target was obscured by the bombs bursting on it and in its vicinity. Only one aircraft returned from this mission out of the five concerned. The pilot of this aircraft reports that in addition to the extremely heavy anti-aircraft fire, through which our aircraft dived to attack the objective, they were also attacked by a large number of enemy fighters after they had released their bombs on the target. Much of the success of this vital operation must be attributed to the formation leader, Flying Officer Garland,

and to the coolness and resource of Sergeant Gray, who navigated Flying Officer Garland's aircraft under most difficult conditions in such a manner that the whole formation was able successfully to attack the target in spite of subsequent heavy losses. Flying Officer Garland and Sergeant Gray unfortunately failed to return from the mission.

On 11th June 1940, Garland and Thomas Gray were awarded posthumous VCs. Almost exactly a year later, Garland's mother, accompanied by his brother, Patrick, attended the investiture at Buckingham Palace. Garland's body was recovered and he was buried in Heverlee War Cemetery, Leuven, Belgium. His VC is held by the RAF Museum, Hendon.



FLYING OFFICER
DONALD EDWARD GARLAND
RAP

Victoria Cross 16 June 1940

Donald Garland was born in 1914 and joined the Royal Air Force in 1937. He trained as a pilot at Hendon and at No 2 Flying Training School before being posted to No 12 Squadron at Andover in May 1939. Having advanced up to Ferry Station the Squadron was called to France as part of the advanced Air Landing Force in September 1940.

Two days after the German invasion of France had begun on 10 May 1940, No 12 Squadron was detailed to attack a pair of bridges across the Albert Canal at Virothorren and Veldwezelt. Garland led the mission attacking the latter, with his crew Sergeant Thomas Gray, Observer, and Leading Aircraftman L. B. Reynolds in gunner.

In delivering his bombing attack from low altitude Garland's aircraft, like the others which followed him, was shot down by concentrated light anti-aircraft artillery which had been brought up since the capture of the bridge two days before. All three crewmen were killed. The bridge however was damaged and temporarily rendered unusable.

A month later the award of the Victoria Cross to both Garland and Gray was gazetted. No recognition was made of Leading Aircraftman Reynolds's sacrifice.



The RAF VCs

Thomas Gray VC



Thomas Gray (1914-1940) was born in Urchfont, Wiltshire on 17th May 1914 and was from a large family. He was the fourth born of seven brothers, and was one of five Gray boys to join the RAF. Three of the boys became aircraft apprentices at RAF Halton. By 1946 three of these Gray brothers had been killed flying with the RAF. Educated at Warminster Secondary School, he enlisted as an apprentice of the 20th (Halton) Entry on 27th August 1929, and for the next three years trained to become an aero engine fitter II.

On leaving Halton in August 1932, his first posting was to 40 Squadron, servicing the unit's Fairey Gordon bombers. Whilst with 40 Squadron Gray volunteered eagerly for "part-time" flying duties as an air gunner – an air crew category usually filled at that period by ground tradesmen on a voluntary basis additional to normal duties, and carried extra pay. He caught the bug and ultimately wanted to become a full time air crew one day.

In 1933, he passed his qualifying trade tests for upgrading to Leading Aircraftman (LAC) and in June was posted to 15 Squadron, equipped with Hawker Hind flying bombers. In 1936, he joined 58 Squadron at Driffild, and finally in February 1938, he moved to 12 Squadron at Andover, and was promoted to Corporal.

He then took a short course at No 1 Observers School and remustered as an air observer and he was promoted to Sergeant in January 1939. On 2nd September 1939, the Squadron was posted to France as part of Operation Panther. When Thomas climbed into his Fairey Battle on 12th May 1940 for the attack on Veldwezelt bridge, it was in fact his first and only operational sortie.

On 12th May 1940, over the Albert Canal, Belgium, one bridge in particular was being used by the invading army, with protection from fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft and machine-guns. The RAF was ordered to demolish this vital bridge, and five Fairey Battle bombers were despatched with Sergeant Gray as the navigator in the plane leading the bombing attack. They met an inferno of anti-aircraft fire, but the mission was accomplished, much of the success being due to the coolness and resource of the pilot (Donald Edward Garland) of the leading aircraft and the navigation of Sergeant Gray. Unfortunately the leading aircraft and three others did not return.



563627 SERGEANT
T. GRAY VC.
OBSERVER
ROYAL AIR FORCE
12TH MAY 1940 AGE 26



IN LOVING MEMORY

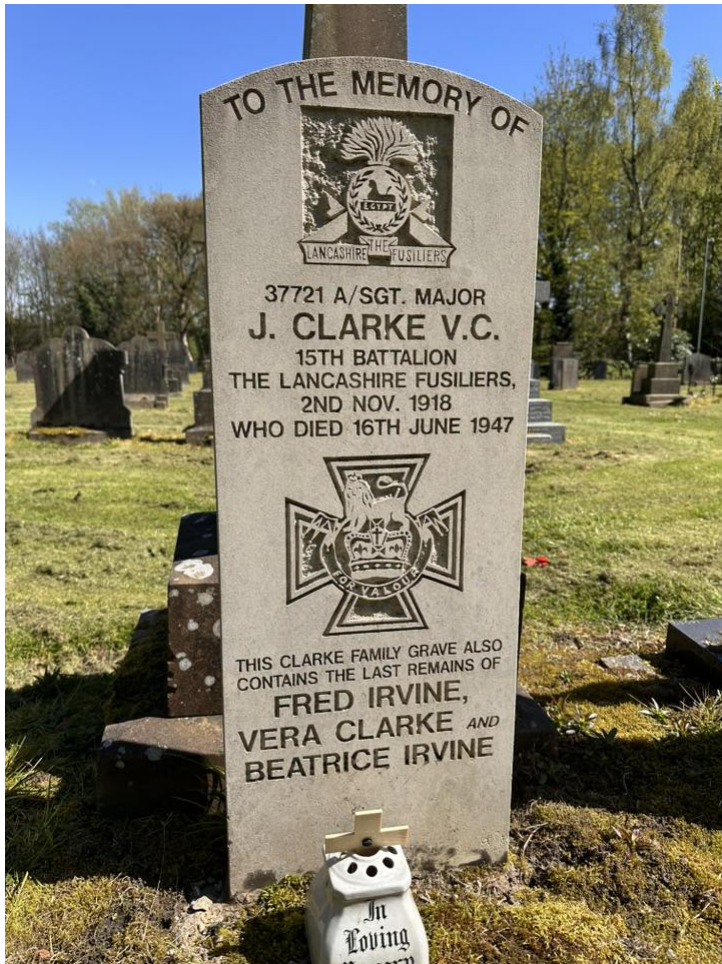
Local civilians discovered the bodies of Garland, Gray and Reynolds and they were buried in Lanaken Cemetery. They were later re-interred at the Heverlee War Cemetery, Leuven, Belgium. On 24th June 1941, Thomas' parents were presented with his VC by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. His medal is privately held.



<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/thomas-gray-vc/>

Victoria Cross Trust Projects

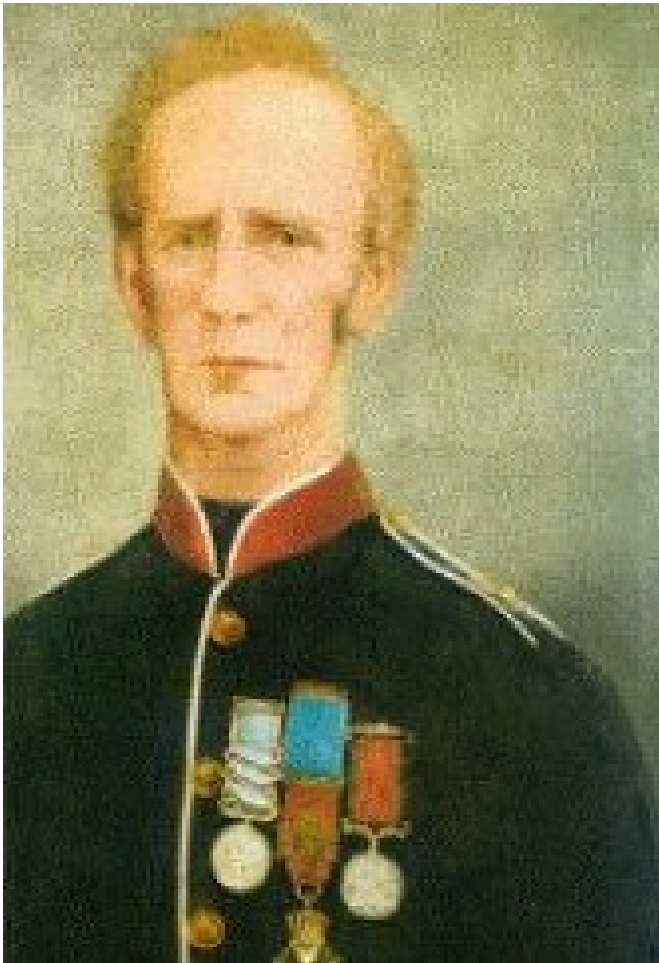
James Clarke VC



In April 2026, the Victoria Cross Trust continued their work in the North West of England. They visited the Lancashire Fusiliers Museum at Bury, where they cleaned the memorial to the "Six Before Breakfast VCs". They also visited the grave of James Clarke VC in Rochdale Cemetery, to give it a clean and renovation.

During an attack on Happegarbes, France, on 2nd November 1918, he led his men forward with great determination, and on being held up by heavy machine-gun fire, rushed forward through a thick, strongly held ridge, captured in succession four machine-guns, and single-handedly bayoneted the crews. Later he led the remnants of his platoon to the capture of three machine-guns and many prisoners. In the later stages of the attack on the same day, when his platoon was held up by enemy machine-guns, he successfully led a tank against them over very exposed ground. Continuing the attack on 3rd November, after capturing many prisoners and gaining his objective, he organized his line most skillfully and held up the enemy. On 4 Nov., in the attack on the Oise-Sambre Canal, under heavy fire from the canal bank, he rushed forward with a Lewis Gun team in the face of an intense barrage, brought the gun into action, and effectively silenced the enemy's fire, this enabling his company to advance and gain their objectives.

Thomas Wilkinson VC



On Sunday 31st May, the York Marines Association and the Royal British Legion will be parading at 1pm from the Chapel in York Cemetery to the grave of Thomas Wilkinson RMA VC, where a service will be held following the lowering of flags and the Last Post.

On the 7th June 1855, he was singled out for his gallantry when he was in the advanced batteries at Sebastopol. He was under heavy constant fire, when he continued to place sandbags on the batteries to replace the damaged bags. He was recommended for his award by the commanding officer of the Artillery of the Right Flank of the attack.

Wilkinson's Victoria Cross was announced in the London Gazette on 24th February 1857, and he was one of the first 62 men to be decorated with the medal at Hyde Park by Queen Victoria on 26th June that year. He was also awarded the French Legion of Honour. He left the Royal Marine Artillery in 1859 aged 28, and returned to his native York where he became the manager of Rymer's Sand Yard in North Street.

Wilkinson died on 22nd September 1887 aged 56, and was buried with full military honours in York Cemetery. His medals are in the Royal Marines Collection.

Hall of Valour - Saskatchewan

On 22nd April 2026, the Premier of Saskatchewan, Scott Moe and Provincial Military Liaison Blaine McLeod joined members of the Canadian Armed Forces and Canadian veterans for the official naming of the Hall of Valour at the Saskatchewan Legislative Building.

The Victoria Cross is the highest honour for valour in the Commonwealth. Created in 1856 by Queen Victoria, it was established to recognize soldiers for exceptional bravery during the Crimean War. Until 1945, approximately one hundred Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross. Since 2018, the Hall of Valour has featured portraits of 15 Saskatchewan recipients commemorating their service to Saskatchewan and to Canada.

The Canada Victoria Cross was established in 1993 as the highest honour in Canada's military honours system, recognizing members of the Canadian Armed Forces for extraordinary valour and devotion to duty in the presence of hostile forces. To date, it has not been awarded.

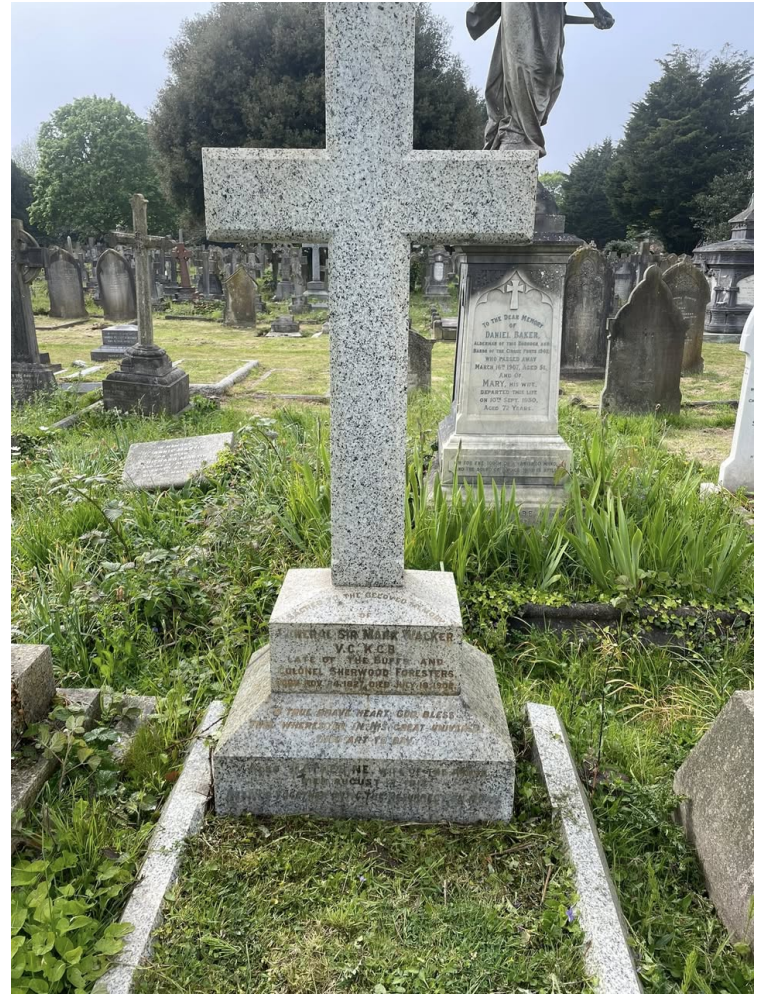
Provincial Military Liaison Blaine McLeod joined Canadian veterans and their families in Ottawa on April 15, 2026, to present a petition to the federal government calling for the creation of an Independent Military Honours Review Board.

"Thousands of Canadians have served since World War II and hundreds have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and the values that all Canadians share," McLeod said. "Now is the time to restore the honour of the Victoria Cross and recognize the bravery and valour in the presence of the enemy demonstrated by armed forces personnel as Canada continues to stand on the global stage, ready to defend our sovereignty as a nation."

Beginning in September 2021, a private campaign was initiated to find a Canadian war hero whose bravery merited the award of the Victoria Cross. Out of a number of recipients of the Star of Military Valour, Jess Randall Larochelle was determined by popular vote to deserve the upgrade and award. Numerous petitions were circulated and supported by tens of thousands of Canadians, many of them veterans, including General Rick Hillier, and the matter was taken up in Parliament, but despite overwhelming bi-partisan support, the government determined that no upgrade or award of the VC would occur. A subsequent petition will be introduced into the House of Commons in 2026 by Pauline Rochefort.

Sadly, Jess Larochelle passed away on August 30th, 2023, from medical complications due to the injuries he suffered during the Battle of Pashmul on October 14th, 2006 in Afghanistan. Larochelle was seriously injured in the initial attack, with broken vertebrae in his neck and back, a detached retina in one of his eyes and a blown eardrum. Though he was partially deaf and had limited eyesight, Larochelle mounted a swift and aggressive defence of the OP, firing his machine gun he quickly ran out of ammunition. He then began firing M72 rocket launchers at the enemy, firing fifteen 66-mm rockets at a force of about 20–40 Taliban insurgents heavily armed with rifles, light machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

VC Graves Update



Over the course of the May Bank Holiday Weekend, the Military Grave Restorer, Steve Davies was busy revisiting 9 VC graves in Dover and Folkestone in Kent. The graves have been cleaned by Steve over the last few years. Due to Steve's devotion to a maintenance program for all graves he looks after, he returns to them every 2-3 years to check on their condition and carry out any cleaning / renovation work that is required. I have included some of the updated photographs (all courtesy of Steve Davies) over the next two pages of this magazine. Above are the graves of William John House VC and Sir Mark Walker VC. On the next page are the grave images of Sir John Commerell VC CB and Charles Wooden VC. The links to all the men connected to graves cleaned by Steve are below.

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/charles-wooden-vc/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-john-house-vc/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-mcwheneey-vc-dcm/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/sir-john-edmund.../>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/sir-mark-walker-vc-kcb/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-alexander-kerr-vc/>

VC Graves Update



If you would like to support Steve and his work which covers all parts of the country and involves the maintenance of all military graves not just those of Victoria Cross recipients then please go to the following link and see what it entails.

<https://militarygraverestorer.org.uk/>

<https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/MilitaryGraveRestorer>

VC Graves Update



Steve also complete revisits to three VC graves in Shorncliffe Military Cemetery, Kent.

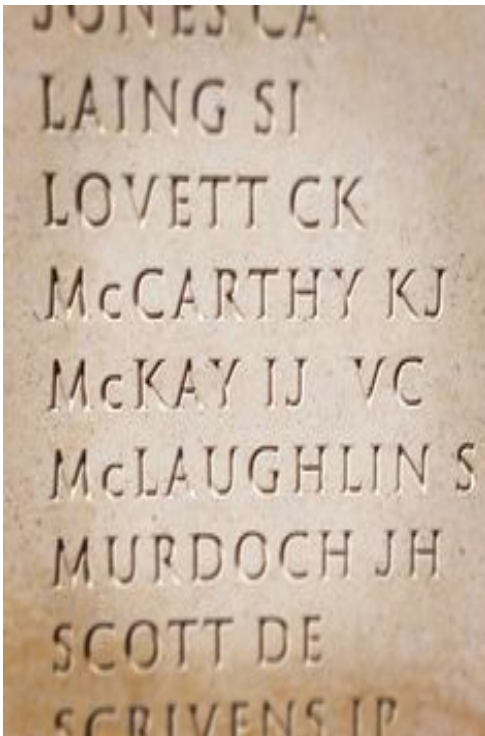
<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/joseph-charles-brennan-vc/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/patrick-mchale-vc/>

<https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/john-doogan-vc/>



New Memorial for Ian McKay VC



Forty four years after Falklands hero Ian McKay was killed in action, a new memorial stone and plaque is being planned in his honour. His parents live in Greasbrough and Rotherham Council is now proposing the stone and plaque as additions to the village's imposing war memorial. Rotherham Council is proposing the work, but permission is needed from its own planning board before that can happen, and an application seeking approval has now been made.

A programme of work at the Listed Church Street memorial would include repairs to the masonry, specialist cleaning, repainting of metal plinths and planters adjacent to the memorial, repairs to paving and a new seating area.

Read Ian's story at <https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/ian-john-mckay-vc/>

Lottery Boost for new Museum



A collection that celebrates Worcestershire's strong military heritage has received a £1m boost.

The Worcestershire Soldier at The Commandery has been awarded the grant by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to safeguard the county's Regimental museum collections and secure public access for the future.

It aims to give the collections a long-term home, with four new galleries at The Commandery, which was the Royalist headquarters during the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

Adrian Gregson, chair of the city's Museums Committee, said: "Local museums are really important to local people. One of our key industries in Worcester and Worcestershire is our tourism industry."

He added that it had taken a long time to develop the project and secure the funding. The Commandery has seen more than 85,000 visitors through its doors in the past year.

The money from the National Lottery Heritage Fund will be used by The Mercian Regiment Museum in partnership with Museums Worcestershire and the Worcestershire Yeomanry Trust.

"The lottery process is a competitive process, so there was no guarantee that we were going to receive this money," said Dr John Paddock, curator of The Mercian Regiment Museum. He said the collections were in storage and without the funding, they would remain inaccessible to the public. The project is set to include six Victoria Crosses awarded to the Worcestershire Regiment in World War One. The planned opening of the new exhibit is 2028.



Kamal Ram VC Memorial

On 26th May 2026, the rescheduled unveiling of the Kamal Ram VC Memorial will take place. The original date for the unveiling was 16th January 2026, but due to unforeseen circumstances it was delayed. The memorial will be at Via Carmine Delicato, 03043 Cassino, Province of Frosinone, Italy. The event will be attended by Her Excellency Mrs Vani Rao, the Indian Ambassador to India, and His Excellency, Dr Enzo Salera, the Mayor of Cassino.



Norden VC Memorial Unveiled



On 14th May 2026, in Gundagai, New South Wales, Australia, a new memorial was unveiled in honour of Richard Leslie Norden, who was recently awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia. Norden, who died in a road traffic accident in 1972 as a serving police officer, was originally awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions on 14th May 1968 during the Battle of Coral-Balmoral in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam. On that day, his platoon was ambushed by between eight and ten North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) soldiers, severely wounding the section commander and forward scout. Norden rushed forward under enemy fire, after expending his ammunition and killing one PAVN soldier. Recovering the downed soldier's weapon he fired at the enemy, recovering the section commander, he then returned killing one soldier who had been using the forward scout as a shield. Discovering the scout to be dead, he then returned to his section to obtain grenades, before returning a third time to clear the area and allow the scout's body to be recovered. Nineteen-year-old Norden was severely wounded in the encounter, but survived his injuries.

In 2022, the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal recommended that Norden be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia in lieu of the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The recommendation for the award was approved by King Charles III on 1 November 2024. The award was announced by Governor-General Sam Mostyn and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the Australian War Memorial on 11 November.

Norden VC Memorial Unveiled

In the ceremony in Gundagai, the Governor General of Australia, Sam Mostyn AC had the honour of cutting the ribbon in front of the new memorial. The ceremony was also attended by two previous Governor Generals in Sir Peter Cosgrove AK CVO MC and David Hurley AC CVO DSC FTSE. Also in attendance was the last living Australian recipient of the Imperial Victoria Cross - Keith Payne VC AM, who was supported by the Chairman of the Keith Payne VC Veterans Benefit Group, Rick Meehan OAM. Rick has kindly supplied all the images for this article with thanks from the editor.

