

Military Medals FAQs

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Why do you get a medal?

In the New Zealand military, the Navy, Army and Airforce, medals are awarded in three areas:

Campaign Stars and Medals

A campaign medal is given to members of the armed forces who served in a particular time and area.

For example, the 1939 – 1945 Star was awarded to British and Commonwealth members who served during the Second World War.

Campaign medals have been given to New Zealanders who served many places, including East Timor, Vietnam and Korea.

Gallantry and Bravery Awards

These are to recognise people who perform acts of bravery while involved war or peacekeeping operations.

For example, [The New Zealand Gallantry Medal](#) is given ‘for acts of gallantry’. [The Victoria Cross](#) is the most recognisable award for gallantry. It was replaced by the New Zealand version in 1999, [The Victoria Cross for New Zealand](#).

Long Service and Good Conduct Awards

These are given to people who served for a certain number of years and for good behaviour.

The Royal Navy Long Service and Good Conduct Medal was given to a person who served 15 years in the Navy with good service.

In current times, the [New Zealand Armed Forces Award](#) is given to officers who have completed 14 years of service.

There are also special service awards given to people who help in certain events. Including the nuclear testing in the Pacific (1956 – 1973), the Asian Tsunami (2004) and the Erebus disaster (1979).

What are medals made from?

They are made of metals such as silver, sterling silver (silver mixed copper) and bronze (copper mixed with zinc).

How much are medals worth?

As medals are not made from expensive metals they are often not worth a lot of money. However, because of the achievements they represent, their sentimental value is priceless. Collecting medals is a popular hobby and medal collectors buy and sell medals for as little as \$10 to as much as \$3 million, depending on where they are from, the age and condition they are in and the history behind the medal.

What do you call the different parts of the medal?

The *obverse* is the front of the medal, and the *reverse* is the back. Each medal is suspended from a unique *ribbon* using a *suspension ring*.

The colours of the ribbon symbolise which campaign or honour it is for. For example, the three colours on The 1939 – 1945 Star each represent a part of the armed forces, dark blue for the Navy, red for the Army and light blue for the Air Force. The colours on the New Zealand Operational Service Medal are black and white as these are the national colours of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

[Ribbon Bars](#) are the small ribbons worn on a person's uniform for everyday use as it is not convenient to wear a full-sized medal.

Where and when are medals worn?

The small ribbon bars are for everyday use and are attached to a person's uniform on the left-hand side. Full-size medal sets are usually only worn for ceremonial and official occasions, and parades such as during ANZAC day. They are worn on the left-hand side. If a person has passed away the family may wear their medals on special occasions on the right-hand side of the chest.

Who is that on the front of the medal?

Military medals issued by Britain, or the Commonwealth often have a face on one side. The face on these medals is the King or Queen of the time they were awarded. Queen Elizabeth II is on many medals as she was Queen from 1953 - 2022. Prior to this her father, King George VI, was on the medals as he was King from 1936 – 1952. King Charles III, our current King, will be on all medals awarded since he was crowned in 2022.