

Valour Reconsidered

Inquiries into the Victoria Cross and Other Awards for Extreme Bravery

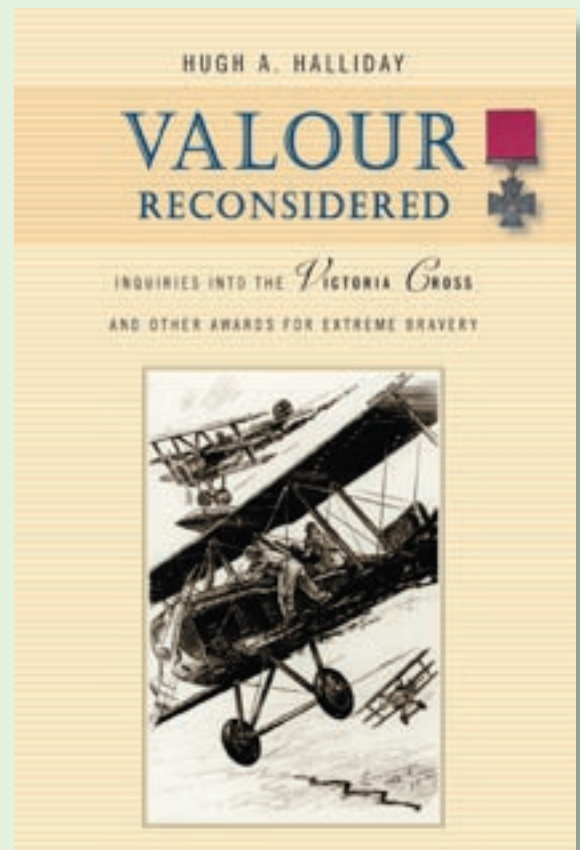
by Hugh A Halliday

The Victoria Cross is the most famous decoration for bravery in the world, its prestige rivalled only by the Medal of Honor. Other awards recognize courage displayed in dangerous (but not combat) circumstances, among them the George Cross and Canada's Cross of Valour. But how is bravery measured? Is valour "in the presence of an enemy" more deserving than valour away from combat? Do all brave persons receive the honours they deserve? Where does "duty" end and "above the call of duty" begin? Has courage sometimes been confused with recklessness?

Drawing on Canadian, American, Australian and British examples, *Valour Reconsidered* examines an array of recommendations for VCs and similar awards, asking why some were approved and some not. It explores factors such as service politics, changing regulations, evolving perceptions of what constitutes "extreme danger" and the role of personalities who sponsored or opposed recommendations. Among other things, it notes that at least 24 Canadians recommended for the VC during the Second World War did not receive it, some being granted lesser awards and a few receiving no formal recognition whatsoever.

The author questions campaigns to award posthumous honours years after the event in attempts to rewrite history. Such lobbying in the United States resulted in bestowal of the Medal of Honor on Theodore Roosevelt 82 years after his death. Similar actions are now proposed in the case of VCs for Australian, British and New Zealand heroes decades after the First and Second World Wars. Along the way, *Valour Reconsidered* describes how politics affected the granting or withholding of awards. It revisits the controversy of Billy Bishop's VC (1917) and sheds new light on VCs awarded after the 1942 Dieppe Raid. It includes a provocative chapter on Canadian honours and awards, suggesting that current Canadian definitions of valour and service are more generous than those in other countries.

Hugh A. Halliday, who retired from the Canadian War Museum in 1995, is widely respected as an authority on awards and decorations. He is the author or compiler of several books on RCAF history and airmen, including *Not in the Face of the Enemy: Canadians Awarded the Air Force Cross and Air Force Medal, 1918-1966*, as well as *Wreck! Canada's Worst Railway Accidents* and *Murder Among Gentlemen*, all published by Robin Brass Studio.



Valour Reconsidered raises many questions and answers only a few. It is hard on myths and strong on facts. Readers may applaud its contents on one page, denounce conclusions on the next, but they will almost certainly come away with new perceptions about the nature of heroes and heroism, in war and peace.

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