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News release

<u>British peer makes NZ$200,000 available to catch medal thieves</u>

Last night in Wellington, Lord Ashcroft, the British peer whose NZ$200,000 reward led earlier this year to the successful return of many of New Zealand's priceless medals for bravery offered a further reward of up to NZ$200,000 for the apprehension and conviction of those who stole them.

Earlier in the day, Lord Ashcroft had visited the Waiouru Army Museum, scene of the theft of the medals: whilst in a police laboratory in Auckland on Monday he was shown the recovered medals themselves, which are undergoing continuing forensic tests.

A total of 96 medals were stolen from the Museum in December. These included no fewer than nine Victoria Crosses, the Commonwealth's most prestigious military medal. Amongst the VC's stolen was the incomparable VC and Bar awarded to the late Charles Upham, one of only three VC and Bars ever issued, and the only VC and Bar ever awarded to a fighting soldier.

Lord Ashcroft is the world's leading collector of Victoria Crosses, having been responsible for building a collection containing more than 10% of all VC's ever conferred. He regards Charles Upham's VC and Bar as of supreme importance. He said, "When I heard that these medals had been stolen, I was shocked. When I then learned that amongst them were no fewer than nine Victoria Crosses, I was simply horrified. Worse still, amongst these medals was the VC and Bar awarded to Captain Charles Upham."

"Charles Upham's VC is incomparable. It is the 'Holy Grail' of Victoria Crosses. I could not bear to think of this tangible record of incredible bravery being melted down or simply thrown away. I knew that, if I could, I had to do something, and that is why I decided to offer the reward for the return of the medals."

Lieutenant General Jerry Mateparae, Chief of the New Zealand Defence Force wrote to thank Lord Ashcroft, "Any theft is distressing, but this was a crime of national significance. It represented a theft of our heritage. It was a callous and belligerent attack against the courage, commitment and honour of the men and women past, present and future who have served our country."

On Monday, Lord Ashcroft also met Corporal Willie Apiata VC, of New Zealand's Special Air Service, the only living New Zealand recipient of the Victoria Cross. Corporal Apiata received the VC for bravery under fire whilst fighting in Afghanistan in 2004.

www.victoriacrossheroes.com
www.lordashcroft.com

Notes to editors

The Victoria Cross is the premier honour which Britain and the Commonwealth can bestow upon its citizens, taking precedence over all other decorations. Yet it respects neither rank nor birthright. And, despite its great honour, the medal is a modest Maltese cross, a little over an inch wide, which is cast not from gold or silver, but from base metal.

The first Victoria Cross was announced on 24th February 1857. To date, fewer than fourteen hundred have been awarded the VC. The oldest winner of the Victoria Cross was 61, the youngest just 15.

There are, of course, other awards. But the Victoria Cross is quite different. Unlike other awards, it is only given for valour. There is no other way of winning it. Unlike other awards, each Victoria Cross carries the name of its winner, his rank, the unit with which he was fighting at the time, and the date of the act of bravery. This detail has enabled the building of an extraordinary archive of historical material.

For more information about the Victoria Cross, please visit www.victoriacrossheroes.com

Captain Charles Upham VC

Throughout the whole of the Second World War, only one man received two VCs. That man was Charles Upham. He was born in Christchurch in 1908. At the age of 30, he enlisted in the second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. It was in Crete, in 1941, that he won his first VC.

His award citation declares that he displayed outstanding gallantry in close-quarter fighting, and was twice hit by mortar shrapnel and badly wounded. In spite of this, and in spite of an attack of dysentery which had reduced him to a near skeleton, he refused hospital treatment and carried an even more-badly wounded man to safety. Eight days later, he fended off an attack with no fewer than 22 German soldiers falling to his fire.

He was evacuated to Egypt and promoted to Captain. Having recovered from his wounds, a year later he received his second VC. His company, which he was leading, was attacking an enemy-held ridge overlooking the El Alamein battlefield. He was wounded twice, but took the position after fierce fighting.

Using grenades, he destroyed a German tank, several guns and a number of vehicles. It was at this point that a machine gun bullet hit his elbow and shattered his arm. But he carried on going forward, and brought back some of his men who had become isolated.

After his wounds were dressed, he returned to his men but was again severely wounded and was this time completely immobilised. He was taken prisoner of war and was incarcerated in the infamous Colditz. When Colditz was liberated by the Americans, most of inmates made their own way home immediately. Upham, however, broke into a German armoury, helped himself to weaponry, and went out "hunting Germans".

Upham had been invested with his first Victoria Cross by King George VI. When the recommendation was made for the second VC, the King remarked that a Bar for the Cross would be "very unusual indeed" and enquired firmly, "Does he deserve it?". The reply he received from Major-General Howard Kippenberger was unequivocal: "In my respectful opinion, Sir, Upham won the VC several times over".