

Backgrounder for Zoom presentation of the Victoria Cross and Billy Bishop



Canadian Victoria Cross

The **Victoria Cross (VC)** is the highest and most prestigious award of the British honours system. It is awarded for valour "in the presence of the enemy" to members of the British Armed Forces and may be awarded posthumously. The original warrant stated that the Victoria Cross would only be awarded to officers and men who had served in the presence of the enemy and had performed some signal act of valour or devotion. The Canadian criteria for award of the VC: *'The recipient must be a member of the Canadian Armed Forces; or a member of an allied armed force that is serving with, or in conjunction with the Canadian Armed Forces. The Victoria Cross shall be awarded for the most conspicuous bravery, a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty, in the presence of the enemy.'*

Whereas in many other Commonwealth countries the relevant version of the Victoria Cross can only be awarded for actions against the enemy in a wartime setting, the Canadian government has a broader definition of the term *enemy*. In Canada, the Victoria Cross can be awarded for action against armed mutineers, pirates, or other such hostile forces without war being officially declared. Recipients are entitled to use the post-nominal letters 'VC' (for both English and French) and also to receive an annuity of \$3,000 (Cdn). The Canadian VC decoration has not been awarded since its inception in 1993.

To date, out of the total 1358 VCs awarded, there have been 99 awarded to Canadian (or allies serving with the Canadian Armed Forces) recipients, who have met either the British, or Canadian award criteria. The VC was previously awarded by countries of the Commonwealth of Nations, most of which like Canada, have established their own honours systems and no longer recommend British honours. The VC may be awarded to a person of any military rank in any service and to civilians under military command. No civilian has received the award since 1879, but one was a Canadian. Since the first awards were presented by Queen Victoria in 1857, two-thirds of all awards have been personally presented by the British monarch. The investitures are usually held at Buckingham Palace.

Beginning with the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, Canada, followed in 1975 by Australia and New Zealand, developed their own national honours systems, separate from and independent of the British or Imperial honours system. As each country's system evolved, operational gallantry awards were developed with the premier award of each system, with the Victoria Cross for Australia, the Canadian Victoria Cross and the Victoria Cross for New Zealand being created and named in honour of the Victoria Cross. They are unique awards of each honours system recommended, assessed, gazetted, and presented by the King, or his representative.

There has been no VC awarded to a Canadian since WWII. However currently the valour shown during the Afghanistan War, of a Canadian soldier, Private Jesse Larocque SMV, is being carefully reviewed to ascertain if his super-human actions meet the criteria for award of the first Canadian VC.

Because of its rarity, the VC is highly prized, and the decoration has fetched over \$800,000 (Cdn) at auctions. A number of public and private collections are devoted solely to the Victoria Cross.

Loyally Yours,

Greg Childs, CD



Naval Victoria Cross
(pre-1918)

Air Marshal William Avery (Billy) Bishop Jr., VC, CB, DSO & Bar, MC, DFC, ED, UE



Billy Bishop in his
Nieuport 17 Fighter Aircraft

Billy Bishop, born in Owen Sound, ON on 8th February 1894, descended from at least three proven original United Empire Loyalists ancestors. His very adventurous spirit would eventually lead him into combat, achieving great military honours in two World Wars. As a youth, Bishop had a reputation as a bit of a scrapper. He shied away from team sports, preferring solo endeavours like swimming, horse riding, and shooting at which he greatly excelled.

“For most of us, life is not punctuated by a moment or two of crowded glory. In the usual scheme of things, life holds to a rather predictable course moving, at best, from small victory to small victory. But for Billy Bishop, the crowded hours of glory came early” Heritage Canada quote provided by Helen Weaver UE.

Bishop commenced his Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) duties as an accomplished aerial photographer, and later a spotter for our Artillery before being allowed to attend pilot training. Billy Bishop is widely known as the top Canadian Flying ace of the First World War, boasting 72 victories as a pilot in the R.F.C. as well as earning numerous accolades. Bishop’s aerial kills during the Battle of Vimy Ridge contributed to the success of that seminal Canadian Corps battle victory. The German enemy grudgingly referred to Bishop as ‘Hell’s Handmaiden’, due to his aerial combat wizardry.

Billy Bishop was a Canadian WWII Air Marshal and the recipient of many medals. During the Second World War, he was a key player in the implementation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan where the majority (131,500 members) of the British Commonwealth pilots and air crews, as well as those of other Allied Air Forces received advanced training at 58 various bases and training schools across Canada. On 18th Nov 1983, the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was designated as a ‘National Historic Event’.

Air Marshal William Avery (Billy) Bishop was the top WWI flying ‘Ace’ in the British Empire, ranked third after German Manfred von Richthofen †, The Red Baron (80 kills) and French Col René Fonck (75 kills), but outshone all, with his WWII service.

Loyally Yours,

Greg Childs CD



Air Marshal William Avery Bishop