

## **Associated Press in Wellington Tuesday July 3, 2007 The Guardian**

A 35-year-old corporal who carried a badly wounded colleague to safety across a battlefield in Afghanistan has been awarded the Victoria Cross. Corporal William Apiata became the first New Zealander to win the medal since the second world war, the prime minister, Helen Clark, said yesterday, announcing the award and praising Cpl Apiata's actions. "Cpl Apiata carried a severely wounded comrade over 70 metres across broken, rocky and fire-swept ground, fully exposed to the glare of battle, heavy opposing fire and into the face of return fire from the main New Zealand troops' position," Ms Clark told reporters. "This brave action saved his comrade's life," she said.

Three other members of Cpl Apiata's squad, from the Special Air Services commando unit, were awarded medals for actions in the battle, in Afghanistan in 2004. Cpl Apiata was a member of the SAS squad that won a presidential citation from George Bush in 2004 for their actions in Afghanistan. The soldier said he was "overwhelmed" by the honour. "At the time I was just doing what I've been trained for, doing my job," Cpl Apiata said, adding he had only been "looking out for my mates". "I see myself as Willy Apiata. I'm just an ordinary person and this is me," he told reporters.

Cpl Apiata, born in the North Island town of Mangakino in 1972, joined the army reservists in 1989 and the regular army in 1999, before gaining selection for the SAS. His medal is the first Victoria Cross awarded to a serving member of the Special Air Service anywhere in the Commonwealth, Ms Clark said. Cpl Apiata is one of only 13 living recipients of the Victoria Cross and the only New Zealander.

The last New Zealander awarded a Victoria Cross was Squadron Leader Leonard Henry Trent in 1946. Trent was awarded the medal for gallantry over Amsterdam in 1943 when he guided a formation of Ventura bombers to their target while under continuous attack from German fighters. Six other New Zealanders have won the Victoria Cross while serving with other forces.



Victoria Cross