

Mr. W. LINGARD to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Wellington, 12th March, 1898.

I understand that it is the intention of the Government to confer the New Zealand Cross on Mr. Harry Wrigg, of Auckland, for carrying a certain military despatch through a hostile district in the year 1867.

I beg leave to most respectfully protest against the presentation of this decoration to Mr. Wrigg, on the following grounds:—

In response to a letter received by you last year requesting that you would confer the New Zealand Cross on certain men whose claims to the decoration were unanimously recognised by all old Volunteers, your official reply was “that no more decorations were to be issued—that the list was closed,” which reply was accepted by all as final.

That, as it is now more than thirty years since Mr. Wrigg could possibly have performed this “conspicuous bravery,” I would respectfully submit that, had he deserved the decoration, he would either have received it before this or have been recommended for it at the time, and the surrounding circumstances must necessarily have been known to all Volunteers.

Your official notice that Mr. Wrigg is to be presented with this decoration has greatly surprised not only Volunteers generally, but also those men who were actually his camp companions in June, 1867, who, although acknowledging that Mr. Wrigg was a good Volunteer, for the first time and after a lapse of thirty years now learn that he ever exhibited personal “conspicuous bravery.” I am assured that the official despatches you have in your possession, date June, July, and August, 1867, must show that prior to Mr. Wrigg carrying the despatch for which he is now to be decorated, and also a few days after his so doing, several despatches were carried by other men and under similar circumstances backwards and forwards over the very same country.

If Mr. Wrigg had exhibited any “conspicuous bravery” by carrying the despatch in question his name must necessarily appear in the despatches received by your department directly after same, probably in either the month of July or August, 1867, and such despatches must still be in your possession.

Had Mr. Wrigg’s name ever been mentioned in any despatch as having shown “conspicuous bravery” all his comrades, and Volunteers generally, must have heard of same.

Any action of personal bravery during the time of war is invariably the camp topic of conversation among all Volunteers and soldiers, and I therefore most respectfully suggest that Mr. Wrigg’s name, and this particular action, would have been thoroughly well known and discussed in every camp in the North Island had he distinguished himself in any conspicuous manner.

I have myself been associated with the New Zealand Forces, and have seen more or less active service between the years 1863 and 1869, and, moreover, I have had the great honour of having the distinction now under discussion conferred upon myself: therefore, I feel it my duty, as far as is in my power, to protect the decoration.

I unhesitatingly assert that there are a large number of fine brave fellows as thoroughly, and very probably more, deserving of the New Zealand Cross than those lucky few who did receive it. No Volunteer who took part in the late Maori war would have ever objected to these men receiving the decoration, as their names and their many heroic actions were thoroughly well known, publicly discussed, and acknowledged by all throughout the length and breadth of New Zealand while the war was actually going on. Not so Mr. Wrigg’s name. As far as “conspicuous bravery” is concerned he is a stranger to all; his name is unknown.

I take the liberty of enclosing you a cutting relative to the Victoria Cross, and I once more most respectfully request that you will reconsider Mr. Wrigg’s “personal” application before finally conferring upon him a decoration which, if thus bestowed, will immediately reduce the value of the New Zealand Cross held by those upon whom it was conferred a quarter of a century or more since.

I remain, &c.,

W. LINGARD, N.Z.C.

The Hon. the Defence Minister, Wellington.

EXTRACT.

At a military dinner given in London some few years since, Colonel Egerton, C.B., who was himself twice highly recommended for the Victoria Cross, but who did not receive it, is reported to have said that political influence and money had procured every imaginable title and honour conferable in Great Britain at the present time with the one solitary exception of the decoration of the Victoria Cross, which, thank God, was still wholly and solely a military distinction, and quite beyond the control of politics or capital. If once the service allowed the decoration to be prostituted by anything approaching political influence, then the highest incentive to bravery of the British soldier would cease to exist—the now much-prized Cross would become a “valueless bauble.” Any person deserving of the title “man,” not to say soldier, should as jealously protect the purity of the military decoration as he should be loyal and true to Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. W. LINGARD to the UNDER-SECRETARY for DEFENCE.

DEAR SIR,—

Wellington, 22nd March, 1898.

I wrote to you on the 12th instant requesting you, on behalf of several old Volunteers, to let me know by whom Mr. Wrigg was recommended for the New Zealand Cross; the actual date on which Mr. Wrigg was first officially recommended; the particulars of the conspicuous bravery for which Mr. Wrigg is recommended for this decoration; but, so far, I have had no reply whatever to this letter. In addition to the above questions I am now desired to ask you, Whether Mr. Wrigg’s name was ever mentioned at the time of the war in any despatch as showing “conspicuous” bravery; the date of such despatch, if any; and the name of the officer who signed