

William James Hardham, V.C.



Feeney, photo., Wellington.
SERGT. HARDHAM,
Winner of the Victoria Cross.

This is a previously unknown photograph of William James Hardham at 24. It appeared in the *New Zealand Graphic* of the 2nd of November 1901. Credit: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries.

William James Hardham V.C. (31 July 1876 – 13 April 1928) was a New Zealand recipient of the Victoria Cross the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

Hardham was 24 years old, and a Farrier Sergeant Major in the 4th New Zealand Contingent, New Zealand Military Forces during the Second Boer War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the V.C.

On 28 January 1901, near Naauwpoort, this Non-Commissioned Officer was with a section which was extended and hotly engaged with a party of about 20 Boers. Just before the force commenced to retire Trooper McCrae was wounded and his horse killed. Farrier- Major Hardham at once went under a heavy fire to his assistance, dismounted and placed him on his own horse, and ran alongside until he had guided him to a place-of safety.

[Hardham also saw service at Gallipoli and Palestine.]

Hardham was the first New Zealand-born man to win the V.C. He later achieved the rank of Major. He was buried at Karori Soldier's Cemetery, Wellington, New Zealand. Hardham was also a Wellington rugby representative [from 1897 to 1910] and donated the Hardham Cup, which is the Premier Division 2 trophy in Wellington club rugby.

His Victoria Cross is displayed at the QEII Army Museum, Waiouru, New Zealand. A replica is on display in the Petone Rugby Football Club's Memorabilia Room along with a very impressive Citation of Appreciation from the Petone Community.(Source: Wikipedia)

[Hardham Crescent, formed in 1947, off Tennyson Street, Petone, is named after him.]

The following obituary was printed in the *Evening Post* on the 14th of April 1928.

MAJOR WILLIAM JAMES HARDHAM V.C.

Friends and all others with whom Major William James Hardham V.C, of Wellington, came in contact, will regret to learn of his death last night at his residence, Perth street, Ngaio, after an illness of over five months. A man with a fine record, Major Hardham had a quiet and retiring disposition, and all comrades of his felt that if there was any man worthy of wearing a V.C. it was "Billy" Hardham. The deceased was the only New Zealander to gain a Victoria Cross in the Boer War. The late Major Hardham, in the campaign in Africa, was also awarded a Queen's Medal, and five clasps. An extract from Despatches, in the London "Gazette," 4th October, 1901, describes his gallantry which won for him the Victoria Cross. It reads as follows: Major W. J. Hardham V.C.,

Queen's Medal with five clasps, received the Victoria Cross under the following circumstances: "On the 28th January, 1901, near Naauwpoort, this non-commissioned officer was with a section which was extended and hotly engaged with a party of about twenty Boers. Just before the force commenced to retire Trooper McCrae was wounded and his horse killed. Farrior-Major Hardham at once went, under a heavy fire, to his assistance, dismounted, and placed him on his own horse, and ran alongside until he had guided him to a place of safety." Major Hardham also took part in the Great War, leaving New Zealand with the Main Body, W.M.R. He had two periods of service—13th August, 1914, to 30th June, 1917, and from 13th November, 1917, to 30th October, 1919. He was wounded on Gallipoli in May, 1915, and in December of that year he was invalided back to New Zealand. Before reaching Hobart, however, his wound became septic, and an operation was performed on board ship. He was landed at Hobart. Another operation was performed there, and he arrived back in the Dominion in February, 1916. Whilst convalescing he was asked to accept the position of Commandant of Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Hamner, and lie remained there until he was again passed as fit for active service. He entered camp again in December, 1917, and left New Zealand with the 30th Reinforcements (Mtd.) in February, 1918. His old wound gave trouble again, however, and during his service in Palestine he frequently had to report sick. In December, 1918, he was invalided back to New Zealand. The late Major Hardham served at the Dardanelles, in Egypt, and in England. He held the rank of captain up to the 15th May, 1918, when he was promoted to Major, and on discharge from the N.Z.E.F, he was absorbed, on 30th October, 1919, into the Reserve of Officers, Territorial Force, with the rank of major. The late "Billy" Hardham was prominent as a Rugby footballer in his younger days, and came into prominence as a representative player when he made his first tour in 1897, travelling south as a member of "Offside Mac's" team. He represented Wellington on many subsequent occasions, and was one of the keenest of players. Those who remember him as such will recall that he always played a good, hard game. As one player who opposed him on many occasions remarked to-day: ",He was one of the best men who ever wore a jersey." His interest in Rugby never waned, and he has taken a prominent part in the administrative side of the game. He did a great deal of service for his club, Petone, and served on the Management Committee of the Wellington Rugby Union from 1910 to 1914, from 1921 to 1925, and again last year. For quite a number of years the late Major Hardham was a delegate to the Now Zealand Rugby Union, and he was ono of the select band who has been honoured by life-membership of the Wellington Rugby Union. The late Major Hardham has been closely associated with the Wellington branch of the Returned Soldiers' Association since its inception, and at one time he was club manager. He was untiring in his efforts and his work earned for him great appreciation from hundreds of returned soldiers. "Wo have lost a good and most faithful friend by the death of 'Billy' Hardham," said Major Watson, secretary of the Wellington branch of the R.S.A. "He was always willing to assist returned men." As a mark of respect to the memory of Major Hardham, players who took part in the Rugby matches this afternoon wore white bands on their left arms. A member of the

Wellington Citizens' War Memorial Committee, the late Major Hardham was a zealous worker in connection with the Anzac Day celebrations, and poppy day and rose day collections. The late Major Hardham, who was 51 years of age, was a son of Mrs. Hardham, of 90, Owen street, and of the late George Hardham. He leaves a widow. Brothers of the deceased are Mr. George Hardham and Mr. Henry Hardham, of Wellington, and Mr. Alfred Hardham, Paraparaumu, and his sisters Mrs. M. F. Kennedy, Karori, and Mrs. H. Hall, Petone. The funeral, which will be of a military nature, is to leave Morrises' mortuary chapel, Taranaki street, on Monday afternoon, for the Soldiers' Cemetery at Karori. Territorials have been invited to attend, also South African veterans and returned soldiers. All returned soldiers are asked to parade at 2 p.m. on Monday to pay the last respects to the late Major W J. Hardham, V.C. The parade will assemble in Dixon street, at the back of the Royal Oak Hotel. Dress will be mufti, medals and decorations to be worn.



The Petone senior XV winners of the 1899 Rugby Championship. Hardham is seated in the middle row, far right. Image courtesy of the Petone Rugby Club.