

Her Majesty The Queen will honour the memory of thousands of Service Personnel who have given their lives for this country by giving Her name to a new form of recognition for military families.

The Elizabeth Cross will be granted to the next of kin of Armed Forces personnel killed on operations or as a result of terrorism in a mark of national recognition for their loss.

This is the first time the name of a reigning Monarch has been given to a new award since the George Cross was instituted in 1940 by King George VI for brave acts by both civilians and the military. Prior to this, the Victoria Cross was introduced by Queen Victoria in 1856 for acts of gallantry by the Armed Forces.

The next of kin will receive the Elizabeth Cross – a sterling silver emblem, in the shape of a cross over a wreath - plus a Memorial Scroll signed by The Queen which will bear the name of the person who died.

The Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll will not just be granted to families who have lost loved ones in the recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Queen's recognition will also be available to the families of those who died in conflicts dating back to 1948, including the Korean War, the Falklands conflict and operations in Northern Ireland.

In a message to Her Armed Forces, Her Majesty The Queen said:

"This seems to me a right and proper way of showing our enduring debt to those who are killed while actively protecting what is most dear to us all. The solemn dignity which we attach to the names of those who have fallen is deeply engrained in our national character. As a people, we accord this ultimate sacrifice the highest honour and respect."

Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, said:

"I know that the families of those who have given their lives will wear the Elizabeth Cross with immense pride. It is a reminder not just of the ultimate price their loved ones have paid while safeguarding our security and freedom; it is also a lasting symbol of the nation's recognition of and gratitude for their sacrifice."

Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth said:

"We owe so much to those who have died to protect our country and our way of life. The Elizabeth Cross was recommended by the military Chiefs to Her Majesty to recognise the huge debt this country owes to the families those brave individuals have left behind."

The arms of the Elizabeth Cross bear floral symbols representing England (Rose), Scotland (Thistle), Northern Ireland (Shamrock) and Wales (Daffodil). The reverse of the Cross will be engraved with the name of the person in whose memory it is granted. The Scroll is on parchment style paper, headed with the Royal Coat of Arms and the following words: "This Scroll Commemorates [name to be inserted] who gave his/her life for Queen and Country on [date to be inserted] " The Scroll will bear the signature of Her Majesty The Queen in the upper left hand corner.

The Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll have been inspired by precedents from the first and second World Wars. A scroll and memorial plaque were presented to the families of those killed in World War One. A scroll was given to the families of those who died in World War Two and in the Korean War in the early 1950s.