

## NEWS BRIEF

### CPL. APIATA

On the 24th. February this year along with my wife and our trusty Camper Van I was privileged to enter the heart of the New Zealand Special Service H.Q., south of Auckland.

I was there as a Representative of the Royal Society of St. George to present Lance Corporal Willie Apiata with Honorary Membership of the

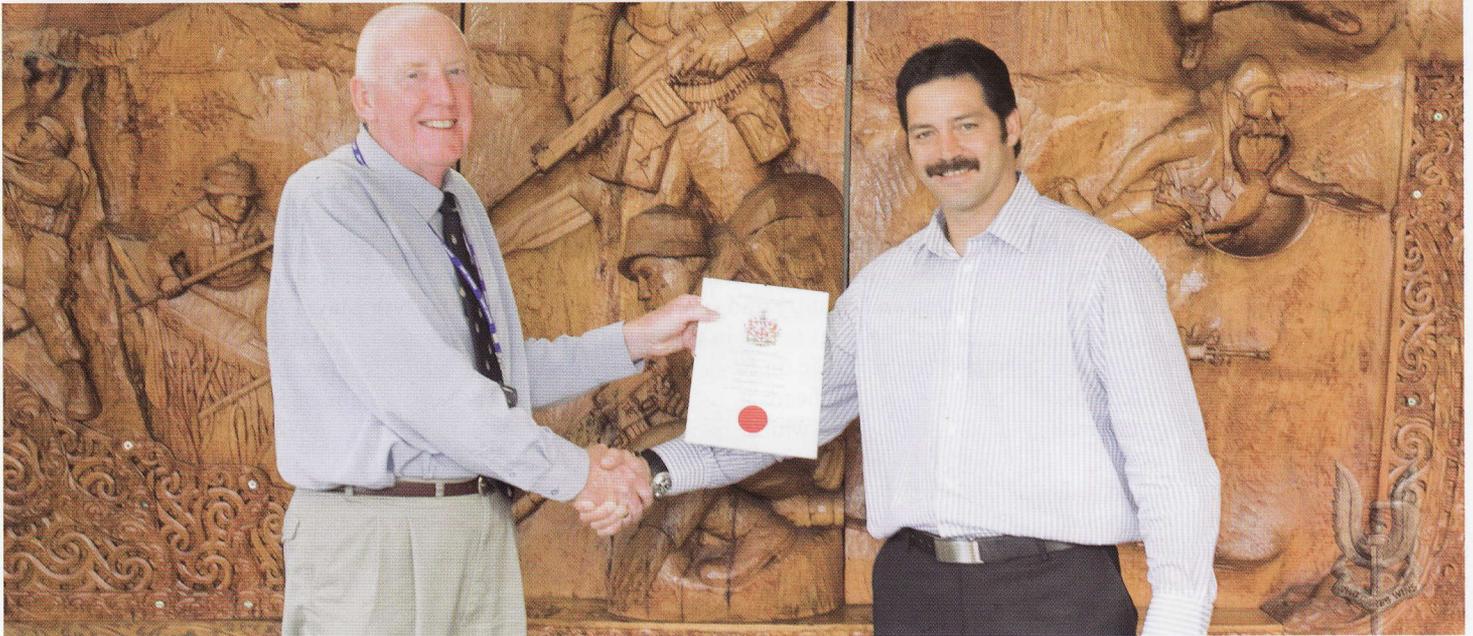
Society. Corporal Apiata is the First New Zealander in 60 years to win the V.C. and the first to receive New Zealand's own V.C.

We were with him and his Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Jim Blackwell during which time they were both interested to learn the history of the Royal Society and its continuing charity work connected with the armed forces, particularly in the support shown by some

Branches to the Gurkas and the Royal Hospital at Chelsea.

When asked about his action he simply says, "I was doing my job, looking after my mates". To say that Willie Apiata was a humble man would be an understatement. When asked by the Press if he felt like a hero he replied "No, I am Willie Apiata."

*Rodney Wardlaw.*



## KINGDOMS UNITE

*Gurkha or Gorkha was a small straggling town in Nepal and the ancestral home of the ruling house of that country. In 1559 Drabya Sah the younger son of the King of Lamjung seized the town and established his own little kingdom. In that same year on January 15th Elizabeth I was crowned in Westminster Abbey. John Crampton investigates.*

The Victoria Cross is still 'the Highest Military Award for Conspicuous Bravery in the Presence of the Enemy' and the Nepalese Gurkhas have won 13 since 1915, fighting for and with the British army. This is a minute fraction of the number who have died in armed conflict across the globe and continue to put their lives at risk. Let's not forget Prince Harry was with the Gurkhas for a short while in Afghanistan.

I was reminded by a Lt Commander General on the BBC news this morning that it is politicians that decide to declare war – not the military.

Quite frankly I was embarrassed

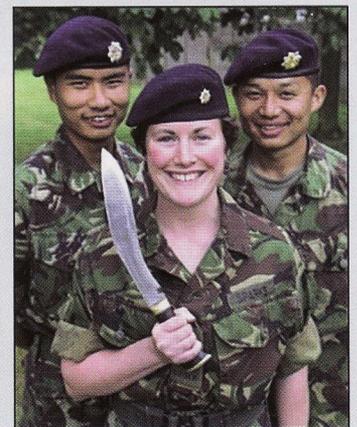
when I took on this assignment a week ago when our Prime Minister was still rejecting the Gurkha soldiers and their families the right of abode in this country. But today is the 1st of May, 2009 and I believe a victory has now been struck on both sides. The demoralizing factor in this scenario is of course that the British and the Gurkhas have always been on the same side.

Reviewing the newspapers over the past couple of days, I would like to quote a phrase or two that chimed so clearly with the way I feel and evidently with a majority in Parliament :

'Just before this vote was taken our spirits were nearly at zero. When it came through I can't tell you the sense of elation, the sense of pride –pride in our country, pride in the democratic



Gurkhas in training in the US led by British officers



Gurkhas with the Kukri

system and pride in our Parliament'. These were the heart felt words of campaigner Joanna Lumley whose late father Major James Rutherford Lumley served with the 6th Gurkha Rifles. As this article goes to press the Home Secretary Jack Straw will have made an announcement on the Gurkha issue following the morning discussion between PM Gordon Brown and Ms Lumley.

As we all know the month of May has witnessed a turbulent political battle with several MP's resigning over dubious expense claims, furthered by a historical change with the relinquishing of the post of Speaker of the House of Commons by veteran Mr Martin. We will have to wait and see if future politicians can show as much mettle as our armed forces.

GAESCO the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organization ([www.gaesco.org.uk](http://www.gaesco.org.uk)) have a simple message on their banner headline 'Proudly Serving British People Since 1816', beneath which is listed the countries in which they have served; India, Africa, Burma, Italy, Falklands, Malaya, Borneo, Middle East, Germany, Afghanistan.

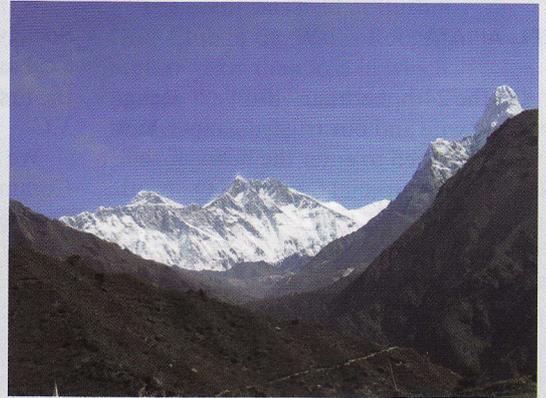
I wanted to get a more fair and balanced opinion with this article and spoke with the owners of the fish and chip shop, our corner grocery shop, neighbours and friends.

Here's what friend and neighbour Victoria Edwards from Cookham in Berkshire had to say on the matter ;

'The recent ruling over the Gurkha's right to stay in this country is a further bad decision, in a litany of obtuse and thick-headed decisions by a government



Gurkas in Kuwait.



Birthplace of Buddha

that neither listens or pays attention to its people. A government which was elected on a principle that supports even-handedness and equality.

'These brave men volunteered to help us, have given their own lives to serve this Queen and country and subsequently earned the right to live in this country. It will be the public on Remembrance Day who bow their heads in thanks for what they have done, whilst this administration (should) hang their heads in shame' (10th May, 2009).

The opinions of the others I spoke with varied only in the use of some flowery vocabulary, intonation and an adept use of body language.

My attempt at spreading the net wider for opinion was somewhat less successful. I haven't yet heard back from the editors of the Kathmandu Post.

George Everest was a Welshman and the Surveyor General of India. The tallest mountain in the world which straddles

Tibet and Nepal in the Himalayas was named after him and adopted officially in 1867 by the Royal Geographical Society.

Tenzing Norgay from Nepal with New Zealander Edmund Hillary were the first humans to set foot on the peak of Everest on the 29th May, 1953.

It wasn't until the early 1960's that the Nepalese government gave Everest its Nepali name of Sagarmatha meaning "Forehead of the Sky". The Sherpa people of Nepal call it Chomolungma which is the "Mother of the World".

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Historical Facts from Encyclopaedia  
Britannica – Volume 10*



Nepalese dancers