

The Order of Viesturs

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The Order of Viesturs (Vesthardus Rex) was established in 1938 in celebration of the ancient might of Latvia.

It was reinstated in 2004 and has its motto “Confortamini et pugnate” (Be Strong and Fight).

The Order of Viesturs is awarded for:

- outstanding military achievements,
- accomplishments in the national resistance movement in defending the country's independence,
- maintaining and strengthening national security and public Order,
- protecting the country's borders, for shaping the National Armed Forces,
- enhancing civic consciousness in citizens so as to train them to serve their country and their land,
- the constant defence of one's country and land.

The Order of Viesturs and the relevant medals of honour are awarded to military personnel and to other individuals.

The Order of Viesturs and its medal of honours can be bestowed to foreign military personnel for merits in educating national armed forces, maintaining public order, safeguarding state borders, and instilling the awareness of statehood.

The Order of Viesturs can also be awarded to foreign heads of state, members of official foreign delegations and foreign ambassadors who have done particularly notable work in shaping international relations.

The Order of Viesturs can be awarded posthumously if the Chapter of Honours so decides. In that case, the individual becomes a Commander of the Great Cross of the Order of Viesturs. This does not apply to foreign leaders, members of official foreign delegations, or foreign ambassadors.

Description of the Order

The Order of Viesturs has five classes and three levels of medals.

Recipients of the Order of Viesturs, First Class become Commanders of the Great Cross of the Order.

Those who receive the Order of Viesturs, Second Class are Grand Officers, Third Class – Commanders, Fourth Class – Officers, and Fifth Class – Bearers of the Order.

The Order of Viesturs is a white enamelled cross with a gilded edge. At the ends of the points of the cross, there are red enamel circles with a gilded edge and a gilded globule. On either side of the red enamel circles, there are smaller red-enamel circles with gilded edges. At the centre of the cross, there is a white enamel medallion with a raised gilded edge. The letters VR are in the middle of the medallion in red enamel, and they are with a gilded edge. At the centre of the reverse of the cross, there is the motto of the Order, "CONFORTAMINI ET PUGNATE," along with the year 1219.

The Order that is received by military personnel bears crossed gilded swords. For civilians, the Order has a split white enamel cross with a gilded edge.

The size of the First Class of the Order is 58x58 mm. The size of the Second Class and Third Class is 52x52 mm, and the size of the Fourth Class and Fifth Class is 40x40 mm.

Recipients of the Order of Viesturs, First Class, and Second Class, also receive a four-point silver star with the mark of the Order at its centre. The star is 87x87 mm in size for First Class orders and 80x80 mm for Second Class orders.

The ribbon for the Order is dark red. The cross and ribbon are linked with a state seal in the colours of heraldry. The width of the ribbon is 110 mm and 75 mm respectively for male and female Commanders of the Order. For Grand Officers, it is 32 mm (tied in a bow for women), for Officers, it is 32 mm with a rosette, and for Bearers, it is 32 mm.

The Medal of Honour of the Order of Viesturs is a 30-mm round medallion. On the front, there is a depiction of the Cross of the Order, and there is the motto, "Confortamini et pugnate," on the reverse with crossed oak branches underneath. The Medal of Honour, First Class, is gilded, the Second Class is silvered, and the Third Class is bronzed. The width of the ribbon for the Medal of Honour is 32 mm.

Miniatures of the Order of Viesturs are the same for all classes of the Order:

- 1) A miniature order measuring 15x15 mm. For military personnel, the miniature has crossed gilded spears, while for others; there is a split white enamel cross with a gilded edge. The miniature Order has a ribbon that is 13 mm wide;
- 2) The rosette of the Order's ribbon with a miniature Order at a diameter of 12 mm. For military personnel, again, there are crossed gilded spears, and for everyone else, there is the split white enamel cross with a gilded edge;
- 3) A piece of the ribbon of the Order, measuring 9x32 mm, with crossed 18 mm swords on the ribbon of military personnel.

The miniature versions for the Medals of Honour of the Order of Viesturs are:

- 1) A miniature medal with a ribbon folded into a triangle – gilded for First Class, silvered for Second Class, bronzed for Third Class. The miniature medal is 12 mm in diameter, and the ribbon is 13 mm wide;
- 2) A piece of the ribbon of the Order with a five-point star – gilded, silvered, and bronzed respectively. The piece of ribbon is 9x32 mm, and the diameter of the star is 4 mm.

History of the Order

In 1938, the Republic of Latvia had two state decorations, the military Order of Lāčplēsis and the civilian Order of the Three Stars. On 12 July 1938, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a law on establishing two new orders and medals of honour. President of Latvia Kārlis Ulmanis proclaimed the law, and on August 11, the country had the Order of Viesturs and the Cross of Recognition, too.

The Order of Viesturs (Vesthardus Rex) was established in commemoration of the might of Latvia in ancient times. The motto for the Order was "Confortamini et pugnate" ("Be Strong and Fight!"). The Order was designed by artist Herberts Mangolts.

The Order of Viesturs had five classes and three levels of medals of honour. It was exclusively a military award, given to people with achievements in the training of the state's armed forces, in maintaining public order, in protecting the country's borders, and in teaching the country's residents about statehood.

Viesturs was the military ruler of the ancient Semigallians, with a seat at the Tērvete Castle. Written sources from the 13th century variously present his name as Viestards, Viesthardus, Vesthardus, Vestardus, and Vesters. Nobody knows when Viesturs was born or died, but we do know that he controlled the western part of the region of Zemgale at the beginning of the 13th century.

Linguist Ernests Blese has argued that Viestards is a man's name from the Baltic tribes which indicates someone who has something to say to everyone else ('taryti' means tell in Lithuanian) and who takes care of everyone else. When the Germans invaded the territory of modern Latvia, Viesturs first co-operated with the crusaders, but he took up arms against them in 1219.

The same year, he had promised the apostolic representative of the pope that he would allow the Christian faith to be proclaimed in Zemgale, but then he went to war. In 1228, his forces attacked German fortresses at Daugavgrīva and Aizkraukle and sacked them.

The Order of Viesturs is a straight, white-enamelled cross with a gilded edge. At each end of the cross are two smaller and one larger red-enamel relief. At the centre of the front of the cross is a white-enamel medallion with the red letters VR (Vesthardus Rex, or the ruler Viesturs), and the medallion has a gilded edge. On the back of the cross is a gilded medallion with the motto above, "Confortamini et pugnate," with the year 1219 at the centre. That was the year when the ancient Semigallians, under the leadership of Viesturs, launched a battle against German Crusaders.

The Order of Viesturs was awarded only for 18 months.

The first was awarded on 17 November 1938, and the last was awarded on 13 June 1940. The Order was granted to 3,221 people, mostly soldiers.

The Order of Viesturs, First Class, was given to six generals of the Latvian Army. The Order of Viesturs, Second Class, was received by 28 military personnel, whereas 126, 390, and 701 people received the Order of Viesturs, Third, Fourth and Fifth Class respectively. The three levels of the medal of honour were awarded to 578, 1,022, and 730 persons respectively.

<https://www.president.lv/en/order-viesturs>