

Press Release
(For immediate release)
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Southland soldiers to receive medals

The efforts of 18 Southland soldiers while deployed overseas will earn special recognition during the 150th celebrations of the 4th Otago-Southland Battalion next weekend.

Invercargill Mayor Tim Shadbolt will host a mayoral reception on Saturday, July 17, at which service medals will be presented to soldiers who served in East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

It's a modern tribute to a battalion which has a proud history serving in all corners of the globe – from Gallipoli and France in WW1 to the Middle East and the Pacific in WW2 and, more recently, Korea, the Sinai, East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

Major Lance Nicholas said the sesquicentennial weekend, to be staged from July 16-18, acknowledged Southland's extensive contribution to the battalion and follows on from celebrations held in Dunedin earlier this year.

"We are the only unit in the Otago/Southland region that still exists and we're hosting it on behalf of all the units that existed in the past in other areas of the provinces," he said.

While the role of the territorial forces had changed over the years, it remained a pivotal component of New Zealand's armed forces with an increased involvement in peace-keeping and humanitarian work.

"We're very much an integral part of the New Zealand defence force," Major Nicholas said. "The need is now greater than in the past ... and we have an opportunity to put the training into real time with deployment overseas to places like East Timor and the Solomon's."

The diversity of the training involved reflected the complexity of the weapons and communication equipment now used.

"No-body actively seeks to go into combat but our history dictates if you turn the other cheek, then the other fella will slap you so you have to be prepared," he said.

"The complexity of the battlefield has changed – its 360 degrees now, not just directly in front of you."

A \$3000 grant from the Invercargill Licensing Trust, together with the support of other funders, enabled the Southland celebrations to take place.

"That community funding is a great acknowledgment of the commitment all these young men and women have put into defence, from the armed forces to civil defence and search and rescue," Major Nicholas said.

Invercargill Licensing Trust chairman Alan Dennis said the event was a fitting tribute to those involved in the battalion.

"The dedication and commitment of Southland soldiers – both past and present – should be acknowledged and celebrated," he said. "It will undoubtedly be a weekend of remembrance, recognition and plenty of good yarns with old comrades."

Following a Mix and Mingle at the Invercargill Garrison Club on Friday, July 16, a charter parade through Invercargill's main streets with drums beating, colours flying, bayonets fixed and swords drawn will take place at 1pm on Saturday, July 17, finishing at the Invercargill City Council administration building.

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