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MEDIA RELEASE

VC Recipient Mark Donaldson announced as Patron in Chief for Soldier On

Victoria Cross recipient Mark Donaldson was today announced as the Patron in Chief for Soldier On, at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, where he pledged his support for Australia's servicemen and women who have been physically or psychologically wounded.

He joins a number of other high profile Australians including former Prime Minister John Howard, songwriter and performer Tina Arena and writer and author Bryce Courtenay who, through Soldier On, have also lent their support to veterans of contemporary operations.

In 2009 Mark Donaldson became the first Australian in almost 40 years to be awarded the country's highest military honour, the Victoria Cross, for 'most conspicuous acts of gallantry in action in a circumstance of great peril in Afghanistan as part of the Special Operations Task Group during Operation SLIPPER, Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan.'

Still a serving member of the Australian Defence Force, he today spoke about how his own experiences in the Army and in Afghanistan inspired him to become involved in Soldier On.

"I've had a couple of friends wounded overseas and I saw the long, hard journey they've had to go through," Mark Donaldson, VC said.

"What I noticed is that there is limited awareness of that journey, not just for them but for their families too.

"There's a real opportunity here to engage the Australian public about our wounded soldiers and I want to be a part of that – of helping to raise awareness of the sacrifices they are making and the support we can provide to them and their families.

"I think there's great appeal in their approach of Enhance, Inspire and Empower – they're really positive words that will help Australians understand and see the impact of their support."

Drawing on the ANZAC spirit of courage, mateship and determination, Soldier On works to enhance the futures of our wounded by supporting their rehabilitation, inspiring their recovery through team and individual pursuits and empowering them to pursue their employment, education and training opportunities.

Currently, the charity is raising funds to purchase specialised equipment for soldiers learning to walk again and to support wounded soldiers participating in adventurous activities as part of their rehabilitation.



Guests at today's launch heard from one such soldier, Michael Lyddiard, a former bomb disposal expert who was wounded in Afghanistan in 2007. Since Soldier On was formed he has supported the charity by raising awareness and donations through adventurous activities, his latest pursuit being the gruelling Mark Webber Tasmania Challenge in November 2012.

"One of the key pillars of Soldier On is to inspire wounded soldiers and we are delighted to have two inspirational soldiers, our new Patron in Chief, Mark Donaldson, and one of our Ambassadors, Michael Lyddiard here today," Soldier On Co-founder John Bale said.

"Both Mark and Michael share the same passion for supporting our wounded servicemen and women, as Soldier On.

"We hope their stories and experiences serve to inspire people at all levels of Australian society to get behind our wounded soldiers and their families through Soldier On."

Today's launch follows the recent announcement that Soldier On has been chosen as the Australian charity partner for the 2013 Walking with the Wounded South Pole Allied Challenge, a program that is under the patronage of His Royal Highness, Prince Harry.

Soldier On was chosen as one of five charities to organise three teams of wounded soldiers to travel to Antarctica, where Australian soldiers will join others from Canada and New Zealand to form the Commonwealth team.

As recognition for the work of Australia's major charity for soldiers wounded in modern conflicts, Soldier On's partnership with Walking with the Wounded will see the charity collecting donations to send Australian wounded soldiers on the expedition.

The expedition will take place Over November and December next year (2013).

The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Defence; Lieutenant General David Morrison AO, Chief of Army; and Lieutenant General Peter Leahy AC (Retd), former Chief of Army and Chairman of Soldier On also attended today's launch.

Ends.

For more information please contact:

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