



Tuesday, April 20, 2010

MEDIA RELEASE

Australia's only serving Victoria Cross recipient, Trooper Mark Donaldson VC, will toss the coin at this Sunday's ANZAC Day game between the St George Illawarra Dragons and the Sydney Roosters at the Sydney Football Stadium.

Like thousands of veterans and serving personnel, Trooper Donaldson – who grew up in Dorrigo in northern New South Wales – will take part in the Dawn Service and ANZAC Day March in Sydney, before gathering at the Sydney Football Stadium for Rugby League's traditional ANZAC Day game.

"As a Rugby League fan, it's a great honour to be asked to toss the coin at the ANZAC Day match," Trooper Donaldson said.

"There are ANZAC Day dawn services wherever our forces are in the world and the game is an important part of the day's events.

"I know fans of the NRL on operations overseas will be watching the game if they have some free time or be keen to hear the outcome if they're busy."

Following the coin toss, Trooper Donaldson and NRL Chief Executive, Mr David Gallop, will receive the ANZAC Cup from an Australian Army Blackhawk helicopter, before joining RSL NSW President, Mr Don Rowe OAM, and returned servicemen Mr Bill Collier and Mr Ferris Ashton, who played for the Dragons and Roosters respectively, in the official party for the pre-match remembrance service.

NRL Chief Executive, Mr David Gallop, said it is an honour to have Trooper Donaldson attend the game.

"Trooper Donaldson's actions and character epitomise the ANZAC tradition and we are very pleased he is able to be a part of Sunday's game," Mr Gallop said.

"ANZAC Day has a special significance for all Australians and our ANZAC Day game has a special significance for all Rugby League fans.

"Following the Dawn Service and March, it is a chance for us to again remember and honour all those who have served their nation in conflict, from those veterans who

forged the ANZAC tradition, to those current serving personnel, like Trooper Donaldson, who carry on the tradition today.

“I encourage all Rugby League fans to come along to our ANZAC Day games this Sunday – in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra – and pay tribute to all those men and women who have served their nation.

“Fans going to the SFS can also send messages of support to our troops overseas, which is another way to express our thanks for the sacrifices they are making.”

The Victoria Cross is the pre-eminent award for acts of bravery in wartime and is Australia’s highest military honour.

It is awarded to persons who, in the presence of the enemy, display the most conspicuous gallantry; a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice; or extreme devotion to duty.

In September 2008, Trooper Mark Donaldson VC was involved in an incident in Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan, that resulted in him being awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia. He was invested by Her Excellency the Governor-General of Australia at Government House, Canberra on January 16, 2009.

Trooper Donaldson was later named Young Australian of the Year 2010.

The Victoria Cross for Australia was instituted in the Australian honours system in 1991.

It replaced the British or Imperial Victoria Cross, which has been awarded to 96 Australians. Ninety-one Australians received the Victoria Cross while serving with Australian forces and five Australians received the award while serving with South African and British units.

Returned and current serving personnel are eligible for free entry to this Sunday’s ANZAC Day game, simply by showing their war medals or service pins, or wearing their Defence Force uniform.

Prior to the game, in the SFS forecourt, Rugby League fans can record video messages of support to send to Australian troops serving overseas, and purchase ANZAC Appeal tokens in support of RSL NSW.

Gates at the SFS open at 1:30pm, with the Toyota Cup match at 1:45pm, the pre-match ANZAC Day ceremony just before 3:30pm and the main game at 4:00pm.

** Please note – Trooper Mark Donaldson VC will not be available for interviews this week or at the match. The only opportunities for media interviews will be all-ins scheduled by RSL NSW on ANZAC Day and media are encouraged to use news vision/interviews from these scheduled media opportunities. **

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