

## **Tim Hortons staff eligible for Afghan war medals Changes to military policy spur controversy**

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Monday, March 29, 2010

A major overhaul of how the Canadian Forces recognizes overseas service will include the controversial decision to allow Tim Hortons employees at Kandahar Airfield to receive medals from the Afghan war.

The changes involve clarifying the type of support eligible for the military's General Service Medal, which will now be awarded to both civilian as well as allied and Canadian military personnel deployed outside the country to provide direct support to operations in the "presence of an armed enemy."

The decision, which has raised eyebrows in the military community, echoes similar methods of recognition applied during the Second World War, according to the Department of Defence.

Medals were awarded during the Second World War to civilians working for Salvation Army, Knights of Columbus, the Canadian Legion and the YMCA.

"I'm not sure it's quite the same here," said Jack Granatstein, a senior research fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. "They were authorized by the government and they were doing a job that the government thought they could do better. I suppose you could say that's not all that dissimilar than Tim Hortons, but Tim Hortons is commercial as opposed to a service group. It doesn't make me whoop and cheer."

Andre Levesque, the Defence Department's director of honours and recognition, acknowledged that recognition for those selling doughnuts and coffee at Kandahar Airfield seems odd, but cited the historical example as precedent.

"Everyone who goes into theatre and did their days -- respective of what they did -- they're part of the defence team and everyone deserves to have their recognition," he said. Other changes to the award process deal with such issues as how to honour soldiers who've performed multiple tours of war zones, how long troops have to serve before being recognized, as well as clarifying the type of support that is eligible for the military's General Service Medal.

"From our point of view, having talked to everyone, we feel this new way is what most of the soldiers want," Mr. Levesque said.

Honouring multiple tours of such war zones as Afghanistan, a key concern among some soldiers, will be dealt with by issuing "rotation bars" emblazoned with a Maple Leaf recognizing each period of 180 days of eligible service that has been accumulated after the initial qualifying period of 30 days. Mr. Levesque said the rotation bars allow for easy recognition of those who served numerous times.

"When everyone is lined up on parade on Remembrance Day, and you look at their medals, everyone will instantly know those who were there for a short term versus those who were there for a longer term," he said.

The new system also provides for a more standardized way to recognize overseas service. The Canadian Forces points out that under the previous system, military personnel serving in Afghanistan facing the same danger at the same time could receive different recognition if they are working under different chains of command.

In some cases, the eligibility requirements have been lowered. The time period needed to qualify for the General Service Medal has been lowered to 30 days from 90 days. The medal will honour those who supported the Afghan mission, ranging from Tim Hortons employees at Kandahar Airfield to Foreign Affairs and Canadian International Development Agency personnel in the country to Forces personnel at Camp Mirage, the military's base in the United Arab Emirates.

Gordon Ritchie, president of Montreal's Black Watch Association veteran's group, vehemently disagrees with the change in eligibility, which he thinks waters down the importance of the honour: "You're going to get a lot of rear-echelon people who just go over to hunt for medals, do their 30 days in some place safe and say, 'Look I did my time in Afghanistan, I'm a hero, worship me.'"

Mr. Granatstein said he thinks the Canadian Forces may have been motivated to make the changes after facing pressure because U.S. soldiers receive more medals than Canadians. "There's probably pressure to give more, and I suspect it's that that drives this," he said.

The Defence Department's review of honours and medals for overseas service was the most comprehensive done since the Korean War and affects not only those who served in the Afghan mission but on future missions, as well.

Mr. Levesque said other missions from previous years also will be recognized.