

Thursday, 2 October 2008

TRIBUTE TO A WAR HERO

The Veterans' Affairs Minister Michael Atkinson will today donate funds for a new museum display honouring the life of a South Australian hero - three-time war veteran Major Len Opie.

"Len was the epitome of the Australian soldier. He was brave, dedicated, enthusiastic and a larrikin, but above all he was a good mate to his many army colleagues and friends.

"The permanent exhibition at the Army Museum of South Australia will be known as Len's O.P. (Observation Post). It will help educate the public about Major Opie's life and his contribution to many Australian war efforts," Mr Atkinson said.

Len Opie was born in Snowtown in December 1923. He joined the Army as a cadet in 1938, beginning a career that saw him fight in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and serve as a U.N. observer in Kashmir.

"Len was never part of the regular army, always serving as a volunteer. This alone is to be admired but the contributions he made on the battlefield are equally awesome," Mr Atkinson said.

Len Opie was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, second only to the Victoria Cross, for his key role in the capture of a hill in Korea in 1951. His platoon prevailed after several attempts by others.

"The Korean War is often called 'the forgotten war'. By establishing Len's O.P., South Australia is recognising Len's achievements and the Korean War itself," Mr Atkinson said.

"The display will feature Len's medals, which his family is donating to the Museum, as well as his uniform, photographs and tales of Major Opie's life and military achievements.

"It's fitting that this display will be at the Army Museum of S.A. because Major Opie was a volunteer guide there for the last 12 years. He was a source of exciting war stories for many school students and other visitors. Len was living history and sadly that's now been lost," Mr Atkinson said.

The Army Museum of S.A. is based at Keswick Barracks and is part of the Australian Army's History Unit. The museum features information on all conflicts since colonisation and can also help people find out about their loved ones' service. It's open every Sunday and at other times by appointment.

"The State Government is contributing \$5000 to Len's O.P. I look forward to seeing what will be a fitting tribute to a man who has contributed greatly to S.A. in war and in peace," Mr Atkinson said.

Major Opie died last week at the age of 84 and was buried with full military honours this morning.