



ARMY FIRE-FIGHTERS HELP OUT AS CHRISTCHURCH, HASTINGS AND THE COROMANDEL BURN

A large team of soldiers, including fire fighters, infantry, logisticians and support personnel, have deployed to help evacuate residents and get the fast-spreading scrub fire on Christchurch's Port Hills under control.

As Army News went to print, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Loftus, who is overseeing the NZDF's relief operations in Canterbury, said Army personnel from Burnham Military Camp had been tasked to help Police evacuate residents from Westmorland, a suburb on the outskirts of Christchurch.

"We are poised to provide additional assistance if required and have a number of capabilities on standby," Lt Col Loftus said.

The Christchurch deployment comes just weeks after Army emergency responders were sent to the Coromandel and Hawkes Bay respectively to help extinguish bush fires.

Sergeant Ben Lockton, who lead the NZDF's firefighting crew in Hastings, said the initial crew of six – five from the New Zealand Army and one from the Royal New Zealand Air Force – assisted local firefighters for over 12 hours after arriving in Hastings.

"We were directly involved in fighting the fire and on many occasions, were only about 20-50 metres away from the flames. We stayed vigilant because there were big balls of fire as some treetops were engulfed in flames," Sergeant Lockton said.

"There was a lot of smoke and it was pretty hot. We had brief breaks throughout the night so we could have a quick bite and drink heaps of water. Once we get a few hours' rest, we'd be ready to go back to work."

Sergeant Lockton said three of the Army's new detachable fire pods were used at Hastings. The pod can be transported on a variety of vehicles and uses an ultra high-pressure hose with a pointed nozzle that can pierce the ground and douse burning roots.



HELO CRASH PILOT AN SAS HERO

The helicopter pilot who died in a crash while fighting fires in the Port Hills on 14 February was a decorated soldier who served with 1st New Zealand Special Air Service Regiment in Afghanistan.

Corporal David Steven Askin was awarded the New Zealand Gallantry Star in 2014 for service in Afghanistan, including the incident at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul in 2011. During the incident at the Intercontinental Corporal Askin was wounded by grenade and rifle fire, yet carried on his mission and rescued guests from the hotel as fire broke out. He was also cited on a number of other occasions for exceptional bravery during operations in Afghanistan.

The Gallantry Star is New Zealand's second-highest gallantry award, presented for acts of outstanding gallantry in situations of danger.

The Chief of Army, Major General Peter Kelly, said Corporal Askin had lived up to the finest traditions of New Zealand Army.

"Our thoughts are with his family, friends and comrades at this time," Major General Kelly said. "He was an outstanding soldier who served his country with bravery and commitment – the same bravery and commitment he

showed in helping his community fight these fires.

"His performance was of the highest order and was in keeping with the finest traditions of New Zealand's military record.

"During his time in Afghanistan, Corporal Askin displayed great gallantry and leadership in the face of the enemy. He put himself in the line of fire, and put the objectives of the mission before his personal wellbeing."

Corporal Askin's medallic recognition was announced, without his identity being made public, in December 2014 by the Minister of Defence Gerry Brownlee. Corporal Askin enlisted in 1998 and left the Army in 2013, though he remained an active member of the SAS Reserves.

The citation for his NZ Gallantry Star reads:

"Serviceman D displayed outstanding gallantry on several occasions in Afghanistan in 2011. Serviceman D repeatedly faced heavy fire from determined enemies and sustained several wounds in the line of duty, while contributing to the resolution of several incidents, the protection of civilian life and undermining enemy operations. Serviceman D's performance was of the highest order and in keeping with the finest traditions of New Zealand's military record."

