

Meritorious Service Medals to Mr. & Mrs. Isfeld

Photo credit: Sgt Eric Jolin, Rideau Hall



Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, is presenting to Brian and Carol Isfeld with the Meritorious Service Medals at Rideau Hall, Ottawa, Friday, 28 April 2006

Meritorious Service Decorations include both a military and a civil division, with two levels in each category: a medal and a cross. The military division recognizes individuals for outstanding professionalism and for bringing honour to the Canadian Forces and to Canada. The civil division recognizes individuals who have performed an exceptional deed or an activity that has brought honour to their community or to Canada.

Brian Lynthor **Isfeld**, M.S.M., C.D.
Carol Margaret **Isfeld**, M.S.M.
Courtenay, British Columbia
Meritorious Service Medal (civil division)

In 1994, Brian and Carol Isfeld's son, MCpl Mark Isfeld, was killed in Croatia while carrying out UN peacekeeping duties. Before her son's death, Mrs. Isfeld would knit woollen dolls for her son to distribute to destitute children in the former Yugoslavia. To honour their son's memory, the Isfelds continue to this day to craft, ship and promote the delivery of the nicknamed 'Izzy' dolls to Canadian soldiers. They, in turn, give them to orphaned and vulnerable children in war-torn regions around the world. Through their generosity and compassion, Mr. and Mrs. Isfeld have kept this tradition alive while alleviating the suffering of children.

The “IZZY DOLL”

The idea behind the "Izzy Doll" started in the Fall of 1993. MCpl Mark (Izzy) Isfeld had been on a United Nations peacekeeping tour from October 1992 to April 1993 with the Canadian Forces in Croatia. While on patrol, Mark had given out candy and a few pairs of knitted socks that his mother, Carol, had made for him to distribute.

Mark took a lot of pictures and one of them was of a little girl's doll on a pile of rubble that had once been her home. On his return home, he showed the picture to his mother and she conceived the idea of knitting little dolls that could be easily carried and that Mark could give to the kids he met on his travels.

In April 1994, Mark was on another peacekeeping tour in Croatia. He took a box of knitted dolls with him and his mother sent over two more before he was killed in a mine detonation on 21 June 1994. His Troop Warrant Officer told his mother that they had named the dolls “Izzy Dolls” and that name stuck. His troop asked Carol to keep making the dolls so they could hand them out in Izzy's honour.

Carol decided to keep making the dolls and having his peers distribute them on their missions. Several friends and other mothers across the country heard of the project and they joined in the project. Word got out and Carol put the doll pattern on the web so that anyone could make them and send to Canada's troops deployed around the world [See: <http://www.isfeldbc.com/>]. The network of participants grows. The Izzy Dolls continue to be made in many forms and they are distributed in many ways. Canadian Military Engineers, in particular, continue to distribute Izzy Dolls in Mark Isfeld's memory and they continue to bring joy and smiles to little faces in war-torn areas of the world.

One very striking spin-offs is the dolls that ICROSS (The International Community for the Relief of Starvation and Suffering) [See: <http://www.icross.ie/>] supporters make and distribute dolls they called "Izzy Comfort Dolls." These are used to pack around donated medicines and supplies that are given to AIDS orphans in Africa. Most of the recipients of these dolls have nothing and many are buried with their dolls.

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