

The Voluntary Reserve Force has a role that goes far beyond preparing for emergencies

Photographs by David Casha



Part-time soldiers

Full-time commitment

The EVRF has four main tasks – emergency support to the AFM in disaster relief or other major civil emergencies, key point protection, infantry patrolling and surveillance and air defence manning. But Adrian Hillman, a member of the force since its inception eight years ago, views the usefulness of the reserves in a wider context.

“It is a two-way street and both the army and the individual reserves stand to benefit,” he says.

“The underlying element is of service, which means different things to different people. Reservists take the skills which they use in civilian life and transfer them to army life. Since the reservists include doctors, teachers, lecturers and athletes, they all have certain elements from which the army and the individual soldiers who are exposed to them stand to benefit. At the same time the civilians are given an insight into the army and learn important tools for everyday life, such as discipline, physical preparation and working under physical and mental pressure.”

Discipline, he said, was a key element. There was no room for questioning in the service. “However our training has built in us the skill to listen, obey but also to think; we are not robots who go about doing things blindly.”

The reserves, men and women, are taken up for one training day per month and for an intensive eight-day training camp every year. Fresh recruits, like regular soldiers, first learn drill as a way to instilling discipline and the capacity to answer rapidly to orders. Training then extends to a number of disciplines such as skill at arms, infantry tactics

which include live fire platoon attack and other infantry skills such as internal security, first aid, survival in the field, navigation, radio procedures, abseiling and light rescue duties – skills which are often tested during the course of 30 km route marches.

The reserves are obliged by law to serve should a call up be made by the Prime Minister. That has never actually happened, but their services were used on a number of occasions when they happened to be at camp.

“Once, we had just come from a really tough exercise, it was the end of the day and we were exhausted. Then a large boatload of migrants arrived and there were not enough soldiers to deal with the situation. A call for volunteers was made and every single one of us stood up – we spent up to 4 a.m. watching over the migrants, everybody did his duty.”

The reserves have also helped out in flood relief, again having been called out while on camp.

They are now expected to be able to serve on security duties during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting next month.

The number of reserves has dwindled to just 35 from a high of 90 some years ago, but the AFM has announced plans for fresh intakes to push their number beyond 100.

“We work as a platoon, but I can see situations where the AFM may require individual reservists, such as doctors,” Mr Hillman said.

“Service has been a fruitful, rewarding experience and my only wish is that the complement would rise and we would be better able to serve” he said. ●