



DEFENCE MEDIA RELEASE

CPA Hometown 014/07

Wednesday 7 March 2007

SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Buderim's Shane O'Mara is now 4000 kms from home. For the last few months he's been wearing Army uniform and patrolling the streets of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

Shane is now part of Operation Anode. It's the name for the Australian Defence Forces' part in RAMSI, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

Australian soldiers - along with soldiers from three other Pacific nations - are supporting police from a total of 16 Pacific nations (including Australian Federal Police) as they back up the Solomon Islands Police Force in its task of restoring law and order. RAMSI began in 2003 at the request of the Solomon Islands Government.

"I joined the Army Reserves straight from the Sunshine Coast Grammar in 2005. I thought it would be a good chance to meet more mates, stay fit and do something useful. I also thought there might be a chance to get overseas, and I was right there!

"This is my first overseas trip as a Reserve soldier. I'm a rifleman, which means I patrol a lot around the city and the markets - show a presence. We're here to put a bit of strength behind the police if they need it. We talk a lot to the locals, find out what's going on, and help out where we can.

"We are getting a warm reception from the locals which really gives you a feeling of accomplishment. I feel that I've been making a difference.

"The allowances are pretty good but when we get back I won't be buying another car - I've already got a ute. So what I'd like to do is go on holiday and then put a deposit on a house - as well as look for my next job!

"But this operation also means I'm eligible for the Australian Service Medal, which means I'll definitely be marching on ANZAC Day and then heading for the RSL with some yarns of my own."

Shane is one of Australia's 41,500 Reservists, who make up about 42 per cent of the ADF strength. They bring their own civilian skills and experience and in return get the opportunity to gain new skills as part of their Reserve training.

Although Reservists may be "called out" by the Governor-General for serious security threats, all Reservists currently serving on operations, or elsewhere in the Defence Force, are volunteers. In recent years Australian Reservists have provided humanitarian relief to tsunami and earthquake victims in our region, and operations in the Solomon Islands, the Middle East and elsewhere. They have served alongside their full-time counterparts in peace missions to

Timor Leste and Bougainville and a Reserve rifle company is regularly deployed to Malaysia as part of Australia's commitment to the Five Power Defence Arrangement.

Reservists have assisted civilian police in roles such as venue search and vehicle checkpoints at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the 2003 Rugby World Cup. They also provide much-needed assistance in times of natural disasters such as floods, droughts and fires and in emergency rescue operations.

***Caption:** Buderim Reserve soldier Private Shane O'Mara is now on patrol in the Solomon Islands*

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