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## **DEFENCE MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER**

Former Isis High School student James Head, 18, has swapped his Eagles jersey for an Army camouflage uniform, and he's now patrolling the streets of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

James 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've always pictured myself in the defence force somehow, and the Army Reserve was most accessible if you live away from the really big cities," said James. "I joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, when I was 17. I haven't been in two years yet and I'm already on an overseas operation.

"At the moment my platoon's stationed at our forward operating base right next to Honiara, the capital city. Our morning routine is to clean our weapons, organize our stores, do an admin run to the main base further out of town to get our "hot boxes" – our cooked lunches.

"After that we relax in the early arvo, and then it's out on patrol. The patrols themselves are with the police and usually take around four hours, sometimes longer, sometimes a bit less depending on what happens. After that, maybe a bit of gym then we hit the sack!

"I'm still only 18 and just out of school so it's been a great chance to get out of the country and get paid to do it! In fact the pay is better than my civvy job, and after we've been here 91 days we get all our tax back – how good is that?

"Even when I'm back home I enjoy the contrast between my desk job and my Reserve weekends – I'm a trainee accounts clerk, so I'll be sitting at a desk one day, then firing 84mm anti-tank rockets the next!

"But I couldn't be in the Solomons without the agreement of my boss at SP Exports at Childers. Kerry Duwre has been really great to let me come over, and she's keeping my job open for me while I've been away. She's a pretty flexible boss – really good.

"When we get back we get two weeks paid leave. I'm planning on going to Brazil with my brother to play a bit of soccer – and then back to work. Before that though, there's the ANZAC Day parade. We get the Australian Service Medal for this deployment, so I'll be marching in Bundaberg for sure."

James 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:** Local Reserve soldier Private James Head on patrol in the streets of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.*

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