



DEFENCE MEDIA RELEASE

CPA Hometown 026/07

Wednesday 7 March 2007

SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Leyburn's player Jason Hamilton-Smith has swapped his farm overalls for Army fatigues when he deployed to the Solomon Islands in January.

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

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.

"Me and my mates are developing a good rapport with the locals. We're here to provide security for the Participating Police Force, that's our primary role, but we get out on patrols and speak to people, we get out to villages and that's what we love.

"The kids are great. We show them 'Hey, we're here to help', and most of the people we've spoken to are really grateful we're here.

"Getting amongst the people is what I love. I've done a bit of missionary work through my church around Australia so I love getting into different countries and getting amongst the people.

"I've got a good group of guys that I'm with, and they're all of a similar sort of heart - they all just want to get out amongst the people, they don't want to be locked away some place."

Jason said when his work is done in the Solomon Islands he'll be getting back to his farm, which his wife is currently looking after. "I had a big to-do list before I left. I can't wait to get back."

Private Jason Hamilton-Smith 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:** Leyburn farmer Jason Hamilton-Smith is now a Reserve soldier on duty in the Solomon Islands*

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