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SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Teacher Adam Wood is now more than a few suburbs away from his home at Enoggera and his teaching job at the Marist College, Ashgrove. He's in Army uniform and on patrol in the streets and jungles of the Solomon Islands.

Adam 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). There are over 100 Australian Diggers in the Solomons and only four of them are Regular soldiers. Adam and all the other Diggers are Reserve soldiers from south-east Queensland.

Along with soldiers from three other Pacific nations, they 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.

"My job is platoon signaller," said Adam. "I maintain communications between platoon headquarters and the guys on patrol, and from platoon headquarters back to battalion headquarters. I've also been helping some of the guys with communications training, and advising the boss on signals stuff."

A key part of the Diggers' job is to build a good rapport with the locals as well as providing security assistance to the international and local police. And because it's a military operation Adam and his mates will earn the Australian Service Medal for this peacekeeping tour of duty.

"I'm enjoying the change of culture — and the variety. I get to do a bit of hands-on of everything, like going to different locations, riding on the boats and just passing on knowledge to the less-experienced guys."

When Adam returns to Australia, he plans on combining his Army Reserve experience with his civilian career. "I'm a film and TV teacher — and script writing is something I talk about all the time with the students. So I said to myself, 'well, I'll have a crack at doing it,' and just floated a few ideas around my head and thought what better opportunity than to write something about the military!"

Adam 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:** Enoggera teacher and Reserve soldier Private Adam Wood (centre) and Belmont's Private Mark Whiting on patrol in a remote Solomon Islands village*

***Media Contact:** Steve Ridgway on 0438 012 107*