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## **DEFENCE MEDIA RELEASE**

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

For the last few months, Calamvale's Craig Rickards has swapped his green Sunnybank Rugby Union guernsey for the camouflage uniform of a combat infantryman, and he's been patrolling the streets of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

Craig 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.

Craig's been a member of his Army Reserve unit, the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Queensland Regiment, for many years but this is the first time his unit has served overseas since it was in PNG during the Second World War.

"I joined the Reserves on a bit of a dare when I was at St Laurence's College," said Craig. "I was about to go to uni, and the recruiter came to the school and said we could earn \$1000 over Christmas. That sounded good to me, so I did it!

"Now I'm the Company Sergeant Major, which means I'm responsible for administration, training, ammunition and rations, and general maintenance of the base.

"This is my first overseas deployment which makes me eligible for the Australian Service Medal. But it's not just about medals. I enjoy the mateship, the network of friends, and the leadership training which they pay you to do - and which has also made me better in my civilian job."

When Craig is out of uniform he is the State Manager for Transactional Banking at Westpac. "Basically we sell services like EFTPOS or bill-paying and internet banking to small up to company-sized enterprises. But my bosses at Westpac let me take this time away, and the Army pays them while I am absent.

"Our tour of duty is almost over now and the pay and allowances have been building up - but the kids will be back at school so I'm holding off on any plans for a big holiday right now. I'll just be kicking back for a couple of weeks - but in August/September I'll probably be taking the wife and kids ski-ing in New Zealand.

There's one important date for Craig and his fellow soldiers before then. On 25<sup>th</sup> April - ANZAC Day - he'll be marching through the city with the rest of his Battalion. The drums

will be beating and the flags flying, and they will be wearing their new Australian Service Medal on their chest. It will be a proud day for all of them, and they have worked hard for it.

Craig 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:** Calamvale's Reserve soldier Warrant Officer II Craig Rickards is on duty in the Solomon Islands*

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