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SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

For the past few months, East Brisbane fashion designer Andrew Magann has forsaken the stylish bars of Fortitude Valley to patrol the streets of Honiara.

Andrew 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 was originally a Regular Army soldier and served for five years. Then in 2001 I left to study fashion design at Ithaca TAFE. In a way I never left soldiering - I just transferred to the Reserves.

"But, as an ex-Regular, I find working with the Reserves really easy. As a group they are more understanding, they are easier to relate to, but under that relaxed appearance they've got a wider pool of knowledge - they've had more life experience."

"This is my first overseas deployment and I was expecting a much more aggressive threat. Things are much more relaxed than we had mentally geared up for. I guess we trained for the worst and everything seems easier after that - and when you think about it, it's better for things to be that way round.

"I'm now a Lance Corporal, which means I'm second in charge of a section of eight men. So I do the patrols with everyone else, but I also fix the admin when we get back - and I also take command if the section leader is away.

"We've been away two months now so we'll soon be home. The pay and allowances are good so I'll be spending up a bit when I get back - I think my girlfriend in Kallangur already has a list! But come ANZAC Day, we'll all be wearing our Australian Service Medals which we get for this overseas operation. I'll definitely be marching with the lads.

"Then it will be back to normal life and a quiet beer at the GPO Hotel with a few more yarns to tell."

Andrew 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:** East Brisbane's Reserve soldier Lance Corporal Andrew Magann is now on patrol in the Solomon Islands*

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