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SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Geebung's Glen Zalewski is now in his Army Reserve uniform and 4000 kms from home — he's now on patrol in the Solomon Islands.

Glen 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.

Glen and over 100 other south Queensland Reserve 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 joined the Reserves three and a half years ago, but the chance to deploy overseas is one of the opportunities you don't think will come up — but when it did I was one of the first to put my hand up.

"I didn't think I would ever be on a deployment this quick — it's a real sense of achievement for me.

"We get a lot of different tasks — patrolling, manning observation post and so on. Initially the humidity was the biggest thing, especially those nights when we slept with no air conditioning in tents! But there's a lot here worse off than us.

"The people here are very approachable — it's a much easier job than we thought. Most people wave and come up to talk — and we're happy to talk to them, just chit-chat, you know."

Glen and his colleagues will be back in Queensland in good time for this year's ANZAC Day Parade, and like his mates, he'll be proudly wearing his new Australian Service Medal for his deployment on this peace-keeping operation.

Glen 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:** Geebung’s Reserve soldier Private Glen Zalewski (second from right) enjoys a roadside coconut milk along with (l to r) fellow Queensland Reserves Private Luke Barrett (Millmerran), Lance Corporal Ross Juillerat (Toowoomba) and Private Cameron Huntress (Springwood).*

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