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SOLOMONS TOUR FOR LOCAL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Carpenter Dane Sanders grew up in Nudgee and now lives in Banyo, but for the last few months he has swapped his carpenter's tools for a 5.56mm Steyr rifle and he's been 4000 kilometres away patrolling the streets of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

Dane 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 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 went to St Pius Primary and then Banyo High School. I'd been in cadets when we lived at Goff's Harbour and the Army Reserve seemed pretty challenging so, after I finished school, I joined in 2002. After basic training I started my carpentry apprenticeship.

"The Solomons is my first overseas operation and our general task is to assist the police - to provide extra muscle if it's needed. Our platoon is based for the moment at our Forward Operating Base just outside Honiara.

"There's a three day routine here, where each section spends one day patrolling with police. On the second day we become the Quick Reaction Force if any patrols need help, and on the third day we stay at camp and get a break from patrolling.

"Off duty life is pretty restricted - our sleeping patterns are still a bit varied, and it took time to acclimatize to the heat and humidity. But hey, it's a military operation so what do you expect?

"We've been here a few months now so we'll be home soon. My boss back home, Jason Krause (of Krause Construction), is certainly looking forward to me getting back!

Dane 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:** Local Reserve soldier Private Dane Sanders is now on duty 4000kms away from his twin hometowns of Nudgee and Banjo.*

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