

Reservists shine in Solomons

By Captain Michael Brooke

OPERATION Anode in the Solomon Islands illustrates that Army Reservists are well-trained and provide real capability to the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

In recent times the Army Reserve has taken on the responsibility of providing Head Quarters staff and peacekeepers for the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which has helped the ADF during the busy operational tempo.

The deployment of Reservists and other ADF personnel, at the invitation of the Government in Honiara, has helped to improve law and order in the Solomon Islands which is vital for economic growth and sustainability.

Since the commencement of RAMSI in July 2003, Reservists and other ADF personnel have been greeted warmly by the local population and are happy to assist in returning their lives to normality.

More than 140 Army Reservists from the 5TH and 8TH Brigades from the Royal New South Wales Regiment recently returned home from a successful four month deployment to the Solomon Islands.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM MP, welcomed the Reserve soldiers at a parade at Holsworthy Barracks on 11 December.

Dr Kelly said he was pleased with the contribution the Reserve was making to RAMSI, where Australia and her Pacific partners are helping the local government to develop peace and stability.

"The security situation in the Solomon Islands remains stable and this is largely due to RAMSI's presence," he said.

"While there is still work to be done, we are confident that the Solomon Islands is making progress towards managing their own internal security."



Private Vanessa Noordermeer, an Army Reservist from Cronulla, is thanked by Commander of the Holsworthy-based 5th Brigade Brigadier Paul Brereton, after receiving her Service Medal for a four-month deployment as a peacekeeper to Solomon Islands recently.

Photo: Captain Michael Brooke

Dr Kelly said Australians should be proud of their soldiers' efforts to serve in this capacity away from their family and friends.

In recognition of the Reservists contribution to the overseas peacekeeping operation they were presented with the Australian Service Medal by the Commander of the 5th Brigade, Brigadier Paul Brereton, at a parade at Holsworthy Barracks.

Brigadier Brereton thanked the part-time soldiers from Canberra, Wollongong, Bathurst, Orange and Sydney's Western suburbs for their professionalism and quality of work during the deployment.

The Commanding Officer of the contingent for Operation Anode (Rotation 16), Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Weir, said this operation illustrated that Reservists are well-trained and can provide real capability to the Army during the busy operational tempo.

"The soldiers carried out 24-hour street patrols and other designated tasks in support of the participating Police Forces within the Solomon Islands," he said.

"During the deployment the Reservists mounted an intense 30-day operation in inhospitable jungle which resulted in the capture of a local man who

was charged with the attempted murder of a RAMSI policeman in 2008."

At the grass roots level the Reservists also won the trust and confidence of the local people by their involvement in civil military cooperation projects which brought much joy and happiness.

The Reservists often handed out school books and other educational items to needy children while the medics helped provide care to sick children at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara.

The medics spent up to two days a week assisting at the hospital while working alongside ASPEN medical contractors.

The medical care the Reservists and contractors provided ranged from the amputation of limbs to delivering babies.

The experience gained in the hospital was very beneficial for the medics who also operated clinics in remote villages through the Solomons, where they provided basic medical care and education for the locals.

Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Weir said the medical care the Australian soldiers provided to the locals helped to strengthen quality long-term relationships with our neighbours in the Pacific.