

DEFENCE EMPLOYEES OFF ON BOSSLIFT TO MALAYSIA

By Flying Officer Julia Ravell

While many Department of Defence public servants were away enjoying a holiday with family and friends, three Canberra-based policy workers were enduring the heat and humidity of the Malaysian jungle to watch ADF infantry in action.

As guests of Reserve Policy Division's Directorate of Reserve Support, Kay Austin, David Cooke and Claire Starkey joined employers from around Australia for a first-hand look at reservist soldiers on exercise as part of Rifle Company Butterworth.

After chowing down on 'rat packs' in the jungle with the troops, watching a platoon ambush, listening to lectures and getting some range practice on a Steyr, the intrepid trio now have a much better idea about the training that goes into making a finely honed soldier capable of fighting beside full-time counterparts. And they're much more aware of the issues faced by reservists when they deploy overseas.

"Before I went to Malaysia on the Bosslift program, I'd only ever visited reserve soldiers working in Australia," said Ms Austin, who works as Director of Service Conditions, a position responsible for making policy on a wide variety of travel allowances.

"Reservists have unique needs and when they go on longer deployments overseas they rely on the proper application of defence policies about pay and conditions so they can maintain they're financial commitments at home," she said.

"The Bosslift to Malaysia was a good opportunity to understand what reservists do on the ground, to appreciate the pay and conditions required to make them an effective mobile force.

"Getting troops to remote places and sustaining them in the field is all about making the administration of reserve pay as slick as it can be."

For Rehabilitation and Compensation policy officer, David Cooke, jungle training challenges presented a risk environment "completely different" to the defence civilian work environments to which he was accustomed.

The punishing training regime had resulted in a few broken bones and fatigue-related injuries.

“Talking with the troops one-on-one gave me a much better appreciation of how our rehabilitation policies work or should work on the ground,” said Mr Cooke.

“I’ve just put out the tender for the second stage in our modernisation program for ADF rehabilitation policies so the trip cemented in my mind the sort of thinking that we need to do so that the policies meet the requirements of practice in the field.

“Joining the soldiers at the jungle warfare centre and firing off some live rounds was also an experience.”

Since 2003, six groups of employers have accompanied reserve units to East Timor, Malaysia and the Solomon Islands.

Newly-appointed Director of Reserve Support Steve Williams said that Bosslift participants were usually matched to deployments and exercises that involved their staff.

“Bosses quickly realise that their employees are at the pointy end of Australian Defence Force activities - they gain a huge amount of understanding in a very short time,” said Mr Williams.

“Most participants have no idea that reservists are involved in the full range of ADF operations. They discover that being a reservist is much more than being ‘one of the boys’ on Tuesday nights and on weekends.”