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My short history as a Reservist

My military service relates to the era from the Korean War to post Vietnam War and shows my service and experiences at that period of time – I am a product of my time.

And, although time, circumstances, policies and equipments have forever changed, my own experiences provide an interesting and not unfamiliar comparison to the activities and experiences of our Reservists today.

Today's Reservists are also, a product of their time – that time is now – and their service and experiences are, equally, just as demanding and, I am sure, just as rewarding and infinitely satisfying as mine.

On to me –

Australia's involvement in the Korean War saw the commencement of a post World War II National Service, with all 18 year-olds being called up for military training. I did 3 months full-time National Service Training at Swanbourne Army Barracks in Western Australia in 1954, followed by a mandatory 2 years part-time training in the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) as a Coast Gunner, with 125 Medium Coast/AA Battery at Leighton, overlooking the port of Fremantle. During my initial 2 years mandatory service in the CMF, I did a Parachute Course at Williamstown NSW in 1954, an Army Light Aircraft Pilot's Course in Western Australia and was commissioned into the Royal Australian Artillery.

With the decommissioning of the Coast/AA guns at Leighton, I transferred to 3 Field Regiment at Karrakatta in WA. Our guns were 25 pdrs.

In my civilian occupation I was a Bank Officer with The Bank of Adelaide in Perth. The Bank was quite supportive and gave me leave without pay to do my 3 months full-time service, to attend the Parachute Course, to attend annual CMF camps and an occasional course each year, interstate.

When the Bank transferred me to their Sydney Office in 1959 I transferred from 3 Fd Regt to 7 Fd Regt at Willoughby in NSW where I was appointed Gun Position Officer. My involvement with the Military was such that I even had a Military Wedding at the Garrison Church, The Rocks, in Sydney in 1963, and it was from Sydney in 1964 that I was appointed a United Nations Military Observer to India & Pakistan (Kashmir). I was able to take my wife with me to the Indian Sub-Continent and I served there during the Indo-Pak War of 1965.

Once again, the Bank was prepared to give me leave of absence, without pay, to take up this appointment, which lasted a total of 15 months.

I served in Kashmir on both sides of the Cease Fire Line, personally undertook 144 investigations of violations of the Cease Fire Agreement, walked in and out of 4 minefields, was shot at a number of times, climbed mountains up to 18,000 feet on investigations, often walked up to 60 kilometres a day along mountain tracks and the Indus, Kishenganga and Jhelum River valleys of the Sub-Continent,

was involved in the September 1965 peace negotiations with U Thant, Indian Prime Minister Shastri and the Chief Military Observer, General Nimmo (a 72 year-old, fine, Australian General) and, of course, saw magnificent scenery that no tourists ever could.

At that time Australia's only peace-keeping activities were in Kashmir and Palestine – 6 officers in Kashmir and 2 in Palestine – all CMF Officers (Reservists).

Today, Australia's main thrust with its armed forces is in peacekeeping activities around the world, so perhaps we were the forerunners for these current and such important undertakings for the ADF today.

On my return to Australia in 1966, The Bank of Adelaide transferred me to Head Office in Adelaide and I transferred to the local Artillery regiment at Keswick - 13 Fd Regt. Subsequently I was appointed GSO3 (Air) on 9 Task Force HQs at Torrens Parade Ground and, while G3(Air), I was posted, in 1968, to Vietnam as a CMF Observer, attached to 12 Fd Regt. While with the Regiment I was involved in active operations in Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa Provinces shortly after the Battles of Coral and Balmoral in May 1968.

Vietnam was another fascinating and important military experience for me. The Bank gave me leave without pay to go to war in Vietnam and it was interesting to be working in the Bank in Adelaide on the Friday, flying to Sydney that evening to catch the plane to Vietnam on the Saturday, and finding myself being choppered in to a Fire Support Base in Bien Hoa Province on the Monday and actively engaged in a fire-fight with the Viet Cong that very same day. No six to 12 months pre-embarkation training, just straight into it – I was a fully trained and fit Reservist!

My Reserve service not only gave me valuable military and overseas experiences and service, but helped me immeasurably in my civilian occupation.

Militarily, my overseas postings equipped me with knowledge and experiences that were not available in Australia and I came back ready and able to pass on this knowledge to fellow Reservists in our exercises and training activities.

I also am certain that my Reserve Service was instrumental in me becoming Marketing Manager of The Bank of Adelaide and subsequently owning and running my own marketing consultancy and coin and medallion business, which still operates to this day.

As a product of my time – and a very active and involved Reservist at that time – I am forever grateful for my Reserve service and experiences, and the opportunities that Reserve service gave to me.

I am sure our active Reservists of today have, and will have, equally interesting, enjoyable and satisfying experiences in their Reserve service activities and training.

They are to be commended for their Service and are truly "Twice the Citizen".