

LAND FORCE RESERVES AND HOMELAND SECURITY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

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Historians are usually wary of the 'lessons learned' approach to the past, an approach that military organisations generally find congenial, even natural. Years ago, Sir Michael Howard pointed to the irritation of military people, led to believe that history offered a sure and steady guide to future directions, on discovering that historians are fickle creatures. Having looked for 'wise teachers who will use their knowledge of the past to explain the present and guide him as to the future', writes Howard, what does our eager, would-be uniformed student find instead?

Workmen, busily engaged in tearing up what he had regarded as a perfectly decent highway; doing their best to discourage him from proceeding along it at all; and warning him, if he does, that the surface is temporary, that they have no idea when it will be completed, nor where it leads, and that he proceeds at his own risk.¹

This is the equivalent, in terms of the information superhighway perhaps, of a web page permanently under construction, or in conference terms, of a Powerpoint presentation without end.

In attempting to draw lessons from Australian use of reserve forces in recent deployments overseas, and the implications for homeland defence that arise from them, a number of qualifications and caveats have to be made. Indeed, until very recently much of the evidence on which extrapolations might be based is of a negative kind, making a 'lessons learned' approach even more problematic than the

¹ Michael Howard, 'The Lessons of History', in Michael Howard, The Lessons of History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 12.

average 'historical road crew' might already believe. But every problem and every issue has a history, or so historians devoutly believe, and we can begin to see the dimensions of the difficulty before us if we examine the history of the use of reserve forces in the Australian context.

The Australian Army is now more than a century old, but for much of its history it had no formal, organised reserve force as we understand that term now. As in Canada, but in a form different from its usage in the United States, the system of citizen-soldiering in Australia meant that the part-time, militia-based units and formations that comprised the numerical bulk of the Australian Military Forces were regarded by government as the mainstay of Australia's land defences. The small, long-service permanent forces, consisting very largely of officers and NCOs, provided training, administrative and logistic support for the Citizen Military Forces, but were explicitly denied an operational combat role, at least in theory and frequently in practice. The regulars acted in support of the part-timers, and that arrangement pertained in the Australian system from Federation in 1901 until after the end of the Second World War.

That situation began to change in 1947, with the establishment of the Australian Regular Army, but for more than a decade thereafter the change was more apparent than real. The CMF was reconstituted in 1948, and although successive governments were committed to the creation of a regular field force of brigade group strength, practice rather than policy suggested that the mainstay of the ground defence of Australia – homeland defence by any other name – continued to be the part-time force, an impression reinforced by the introduction of a national service training scheme between 1950-59 that channelled men into the CMF after their period of full-time call-up, and which imposed no liability for overseas service.

The factor that more than anything else restricted thinking about the use of the CMF on deployments beyond Australia's shores was the Defence Act (1903), which prevented men from being sent on overseas service unless they volunteered for the specific duty. This was why Australia raised separate expeditionary forces at the outbreak of both world wars. No such constraint has been applied historically to either the Royal Australian Navy or the Royal Australian Air Force, and although the Menzies government altered the legislation in 1951, during the height of the Korean War, to bring service conditions in the Australian Regular Army into line with the other two branches of the armed forces, the citizen force remained subject to the old provisions.

The only time in which the non-regular force has been called up and utilised in the defence of Australia and Australian interests was during the Second World War. The major effort was in the fight against the Japanese, between 1942-45. Significant numbers of CMF soldiers were called up to full time duty at the outbreak of war in 1939, but while the war was confined to Europe and the Mediterranean this call up was limited in both scope and duration; the government did not want to impose too great a strain on the civil economy or on social harmony, consistent with the early wartime slogan on the Australian home front, 'Business as usual'. During the Cold War, and especially in the 1950s, considerable resources and attention were paid to the CMF, and it reached its greatest numeric strength through the national service scheme, but there seems to have been little serious intention of calling up the force in a contingency short of a third world war. Even then, it must be doubted that the CMF could have been deployed on operations, either in the Middle East or to Australia's north, without considerable further and extensive training and

preparation, while the national service scheme was intended to fulfil the conservative government's social agenda as much as its defence one.

National service was suspended in 1959, and a clumsily handled reorganisation of the army between 1959-64 saw many long-standing CMF units struck from the order of battle or amalgamated, with many long-serving officers and NCOs resigning, not to return. The Vietnam War then completed the demise of the old-style citizen-soldier structure and function in Australia. Although there was considerable agitation within senior CMF circles for a role for the CMF in Australia's deployment for Vietnam, and although the CMF Member on the Military Board of the time, Major General Paul Cullen, is certain to this day that a battalion of CMF volunteers could have been raised for service in the Australian Task Force in Phuoc Tuy province, the government chose to expand the army for the roles it acquired in Southeast Asia through the reintroduction of national service, with an obligation for overseas service. By the time the Australian forces withdrew from Vietnam finally at the beginning of 1973, the CMF was a shambles.²

The point of this lengthy historical preamble has been to emphasise that in Australian practice there has been no tradition of reliance upon reserve or citizen-force soldiers in times of national emergency. There are no 'Minute men' in the Australian military tradition, no Territorial Army battalions taking their pre-ordained place in the BEF's order of battle for deployment to France in 1940; the attempts by the CMF to incorporate into their own traditions those of the units of the expeditionary forces – the 1st and 2nd AIF - of the two world wars were always somewhat forced. The regulars' traditions may be recently acquired, but they are at least unambiguously their own.

² For an extended, detailed and sophisticated analysis of the decline of the CMF in the postwar period, see Dayton McCarthy, *The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Forces, 1947-1974*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2003.

The further point here is that in the Australian experience, appeals to past practice offer little guide to future directions, except in a negative sense, when we are dealing with the use of ground force reserves – the Army Reserve or ARes as it is now explicitly designated – in the changed strategic climate in which we find ourselves. The change of name to reflect the reality of a change in function, was recommended by the Millar Committee of enquiry into the state and future of the CMF in 1974, but in fact the army had been aware of the problems facing effective utilisation of the part-time force, and of the measures necessary to turn this situation around, for many years. Improving the effectiveness of the CMF had been an agenda item for the Military Board repeatedly since the late 1940s at least, but the debate was usually defined by resources while the solutions proposed frequently ignored the political dimension and thus were unlikely to succeed. (It is important to emphasise here that this analysis applies overwhelmingly to the ground force reserves. The naval and air force reserves have always been much smaller, more specialised, and platform-based, and their utilisation and incorporation into the regular force structure has posed fewer challenges.)

The Australian Army, like its counterparts among its ABCA allies, has undergone considerable downsizing since the Vietnam War and the return of an all-volunteer military. In 1971, before national service ended, the regular army numbered 46,362 (ARA, PIR and NS) while the old CMF fielded 30,943, at least on paper.³ Since then, the numbers have generally gone in one direction: by 2001-2002 the ARA had a strength of 25,012 with a slight projected increase to 25,941 in 2003-2004 (enlisted strength in 2002-2003 only reached 25,289); the ARes had a posted

³ Joan Beaumont, Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001, 128.

establishment in 2001-2002 of just 16,500, rising to 17,172 in 2002-2003.⁴ The 2001-2002 Defence annual report states that the ARes is 'designed to sustain, reinforce, and to a lesser degree, rotate personnel and equipment'. This is quite separate from the roles of the three Regional Surveillance Units that operate across northern Australia, or the reserve commando battalion available to Special Operations Command. (The slight increases in strengths between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, cited here, reflect government acceptance of the need to boost the establishment of the ARA slightly in the face of multiple overseas deployments over an extended period since 1999.)

Certain long-term features of the Army Reserve pose a continuing challenge for defence planners and policy-makers who would utilise reservists on defence tasks in circumstances short of a 'defence emergency' (the euphemism of choice now that 'in times of war' has been deleted from the definition governing call-out). As an historical fact, few ARes units have been capable of deployment on short notice; to that must be added serious doubts about the degree of readiness displayed, absolutely, within units and relatively, between them. Recent legislative and regulatory changes have removed the century-old barrier to the call-out of reservists and their deployment overseas in any circumstance deemed necessary, and the ADF has created five categories of reserve status in a bid to more accurately assess capability across the force, and to signal more clearly to reservists the standards of readiness required in each category. These are necessary first steps, as is the legislative action designed to protect the employment and financial status of called-up reservists and their families, but they will not, by themselves, change a pattern that is at least half a century old.

⁴ Australian Defence Report 2001-2002, 5.

This point is underscored by consideration of the use of ARes personnel on recent deployments, and specifically to the continuing deployment in East Timor, for which Australia initially had primary responsibility.⁵ When the Australian Defence Force mounted the INTERFET operation in late 1999, in conjunction with force contributions from regional and western allies, it represented the largest single force deployment beyond Australia's shores since the Second World War, and the largest continuing force deployment since the end of the Vietnam War. Virtually no reserve personnel were available for deployment with INTERFET, although it should be noted that reservists of all three services played important roles in Darwin and elsewhere in services support roles. Since the handing over of authority in Timor to the United Nations, and the replacement of INTERFET by UNTAET, in which Australia has continued to maintain a sizeable though declining presence, the Army has utilised reservists as part of the force mix, and several units have taken ARes soldiers in their ranks to Timor. The 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), based in Brisbane, is an integrated battalion that has served with UNTAET; it consists of regular officers and senior NCOs with a proportion of the other ranks drawn from the ARes. This describes the actuality on that deployment, although it is supposed to be integrated with ARes at all levels. The battalion was sent to Timor to replace the all-regular mechanised infantry battalion, 5/7RAR, in order to show that the ARes had a role in the new strategic environment (and which resulted in some ill-feeling from another regular battalion, 1RAR, which had missed out on a deployment with INTERFET and now missed out again). On its second tour, 5/7RAR deployed without its integral APCs and less one regular rifle company, instead taking an ARes company drawn from the 4th Brigade and the Royal Victorian Regiment. The 4th

⁵ The following discussion is based on a conversation with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Houston of the Army History Unit. Lt Col Houston has been a member of Australian Defence Force field history detachments deployed to East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The factual data is his, the conclusions are my own.

Brigade has been the recipient of considerable additional expenditure intended to increase its readiness for deployments of this kind, and the company concerned was given a working up period of 3-4 months before deployment. In addition, reservists from the 2nd/14th Queensland Mounted Infantry (2nd/14th QMI) were utilised as drivers in an APC and light armour troop attached to 6RAR.

There is some anecdotal evidence that while this latter group of soldiers had received sufficient intensive training in order to carry out their duties as drivers, there was insufficient time to refresh them in 'soldier skills'; although they were only a proportion of the unit strength, all the unauthorised discharges in the unit during its tour occurred to reservists.⁶ This observation is not intended in any way to disparage the reservists concerned, but to underscore the fact that trade offs were required in pre-deployment training and that such compromises may have consequences in other operational circumstances. Despite attempts to increase the readiness and short notice 'deployability' of reservists, the time periods available are insufficient to bring them to a level of readiness that would allow them to operate effectively, and survive, in high intensity military environments (and East Timor avowedly has not been in this category since the withdrawal of INTERFET, if then). The individuals concerned are drawn from across units in the ARes, and training must often start at fairly basic levels in order to accommodate different levels of readiness amongst them. The 3-4 months that they have received so far is cutting it fine, to say the least, since the training, deployment and post-deployment 'wind down' that the Army now insists on (and wisely so) must all be accommodated within a 12-month period of full time service (and it should be noted that, thus far, all those reservists who

⁶ Attempts to obtain more precise statistics and other details of the utilisation of ADF Reservists on recent deployments have foundered on the reporting system currently used with the Australian Defence Organisation. This emphasises reporting on expenditure rather than activity per se. Enquiries directed to the three areas within the armed forces responsible for each service's reserves, and to the secretariat of the Reserves Support Council, yielded a willingness to help, but a general inability to do so.

have served in these capacities have volunteered to do so; the Australian government has yet to exercise its legislative powers and call up either units or individuals).

The issue here, as it has long been, is deciding what role and function the reserves fulfil. The increasingly discredited 'Defence of Australia' doctrine that emerged in the late 1980s, and which justified the running down of Army capabilities for a decade before the intervention in East Timor, allotted the ARes a (largely undefined) supporting role in dealing with 'thugs in thongs' who might manage to traverse the so-called 'air-sea gap' to Australia's north and land in northern Australia. This is increasingly recognised as the least likely of the strategic scenarios facing the Army in the foreseeable future. As the range and intensity of tasks assigned to the ADF by government increases – and since October 1999 the ADF has been deployed to East Timor, the Solomons, Bougainville, Afghanistan, the Gulf, and the war in Iraq – and the hollowness of much of the ADF makes itself felt, especially in the Army, useable reserves can make an enormous contribution both in terms of supplementing the regulars and relieving the impact of prolonged and heightened operational tempo. An example of the latter is the use of an ARes company on the 3-month annual deployment to Butterworth in Malaysia in the role of 'Rifle Company Butterworth' (RCB), which has replaced the previously utilised ARA company and which provides a useful training opportunity for the reservists concerned. The same is true of the deployment of ARes medical personnel deployed for 2-4 week periods to the medical facilities in Dili, or in support of operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, or during Operation BALI ASSIST following the terrorist attack there in October 2002.⁷

⁷ A full listing of current and recent operations involving the Australian Defence Force is provided in the Defence Annual Report 2002-2003, chapter two.

Ironically, the Army had implemented a heightened reserve system in the early 1990s that would now pay significant dividends in the current environment if the present government had not abolished it, without much consideration or discussion, when it assumed office in 1996.⁸ The Ready Reserve Scheme (RRes) was introduced in 1991 in order to maintain capability and levels of readiness in the face of further reductions in the regular establishment and order of battle, specifically among the infantry battalions. Ready reservists received a year's full-time training, bringing them to the level of a regular, and thereafter undertook a minimum obligation of 50 days per year over four years. An attractive incentive scheme meant that the Ready Reserve program drew heavily on those intending to enter tertiary education (80 percent of those in the Army component), an educated pool of recruits not normally attracted to full-time military service, and one moreover available for extended periods of training over the summer and likely to be available for deployment of six to twelve months duration without significant social or economic disruption.

The scheme was abolished because of its cost: a Ready Reservist cost 45 percent of his regular counterpart over the five year engagement, while the Ready Reserve units were estimated to cost 65 percent of a regular battalion. (These figures require interpretation. The original idea was to recruit in southeast Queensland and New South Wales because the troops would be employed in the 6th Brigade, based in Brisbane. Political requirements insisted on Australia-wide recruiting, which greatly added to the training costs through the necessity to fly Ready Reserve personnel from distant points in, for example, Western Australia, in

⁸ The following discussion draws on Hugh Smith, 'The military profession in Australia: crossroads and cross-purposes?', in Michael Evans, Russell Parkin and Alan Ryan (eds), Future Armies, Future Challenges: Land Warfare in the Information Age, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004, 195-201. A lengthy analysis of the Ready Reserve Scheme is contained in Lieutenant General John Coates and Dr Hugh Smith, Review of the Ready Reserve Scheme, Report to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Canberra, 1995.

order to meet periodic training commitments.) An ordinary reservist at the same time was estimated to cost around ten percent of his regular equivalent. But as Hugh Smith points out, there is little point in turning out 'large numbers of low cost reservists who can not be used, certainly not in formed units'.⁹ The focus within the Army component of the scheme upon infantry battalions provided precisely the capability that the Army has drawn on so heavily in East Timor and which the Ready Reserve Scheme could have supplemented with relatively little effort. In addition, as the Defence submission to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade noted in May 2000, 'the cessation of the very successful Ready Reserve (RRes) Scheme in 1996 resulted in a significant downturn in reserve retention and recruitment'.¹⁰ As Smith again notes, the scheme was a hybrid and had its detractors amongst both regulars and reservists, but perhaps its 'mongrel quality' is in tune with the needs of the times. Certainly, even if the money was forthcoming it is unlikely that the Army could recruit substantial numbers of additional regulars while maintaining the quality and levels of training, at least in the short to medium term. In short, you get nothing for nothing.

In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Lawrence J. Korb notes the need to update the US Army's Reserves and 'fix the mix' in the face of the demands being made upon the US Army, both in terms of the nature and the extent of overseas missions now facing it.¹¹ He argues that the structures in place are a post-Vietnam legacy no longer in tune with the needs of very different times. The Australian Army Reserve is, likewise, a post-Vietnam legacy force, and although legislative measures have removed the impediments to call-up and deployment that previously restricted its use, in most other respects nothing much has changed. The current and likely

⁹ Smith, 'Military profession in Australia', 199.

¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

¹¹ Lawrence J. Korb, 'Fixing the Mix: How to Update the Army's reserves', Foreign Affairs, March/April 2004, 2-7.

future requirements for force projection in our region and beyond it in defence of Australian interests suggest that we need an effective 'One Force' Army in reality as well as rhetoric. To date, however, we seem as far from attaining it as ever.

Defence annual report 2002-2002

Defence regulations were drafted that create new categories of Reserve service, following changes to Reserve legislation.

The *Defence (Personnel) Amendment Regulations 2002*, which came into effect on 1 December 2002, consolidated the existing regulations relating to personnel matters contained in the *Naval Forces Regulations 1935*, the *Australian Military Regulations 1927* and the *Air Force Regulations 1927*. These regulations also consolidated some of the former provisions of the *Naval Defence Act 1910* and the *Defence Act 1903* relating to personnel matters.

The regulations simplified administration and introduced common terminology across the Services. The regulations also established new categories of Reserve service:

- High Readiness Active Reserve;
- High Readiness Specialist Reserve;
- Active Reserve;
- Specialist Reserve; and
- Standby Reserve.

All currently serving Reservists were transferred into one of the new categories.

For permanent and Reserve ADF members appointed or enlisted after 1 July 2003, transfer to the Standby Reserve will now be part of a member's service. All members will serve in the Standby Reserve, except if the member has reached retirement age, or circumstances have occurred which have resulted in the prior discharge of the member.

Other new initiatives introduced by the regulations included:

- the concept of a provisional appointment, whereby permanent and Reserve members are able to undertake appointment or enlistment on a provisional basis. The member can be appointed or enlisted on the basis that certain specified matters are completed within a specified time; and
- increasing the maximum retirement age to which permanent or regular and Reserve members may be extended to 65. Additionally, the compulsory retirement age for Army and Air Force Reserve members (ie the normal retirement age in the absence of an age extension) was increased to 60 which is consistent with the compulsory retirement age for Naval Reservists.

Defence Determination 2002: Employer Support Payments, relating to the ADF Reserves Employer Support Payment Scheme, was amended by the Minister for Defence on 17 June 2003, with the revised arrangements for the scheme taking effect from 1 July 2003. These revised arrangements provide better support for ADF capability requirements.