

Mission Excellence Insights

What every manager should know about the
military reserves



Government policy means that more Armed Forces reservists are being recruited by the MOD. This paper, compiled by Mission Excellence, explores the benefits and dynamics of the relationship for both employers and their employees who have commitments as a reservist.

The insights and advice offered in this paper can also be extended to the employer / employee arrangement where the employee simply has substantial commitments outside their work.

January 2017

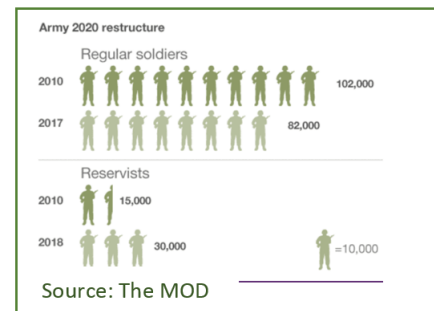
© Mission Excellence 2017

www.missionexcellence.com

WHAT EVERY MANAGER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE MILITARY RESERVES

Government policy is that an increasing proportion of our defence capability will be met by military part-timers or 'reservists' going forward. Assuming a successful recruitment campaign (not exactly a given), this implies that an increasing number of people working in regular employment will also have a part-time obligation for military service.

This short paper outlines some realities of the relationship between an Army reservist and an employer. The aim is to inform managers' thinking on the issue, as well as offering some insights as to the reservist's motivation and some tips for anyone considering the option. It is written from 2 perspectives: a business founder/manager (JH) and an *employee/reservist* (AC).



JH: What your business is signing up to

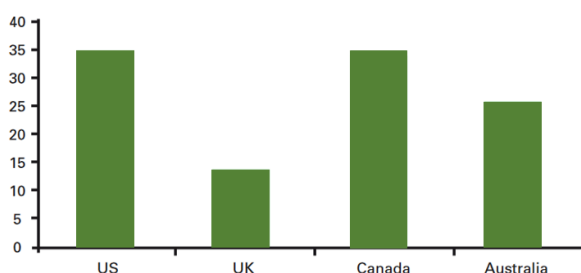
The nominal commitment is a number of training days per year, usually all at night or weekends, and a 2-week annual training camp. The reservist gets paid for their time on a day rate. They are, of course, also liable for call-up to join the regular army on operations. Historically, the chance of that commitment coming around has been extremely low, other than in certain specialist roles.

Prior to 1990, our military commitments were generally well within the capability of the full-time armed forces. Since 1990, the combination of significant cutbacks and near continuous operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Sierra Leone and Libya has meant that the possibility of call-up has been somewhat greater. It still appears to be a rare event for most reservists though, and is currently a reducing likelihood due to a significant reduction in deployment to the Middle East.

So, in simple terms, a reservist will require up to 2 weeks for annual training and runs, what is generally, a very small risk of call-up.

Percentage of reserves in international military forces

Source: Independent Commission to Review the UK's Reserve Forces (2011)



UK Government reserves target figures

Source: MoD Corporate Report: Single Dept. Plan: 2015-2020

	Target	FY16	FY17	FY18
Maritime Reserve	Trained	2,320	2,790	3,100
Army Reserve	Trained	22,900	26,100	30,100
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	Trained	1,860	1,860	1,860
Total	Trained	27,080	30,750	35,060

AC: Why I wanted to do it

I left the full-time regular Army as a Major after 9 years of fantastic opportunities with overseas postings, deployment on operations, sport and adventure, all surrounded by some truly inspirational people. But what you want in life changes, and my preferences became misaligned with the career plan that the Army had in store for me, so I left. The decision to join the Reserves seemed to provoke plenty of opinions – everything from ‘make a clean break, concentrate on your new life’ to ‘yes, do it - all of the benefits, few of the drawbacks’.

I followed the same approach I’d taken with all other parts of the transition from military to civilian life – listen to all the advice, take the bits which apply and discard the rest. I joined an extremely busy Reserves Regiment (are there other types?) and currently command a Squadron of 125 officers and soldiers, who all have civilian ‘day jobs’ ranging from public sector workers to law partners and everything in between. The longest serving members have been in almost since I was born, the most junior are millennials with a thousand other things going on. All are united by common training, tradition and a desire to do something different with their time.

United by purpose. *My first job after the Army was at a large multinational financial services company, where there were a surprising number of similarities to the military. However, even though it’s an incredibly important part of our society, I had little of the same sense of purpose. On a scale of 1-10, my days hovered around a 5, never terrible (nobody generally gets hurt by spreadsheets) but also lacking the highs. I missed the intensity of the regular stretch (for better or worse!) and shared experiences of military life. So, at that time the Army Reserves offered a purpose that resonated, both the higher one (in defence of the realm), and the closer, tactical one – looking after my reservist soldiers and getting them to believe it’s worth turning up each week, more of a leadership challenge in many ways than most of my previous regular Army jobs. Also, having committed to the task, I had, and still have, a belief that I can add value to the Regiment and its people and I want to see both succeed.*

Being part of the family. *While my city slicker career didn’t last long, and I’m now very happy in this small business much closer to my heart and more aligned to my background, two years down the line I am now in too deep with the Reserves to extract. I’d miss the people; the Regiment is perhaps even more like a family than my experience as a Regular, especially if you include the ceremonial units, veterans, cadets and community engagement. The Reserves survives and prospers primarily by engendering that family feel, such that people choose to come each week because they enjoy training with like-minded people.*

Back-up plan! *I admit, I used the Reserves as a hedge. It meant that when I finally took the plunge and quit, I had an income which could be flexed by doing some extra days of Army work so I could still cover the basics. The confidence that this gave me to take the leap was significant in my decision-making process. It also took the pressure off, meaning I could take time to look for the right thing plus I had a ready-made network of willing people to open my eyes to career options I’d never considered and highlight any opportunities.*

JH: What your business is actually signing up to

I recently saw what was basically an advert for a major defence contractor, comprised of some film of a reservist employee flying a helicopter as part of their military duty. It’s a really nice piece of promotion... if you’re a massive organisation with lots of spare capacity, your reservist is working part-time for your

biggest client, you can claim to be supporting the defence of the nation and you have the resources to make a professionally produced film about it for marketing purposes. Lots of wins!

In a smaller business, the main thing you notice is the empty desk. As an ex-military person myself, I was largely pre-disposed to be supportive of the concept but you do need to understand what you are getting into.

The actual commitment of your reservist employee is probably highly dependent on their specific role and their rank. In their military job, they may well have full-time colleagues who have an expectation that questions will be answered on your time, and your employee may feel a moral/professional obligation to do so. How do you feel about that? There may be a pay differential, in either direction. Which party should bear this? It's not going to be the Army! And there is the issue of the 2 weeks' annual training time. Holiday or not? I can only offer my own opinions and experience:

1. Make the expectation clear and explicit. I included terms relating to the reservist time in the contract of employment, specifically pay and holiday time.
2. We do not have the resources to be underwriting the defence budget:
 - a. We have the 2 weeks as unpaid leave; any further needs to be taken as leave. All is subject to mutual agreement.
 - b. Self-evidently from above, we do not underwrite any pay differential.
3. Keep each other informed and discuss potential issues before they become issues. I largely put the success of that arrangement down to mutual respect. We have a transparent conversation on any issues and feedback on the arrangement formed part of the annual review process. It also helps that AC is sensitive to much of the above, and doesn't make assumptions without discussing.

AC: The reality

***All of the benefits and few of the drawbacks?** Well yes and no, most of the benefits and different drawbacks is how I'd frame it in reality. I love that I can still be part of an organisation I believe in but have flexibility about it. For example, I don't have to accept a posting to somewhere utterly undesirable because 'it's good for my career' or the Army needs me to. I can leave, or stay, as long as I want. I still get to work with people I hugely respect – perhaps even more so, and have amazing training, travel, sports and social opportunities. However, I also get home most evenings and start on the Army inbox; it's a demanding second job, not a hobby. People's careers, managerial firefighting or strategy planning keep me from getting much use out of my Netflix subscription. The amount of time and effort devoted is insidious and I rarely stop to count it up or step back to ask if this is what I intended when I joined.*

***Guilty parent syndrome.** There's a constant tension between my jobs, and while my civilian employer is largely supportive of my choice to serve, I try hard not to push the boundaries of their goodwill. My primary loyalty must be to my company, I signed a contract, they give me a good income, and I'm fully bought into playing my part in making it successful. It's a particularly tricky balance with a small business as a. it's a lot more personal – there's a direct link between my input and our success or otherwise and b. there's no redundancy or bigger team to pick up the work when I'm elsewhere. On the flip side, these are exactly the reasons that I enjoy working here rather than a bigger organisation. So, I have a classic case of guilty parent syndrome, at times feeling I'm giving neither role 100% and that I'm in danger of letting down the people on both sides who depend on me. So far I'm just about managing to juggle both; I still get a lot out of my 'other life' and have learnt a few tips along the way which might be worth passing on to anybody considering the option:*

- *Be disciplined about time management – compartmentalise civilian work time and Army time. While I've set up a separate email account to deal with Army work, I've considered, but not yet taken, the next step - removing all Army-related communication from my phone so I literally can't see it during the day.*
- *Accept that compromises are inevitable. For me, this largely applies to the Reserves. While some things just need doing – people and career issues, for example - for other things, the principle of 'done is better than perfect' applies, or sometimes not done at all. But take heart, reservists develop some great time-management skills.*
- *Don't always say yes! Manage the Army's expectation and make sure they realise the unsuitability of timelines that are based on those working normal weekdays.*
- *Get managers involved, invite them to appropriate events and highlight the benefits eg skills cross-over or personal development. But be upfront about the realities or conflicts of time - understanding and communication is the basis of making this work.*
- *Give yourself a break – keep it in perspective (I make myself take 5 minutes occasionally to remind myself why I do it) but also remember to take time for other things in life.*

Conclusions:

AC: *I'm well aware that other reservists have much less (or no) support from civilian employers, so I feel fortunate to be able to commit to both roles. It's not something to be taken for granted, nor lightly, and it does take effort to make it work, but overall I believe the benefits outweigh the disadvantages for both sides.*

JH: Due to my own military background, I am supportive of those prepared to give their time to the reserves. However, it is important to appreciate that there is a cost involved. Due to the nature of our agreement with AC, we bear no real financial cost, but she does have other demands on her time, and works less total time per year for us than would otherwise be so.

So, what's the payback? Well, we might not be a major defence contractor, but there is an element of simply that it's the right thing to do. Then there is the potential for skill transfer and development of the individual. We have a strong ex-military presence within the business and so are perhaps less appreciative of some of the tangible benefits. However, for businesses where that is not the case, reservist service offers the chance to undergo regular stretch experiences and learn leadership, management and implementation skills from an organisation which has spent hundreds of years refining its expertise.

If you're not convinced on any of the above, I refer you back to AC's comments. Your employee's most powerful motivation is always internal; what's good for them is good for you!

January 2017

© Mission Excellence 2017

www.missionexcellence.com