**Group: M**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 1 Sep 1900 hrs

**Location:** Nescliffe

GR: This is group Mike and the recorder is now on. So the first question I’d like to start with is, who has deployed on operations with the Army Reserve before?

M4: Before this?

GR: Yeah.

M4: No.

M5: Nah.

M1: No.

GR: So this will be your first mobilisation?

M3: I’ve been a part of a…MACA.

GR: Yeah, that counts! What did you do there?

M3: So I was deployed last year, November 2021. I was based up in Perth, in Edinburgh. My role, specifically, I was in charge of a team of 13 of us and I would sort of liaise with a counterpart in the NHS and she would send me shifts and I give the shift to the Privates or Lance Corporals and they would go out ambulance driving. I’d also sort out transport to get them to and from work.

GR: And that was mobilised?

M3: Yeah, mobilised for about six or seven weeks.

GR: Fantastic, great. So a little bit of prior experience in the room with much more to come. So the next question is, how important do you think it is that Reserves do actually mobilise and deploy as part of their service?

M5: Very.

M4: 100%.

M5: It was one of the comments that was made when we certainly were going through \_\_\_\_[barracks] as \_\_\_\_\_[our unit], it was, why would you join the Reserves if you didn’t want to do it? And for me that hit quite home, because we are doing a job, you are getting a lot of training and it feels like that is the culmination of everything. To be able to come into a regular unit and for me anyway, to be able to do, the role with my regular counterparts. I don’t know how anyone else feels about that but that certainly feels like one of the reasons I joined…was to get some skills out of it but ultimately to do something like this.

M4: It’s having that ability to fall into a regular post and there’s only been a few times that reservists have mobilised, the Rifles, I think the Rifles went out and done TOSCA as a Reserve unit. They went and took it on. It doesn’t happen very often.

M5: Well, bear in mind, people in our one, and there’s six of us here, plus yourself.

M1: Yeah.

M5: There’s not a huge amount who are able to do that so size wise –

M4: -Our Regiment would never be able to mobilise as a Regiment.

M5: At the moment you wouldn’t have thought so, no.

M4: I don’t think ever! But…yeah.

GR: Are you all from the same sub-unit?

Together: no.

M1: I’m different, these are the same.

GR: OK.

M1: I’m from \_\_\_\_[Regiment].

GR: OK.

M1: So I’m all the way up there!

M4: But 100% that it’s…. you’ve got different concepts to it, like. You’ve got putting your training actually to use, you’ve got the…actually…I don’t like to say it, actually being a soldier, rather than just constantly training and then, like, even the little things like getting a medal for it for example, and that gratitude and actually having it. I’ve got kids, and it’d be lovely for the, to be like, oh, Daddy got this, Daddy got that.

M5: It does sort of put an end result to it from the kids point of view, being away from friends and family for weekends. Like what have you done? Well I’ve done this instead of, you are just getting paid to play soldiers, and actually be able to go, well, no, I’m doing it. There is an element that is, and I go back to it, it’s that culmination of every bit of training, and being able to come and do it.

M4: You lose the dress-up element.

M5: Yeah, Yeah. I get that. You lose the dress-up element. And also, again, I don’t know what you guys like, certainly I did, you joined to do something.

M1: Yeh, to do something.

M5: Because otherwise, I get it, it sells it on the AT, it sells it on the social element, it sells it on all this, but ultimately, I would have thought most people joined the Reserves, particularly after Iraq and Afghanistan, because you might end up serving there.

M4: But you’ve just said, you’ve just said the main word there: Reserves. Whereas with the mind-set of TA of Reserves has now changed and now you should…well they changed it, didn’t they? Territorial was you just stayed in the UK. That’s it. Whereas now you are a Reservist, you’re ready to go.

M5: Well, so just go back. When I did the OTC, back at uni, it was very clear, you joined and there was no chance of you getting called up, short of World War 3. And when they, I remember going to the Reserves now, and them being like, you need to understand there is a possibility you will be deployed. It was very clear from the outset that could happen.

M4: Hmm yes.

M5: Slight roundabout way, but same way.

GR: How about you? Do you feel like it’s important?

M2: Yeah. I think it’s important in terms of like the skill level. When you do it on weekends you do your job but then you do get some people that turn up this weekend and turn up, the next time, in like three months’ or five months’ time. Some people can take a year without turning up. You get skill fade. Whereas, if you keep turning up or with a 6 month deployment in your trade, you can improve so much more.

M5: You’re going to go back, one of the more experienced chefs in the Regiment.

M4: I think we will all go back more experienced and learning just from today, there’s things that some people have never done before or some people have touched years ago. But we are all going to go back with the experience and an extra qualification out of it.

M5: We are all going to take something back aren’t we?

M4: 100%.

M1: it’s like at my unit, we don’t really do your trade. We do a trade only on your trade weekends, like one, maybe two a year. So you do your trade, like, one weekend a year. And then all the rest is like, all different training-

M5: -it’s green stuff…it’s we’ve got to keep it interesting to keep people coming in.

M1: Yeah. So coming out on deployment to do your trade, to get the skills, because when I did my Class 3 they said to me that I have to do 2 ACT camps to get onto my Class 2, for me to progress, but my Regiment on their ACT doesn’t require a chef. So I can’t do that, I can’t progress. So whereas they give me this opportunity to get the cheffing in, to get the experience to progress.

GR: So for both of you, you are both chefs?

M1/M2: Yes [together].

GR: So to summarise, I suppose you…it gives you the opportunity to progress in your military career.

M1/M2: Yes [together].

GR: and, also gives you a chance to put all the training you have done so far into something worthwhile.

M1: Yeah.

M4: Which is ironic…because stepping up from a Reservist into a regular unit, and this is the issue I’ve had as I have come here, and my Regiment have been like, yeah don’t worry, you’ll get this, they will sort that out for you. And then I have come here and they are like, no, you are meant to have got that…you can’t go unless you’ve got this and this. So that was squaring that away.

M1: That was my experience.

M4: So it’s all well and good. Ahh yeah, go and mobilise and get the experience, get the quals, but actually before we mobilised we should have had those qualifications and been ready to fall into a job. It’s upskilling. There’s always going to be upskilling from a Reservists to a regular. 100%. Because regulars do it day- in, day-out. Reservists don’t, so you get that skill fade. But there should still be that baseline, for where we fall into each other….is my experience.

M1: Yeah.

M4: And like, same as yourself, like driving, you are in a job where you need this, this and this, and then you’ve…

M5: Well, to roll back to the original question, that wouldn’t have stopped me from putting my name forward and mobilising.

M4: Oh no, 100%.

M5: It’s part of it. I think the original question was, how important it is? It’s a part of it.

M4: yeah, sorry, we diverted there.

M5: It’s essential! For me, if you were a Reservists and you weren’t even going to contemplate mobilising. I get some people might not, particularly previous conflicts, there’s conflicting issues, morale, disagreements with the politics and stuff. But ultimately, you join the Reserves, you expect that at some point they might say go. We are quite lucky, TOSCA is quite a nice tour to go on. It’s not particularly controversial. No-one is going to say, oh god, I can’t believe you are doing that. You are not likely to get some of the feedback that people would have got from Iraq and Afghan.

M1: Yeah.

M5: But ultimately it’s something that a reservist needs to be aware of. You might get, you are going to get called up. And if you are not prepared to do that, then I kinda think that the Reserves-

M4: -What’s the point?

M1: Yeah.

M5: There’s something. You can do stuff that you do in the Reserves, elsewhere, yes you won’t get paid for it, but there are other ways of doing what we do-

M1: -Yeah.

M5: without that top level of, you’re going to have to do stuff.

M4: Are you saying go and be a cadet instructor? [laughs]

M5: Yeah basically! Go and be with the cadets!

M4: Yeah, but no, I agree with…people can pick and choose their deployment. Like, fine, there are some people who definitely are not going to want to go and go Afghan. Or Iraq or and that. Fine, I get that. But then there are things like Cyprus which is by far the easiest tour out there at the moment. My own…

M5: Yes, well let’s wait until we get back here! [laughs]

All: [laughter]

M4: Minus like the UK based ones, like MACA or TEMPERER or whatever else they have got rolling out.

M5: Yeah.

GR: So one thing you did mention was about the size of the contribution you thought your unit could put forward and you said that there are not many more of you here except those here in the room. So five plus a couple of others. Do you think that is pretty standard experience? Is that best effort for your unit?

M5: Well, I do wonder.

M4: There was loads of people put down for it. And then they got filtered out, or some got filtered out. And there was a massive, and I don’t know where it, and I’m not pointing fingers about where this has come from, but there was a massive communication error somewhere. Because people were stood down, for example, and then asked, “actually, do you want to go and do it?” a couple of months later. When they have already told their family. Bearing in mind we knew about it about a year before.

M5: It was last July. I remember because it was one of our last Zoom calls. And I remember the CO at the time being very very clear that the world was, and obviously it has changed this year, in a better place. This was the only time we were likely to get a tour to come up and if you were interested then there were no more than 30 places at the time. And then obviously we’ve come into it…slightly different because they were not asking for a full Regiment’s worth. I would imagine. I don’t know if it would have changed, if they had decided to deploy the Regiment, what the response would have been. But given that a year ago they were asking for names. And I, as I say, got stood down in January, well I didn’t even get stood down, I didn’t get a response. And then in April I was then told, “are you still interested?” And I kind of went, “err, yes”.

M4: and you’d already told your family…

M5: Having already told the family that it doesn’t look like it’s going to happen. Or having to then re-have that conversation.

GR: Does that kind of uncertainty and, frankly, mess around have a damaging effect?

M4: It’s the worst thing. From both your family and individuals…

M5: From some people’s response it definitely put them off. People that were good to go, were told they were not needed, were then told three months later if they wanted to go, were actually, well, no, now I’ve moved on and made plans.

M4: And you lost some good soldier that way. I can name at least three people that would have had something to offer this tour.

M3: ‘Cos in my Squadron we had umm, I don’t know of maybe Corporal and below, of the regular turn-out, maybe a good twenty of us that wanted to go, sort of thing. And like they said, we had the same situation, where one minute you are sort of more or less going and the following moment, yeah, you’ve been stood down.

GR: So conceivably you could have got the whole thirty? A platoon plus some people for the HQ.

M3: Potentially, yeah.

M5: Potentially, yeah.

M4: Without, yeah. Obviously you’ve got to take into account the passing bits and bobs and all that.

GR: Of course.

M4: But there was people who put names down who were not traded and stuff.

M5: But there were at least thirty people who put their name forward, as you say. There was some element to it. And we know the Rifles did it, as you said, and I think they were with a regular one as well?

M4: No, no all Reservists.

M5: OK, all Reservists went out, so we know there is within some elements there is a Reserve centre there.

M2: Even next year 71 Engineers is a Reserve unit is doing it.

M5: The whole unit?

M2: Yeah.

M5: Is that the one you are going for as well?

M2: Yeah.

M5: Going back to get a second one!

M4: But they do…so, like with the Rifles. That’ll be the whole Reserve Rifle Regiment. It’s not like \_\_\_\_\_[this unit] going. It’s be like \_\_\_\_\_\_[unit], \_\_\_\_\_\_[unit], \_\_\_\_\_\_[unit] or whoever, they would pick up, does that make sense?

M5; Yeah, Yeah. OK.

M4: As a Regiment, I don’t think they did it as a….they did it as a cap badge went out and did it.

M3: It’s different battalions, innit?

M5: Because it was, was it 4 and 5?

M4: I think so, yeah.

M5: Anyway.

M4: It’s like PWRR would get 3rd and 4th Battalions would uplift together.

M5: So when did your lot tell you about this one? You said it was fairly recent.

M1: I got told about three months ago about Op TOSCA. Said do I want to go on it?

M5: So that lines up with where we were finding out then.

M1: Yeah, so it was about…

M4: Yeah, but when did you first find out?

M1: Three months ago!

M4: Yeah, so we…

M1: Yous knew about a year ago. Whereas I found out about Op TOSCA three months ago. Got asked.

M4: We’ve been here three months!

M5: That starts to fit in with where they would have started to scratch around looking for more people.

M4: And there was from what I hear, and it is only hearsay, that apparently, you know, the Regiment we have deployed with, were changing what they wanted as well. So they might have asked for thirty, then they have asked for fifteen and then they have asked for more. I think it fluctuated, what was requested of our Regiment.

GR: Yeah, and that obviously messed around individual soldiers.

M4: Yeah, it all ripples, doesn’t it? It starts off as a query at the top but then by the time you get down and you have spoken to your family about it, it’s probably a wave. And then you’ve got to try and bounce that back. Whilst taking into account.

GR: Yeah, so I’m getting that the uncertainty is very unhelpful and also the short notice.

M1: Especially when I turned up.

GR: Did you find that three months was enough?

M1: It was enough, it was just for, like, it was a bit uncertain, especially when I got here. I turned up and they went, “who are you?” I wasn’t actually on it.

M5: So similar experience, we are still finding it now. We’ve got guys who are not with us now, going out with the other team, who are messaging saying that the Regiment knows we are here because we turned up and thankfully we turned up more than just one person which was probably a benefit because there was a collective of us. But again, it took us a good two to three weeks for us to be booked in. Even now, they can’t because of the way it is working between the Regiment and Bassingbourn, they can’t see all our information so there’s a, so I know this because I went in and saw, there is paperwork on the desk, with every Reservist’s name on it, of all what they can see, but they can’t see the full details. So that joining experience, everyone’s been very welcoming, on the ground, everyone’s been great, but from an infrastructure point of view, it’s…

M4: We got moved Squadrons three times in a day. Like genuinely, got told we were this Squadron, and then they were like, no, you are this Squadron, and then we went back to that Squadron. Nobody knew where we belonged. And I think that’s a communication error. Mainly, I think that element is where we were with the Regiment we are with now, but I also think it was partly where we have come from as well.

M5: It’s got to be end to end.

GR: well I guess that doesn’t really give you, when you first turn up, it doesn’t really give you confidence, it’s like a, first impression.

[laughter]

M5: We’d obviously done Bassingbourn for a couple of days. And that was very structured, I think is probably the best way to describe it. So I was expecting the same…well when we mobilised I don’t know what I was expecting. You’ve done it before so you roughly know, but we…I, certainly from the way they described it I was expecting more of a conversation. But when we got to Bassingbourn it was very much, no. Even when you talk about expenses and stuff like that, they said “this is what you can claim for, there is nothing else!” There was no other discussion about any other considerations. Which was good, in one way, because it meant there was no grey area. But in other way, I know it sort of, it stuffed a couple of people over.

M4: It screwed me over a little bit…

M5: But digression again…

GR: You also mentioned about medallic recognition. Is that particularly important to you? Why do you think it is important? What does it mean to you?

M4: To me, I think it’s important. One, because I’ve got family who have earned medals and I would like to be able to do the same and two, for my kids as well. It allows them to be proud of something like I was when I saw those from my grandparents and great grandparents. And also it has a bit more of an impact on myself because it relates to my day-job, so they go hand in hand. I can wear my medals in relation to my day job and vice-versa. So it has a bit more of an impact whereas with some people…it’s, you earn a medal with the Reserves and that will only impact you when you are doing Reserves stuff. If that makes sense?

M5: I mean, I don’t know how everyone else feels…Getting a medal is not the sole reason for going on tour.

M4: No, No.

M5: But it’s a nice thing. Because it’s a recognised element of, you go on tour, you are recognised for doing something in this manner. And it’s something that, particularly for the Reserve, and you get new guys coming in, you are going to go on parades you are going to have something that others potentially don’t, it just helps to generate conversation. It’s that little bit of…almost aspirational. And I get some of the…you do get some of the guys coming in, the regulars coming in with their absolute racks, Afghan, all these tour medals. The guys, not necessarily want to have the same experience, because some of their experiences are quite harrowing, but at the same time, they have been recognised and it’s quite nice to get some of that recognition in the same way. It’s not the be-all and end-all, but it is a nice add-on to the rest of what we are doing.

GR: So it’s a recognition of your commitment and your activity as a Reserve soldier…like a mark of honour within the organisation.

M5: Kind of…You see someone with a medal and they know they have done something.

M4: Yeah, I remember being on Remembrance parade and the Padre came out and no word of a lie he had a rack! His rack was hanging off the side of him! And I was like, that is one ally Padre! And it’s like, yeah, I’m never going to be able to do anything like that, as a Reservist; my missus has already left me because I was in the Reserves too much, and now I’m going to be deployed. But it is an aspiration, and I think it’s important, yeah, but it’s not the main reason. What else do you get in recognition from the Army?

M5: You don’t, you get the pay, there’s all the extra stuff.

M4: Yeah, but recognition?

M5: True, but it wouldn’t necessarily stop me from doing things like CABRIT. I would quite happily do something like CABRIT as well.

M4: Yeah.

M5: This just came up first and it’s, this just happens to have a medal attached to it. We had a conversation, it’s a nice to get, it’s a nice bit of recognition. Particularly since we will do the medal parade with \_\_\_\_\_\_[Regular unit] when we get back and it’ll feel like we have been a part of the full experience.

GR: So it’s almost like a shared experience, you know, as well. You’ll see other people with the same medal, either within the same unit or another one-

M5: And you will have talking point.

[pause]

GR: You also mentioned about what you might call, or what you thought were, controversial operations. And obviously you are going on Op TOSCA in the near future and you said, well, that’s not really a controversial operation-

M4: That’s all politics for you \_\_\_\_[M5]. [laughter]

GR: Do you think that’s quite an attractive aspect of our operations for Reservists.

M5: Yeah, I know from my own point of view, deploying on TOSCA was an easier conversation to have with family. Because it’s perceived as a UN Peacekeeping tour, perceived as fairly low level in terms of threat. It’s not a combat tour, you know, the risks are…the running joke is that the worst injury you will get is heatstroke or falling out of a kayak. So it’s an easier sell to friends and family I guess to explain why you are doing something. When I say controversial, I’m taking, sort of, you know, at the height of Iraq or Afghan, there were a lot of politics around what we’d be doing other there.

GR: So it’s almost universally seen as an intrinsically good thing to do?

M5: Yeah, good thing, yeah. Whereas others, you talk about Iraq and Afghan and people would respect what you have potentially done out there and they may have their own opinions of what is going on out there. Most people, because it is probably seen as a holiday destination, you don’t really see it as the buffer zone, and then you say, “oh yeah we are going out to do peace keeping,” and they go, what? I didn’t even know there was something going on!

M4: And I get that, like, with Afghan, all these names going round like baby killer, which was something that was associated with those tours. I’m not saying that that was correct. But those names have gone out with those tours.

GR: Personally, do you think that would put Reservists off? Would it put you off?

M4: Personally, not me, but nobody likes me in my day-job anyway, so I’m used to that negativity anyway. Well, I’m used to it, constantly. Whereas, everyone loves Tescos! [laughs]

M5: The Army talks about branding quite a lot and I think from a Reservist point of view that branding still comes into it, and it’s to go back to the selling point, it’s a harder sell, so as a Reservist I would still absolutely want to go and do a combat tour, had Iraq and Afghan still been on, I would have volunteered for that, a more difficult conversation with my friends and family, but again that’s just it, you don’t necessarily serve to pick and choose, because regulars aren’t allowed to do that. Within elements of both those previous conflicts, Reserves weren’t necessarily able to pick and choose either, they were told, you are going out. But it’s certainly it makes it more…because the Reserves have that option, just to go, you know what, I’m just ducking out, I’m not going to turn up, because that’s an option, it does make it slightly more difficult to sell some of those more. Because you always get into the conversation of why do you want to go to war? Are you some sort of lunatic? Sort of thing?

M4: But that’s also, to add to that, I agree with you. You’ve got, when you are in the regulars, you’ve got a bubble. So you go on tour, come back, and you are surrounded by people that are in exactly the same situation or have that understanding, whereas you go back to driving, you go back to your day-job, you are then surrounded by people that don’t have that understanding. You go back to the office and be like, yeah I was in Afghan last week. Like, do you see the difference, whereas you come back here and say, “I was in Afghan last week,” they will be like, “yeah, wicked!”

M5: [inaudible]

M4: Yeah, yeah, but I mean the difference between tours and like, the…both the good points and the bad points that go along with doing certain tours. Some people will see like the likes of Afghan as doing well, you know, you are out there and you are taking on…

M5: You are doing that.

M4: Yeah, you are taking on terrorists, whereas others will see it as, you know, baby killing and having that conversation with a bunch of regulars is different to having a conversation with…

M1: Civilians.

M4: Civilians that you work in the office with that know you as Dave from finances, and then you come back and say, “yeah, I was in Afghan.”

M5: That’s one of the things that helps in Cyprus. People go to Cyprus on holiday, it’s not a faraway destination and they can visualise some of what they have seen out there so it helps ground it a little bit I guess. ‘Cos as you say, there isn’t that disconnect.

M4: Well it’s historical as well. It’s…we, how long was it? The ‘70’s?

M5: Yep.

M4: Yeah, so. Four, fifty years ago that this is what we are dealing with. Whereas the likes of, like, Afghan and the politics to that is only five years ago, ten years ago. I know it started a lot longer but there’s still, like-

M5: Well, it’s twenty years ago now! Yeah, good god!

M4: Is it really?

M5: Yeah, 2001. Bloody hell!

GR: Do you feel like the type of the operation and how controversial it might be is a factor in your thinking when it comes to mobilisation?

M3: For me, personally, I’d volunteer for anything. I suppose it’d probably be slightly different if I was with the regulars. I’ve done the Afghan, so yeah, just…

GR: So for you, a tour is a tour?

M3: Yeah. A tour is a tour. It’s all about the experience and, yeah, just gaining skills to take forward in your military career.

GR: Yeah.

M2: Well, for me, I have a similar opinion to him as well. I will do anything that came up. And, yeah…

M1: It’s what you joined for it. You don’t join to be sat in your unit doing weekends. You join to actually get deployed and do your actual job.

GR: So weekends are not the be all. But it enables you to come out.

M1: Yeah. It’s just practising for the real thing and training you for your actual job, really.

GR: So you mentioned that you had deployed on the recent MACA.

M3: Yeah.

GR: Op RESCRIPT. How do you feel about MACA operations? Are they the sort of things that are worthwhile and Reserves should do?

M3: Yeah, for me, I definitely think that Reserves should be doing it. It was something completely different. I’d never had thought I’d be doing that sort of role. The only problem is, it was a bit short notice. I was literally, say, at work on a Monday, and I was a Bassingbourn on the Tuesday. But overall the experience is, just met some good people, yeah, it was very good experience doing a MACA and I got to drive the ambulances. We didn’t get to do any blue-light training, that’s the only down-side of it.

M5: Did they at least let you press the button?

M3: Yeah, yeah, we turned it on, like as part of the first-parade checks. Yeah, I definitely think Reserves should do more MACA taskings.

M4: You could just lean out of the window and shout “nee-norr”?

M3: Yeah, Laughs.

M4: Nee-norr-nee-norr [imitating ambulance siren].

GR: What is it about MACA that you think is particularly suitable for Reserves? What is it about the operations?

M3: One, it’s basically in the UK so you are not really going abroad. When we went through Bassingbourn we were there for only a couple of hours. It’s something you could do really quick. Yeah, just, I think, it’s just probably a bit easier to get Reserves to do it than getting a regular unit to move about…

M5: It’s less…pressure. I’ve heard from colleagues who are in the regulars who have said it is absolutely what the Reserves should be doing, so…particularly as it is us in our local communities. So there’s a chance for you to go out, go off in your local community, do a bit of good, sandbagging in Yorkshire or whatever it is…

GR: So It’s uncontroversial, fundamentally a good thing to do. Everyone can relate to it?

M5: Yeah.

M4: Everyone understands…

GR: There’s an obvious benefit to it at the end.

M4: An ambulance driver or sandbags or floods, food deliveries, stuff like that. Everyone can relate to that. Whereas, as we said about Cyprus, half the people have got no idea that we are even there.

M3: Yeah.

M4: They just see it as a holiday destination. And then you go even further to the Afghans and people are like…and they even know what is going on. It’s the politics and I’m staying out of it. Or people like to live in their safe little bubble and if they don’t know about it, it doesn’t happen.

M3: Yeah.

GR: Do you think the understanding of your colleagues, friends, the wider public, does that have an impact on your thoughts and impressions and attitudes towards mobilisation? Or is it that it happens and you will do it anyway?

M4: Not really, yeah, it’s just a conversation, different conversations.

M2: Sometimes, one of the things that prevents a lot of people from deploying sometimes is families, sometimes it’s girlfriends, sometimes it’s the people around them and, like you said about the MACA, if it’s something around the UK, someone would understand. If you tell someone you are going to Edinburgh, you know where it is, or if you are in London…

GR: You are clearly benefitting your own people.

M2: Yeah. There’s a few people that got deployed to East London during COVID. People understood that, oh, the Army has been mobilised and they are actually helping towards COVID. And yea, something like that is much easier to understand…

M3: It’s a lot easier to sell to your family and friends, going out to East London, yeah.

M4: But it should be like that, yeah. It always baffles me that we’ve got engineers in the Army but we pay Babcock loads of money to look after our vehicles. And it’s the same, like, we were struggling in hospitals and delivery drivers and stuff like that. You’ve literally got an entire Army. Yes, you’ve got bits that need to be protected here, protected there who have got their own jobs to do. There is still plenty of troops, no disrespect, doing fuck all that could be used. That’s always a concept I struggle to understand.

M5: That’s a big conversation for another time! We could spend an hour or more on that one!

M4: But you get my point, what I’m saying?

M5: Yeah, yeah.

M4: We got used to ambulance driving and it made sense.

[pauses]

GR: So, what, we’ve talked a little bit about types of operation, what makes it feel easy or attractive to mobilise and deploy on an operation?

M5: So for me, the financial assistance was certainly an easy way of selling it. Particularly from the additional allowances point of view. It makes us going away an easy thing, if that’s the angle you are going for? The financial benefits are, yes I want to go and do it. This is what I want to do, which is what I want to do personally. But ultimately to support the rest of my family, the Army supporting with that and indeed having an employer who is supportive also. It certainly made my life easier and made that decision. The decision was made and I made that decision, and then the fact that my wife said yes, the financial assistance was covered, and work said, yes within rapid succession. They were all very supportive.

GR: It didn’t undermine your initial decision?

M5: It didn’t. There was no pause for, oh can I do this, because I knew there was stuff that was going to cover it.

M4: You couldn’t do it, well I couldn’t do it without the financial support.

M5: No almost certainly.

M4: Like 100%, and that’s the issue with the Reserves. Like there’s some people that get a pay rise coming to do this or match it to do this. But the majority of Reserves, if the Army didn’t support us financially, you just wouldn’t…physically couldn’t…like you’d lose your house. Like you couldn’t do it. So that is a massive element. And it was a big seller for me, to be fair. Because my plan is, I am saving for a house, as we spoke about previously, I’m saving for a house because of this I am able to do that. Because I am saving money.

GR: What sorts of things make it attractive for you two?

M3: Pretty much the same. Just to go back to it. The financial side. In my civvy job I’m on a very decent wage and if I was to deploy as a Corporal I’d be taking a considerable haircut on my payslip. So yeah, it was good that the Army matches your wage. It makes it a lot easier, for your family and whatever.

GR: Are there any other positive aspects you feel to it? Not just the financial side of things, which stops it being a negative.

M5: Well it just means you can enjoy the rest. Things like the adventurous training, the camaraderie, all that stuff that you join the Reserves to experience. You are then able to do that without that worry. So the financial element, yeah. Getting on the AT, getting on a recognised tour, doing the day-job. All this stuff is great, but ultimately that financial element allows me to do that otherwise I’d be sat there grabbing my hair thinking how can I afford that? I’d love to be able to do that I don’t think I would be able to.

GR: So doing your job and also you mentioned camaraderie, being part of a bigger team?

M3: A Team, yeah.

M1: Yeah.

M5: It’s a very different experience. It was mentioned before, the bubble you get within the Army. Everyone, the banter is there, everyone gets stuck in. There’s a real different sense that even the best team might have on civvy street. It just can’t reflect the fact that we are staying on camp, where we are there during the week and everything. It’s not like, it’s 5 o’clock and I’m going off home. The lads are there and out in the corridor chatting. It’s a bizarre but very good experience.

M4: The experience I’ve had before, you compared it to being at uni.

M5: Yeah.

M4: I never went to uni. I didn’t have enough brain cells for that. But it’s nice because I aways felt like I missed that, not going to uni. My partner went to uni, she enjoyed it. Whereas now I feel like I can compare this to that, if that makes sense?

GR: Do you feel like joining part of a bigger team is important?

M1: It is, because obviously in your Squadron, they are kind of small. So, especially mine we are quite a small knit Squadron. So coming to somewhere like this where it’s a big thing that’s going on, you get to meet more people, different people.

GR: And of course you have the problems you mentioned about only 1 or 2 people turning up and you don’t have a coherent team.

M1: Especially, like with my trade. Because you see the same people doing the same kind of thing so especially coming out with different people. You learn their kind of skills. So you are improving on your own skills because you are learning something new to what you’ve already been shown. Like, we do specific things and they are doing their specific things and they are completely different. O you are learning two ways of doing things so you can combine them together and obviously you are improving your own trade and your own abilities.

GR: And what things would actually make it unattractive to mobilise and deploy.

M1: I’m probably different to all these because obviously I’ve had it very different to these. They have been mobilised, come here, months before, had all the information months before, got all their stuff and everything, whereas I come and they didn’t know I was arriving. I had no kit, I had no information what I was doing. Where I was going. I had nothing. So my experience was completely different to everyone else.

GR: How did that make you feel? It must have been pretty daunting to turn up expecting to be looked after but actually…

M1: Especially as I come up on my own. There’s only me from my Regiment. So I’ve come up on my own and they wasn’t expecting me. I’ve got no information whatsoever, no kit…

M2: Because when she came in, I think it was the second, on a Tuesday. You came into there on the Tuesday and she was still pending. So someone had to move her on to somewhere, for them to confirm whether she was to stay or going.

M1: It took a couple of days…so for a couple of days I was, like, am I staying or am I going? So it’s like, what do I do? For about 2-3 days…

GR: So that uncertainty is quite unattractive, especially, there must have been times when you thought of leaving it?

M1: Yeah. Having got to those times near the end of last week, it was like, is it really worth it? And then they were like, yeah, you are on it and I started to get all my kit and everything and I started to get to know everybody else and I thought it’s actually going to be…alright.

M4: Like quite good?

M1: Yeah.

M5: You had a very similar experience to what we had though it was a larger group so we basically had ourselves because we had, obviously we had an officer with us as well and probably had much better top cover. But even now, it sounds very similar to us. I’ve just had one of the guys message to say apparently the Regiment can see none of his gear. And that, for the first couple of days, and we got stuck in, but even then, anytime it was ok, let’s go and get booked-in, no-one knows where we are, no-one knows what to do with us. No, you go here, there was a good couple of days going from pillar to post. And it still happens, and is still happening now to a degree. So you went for your DAC-

M3: -Yeah there’s still my documents they still haven’t got…still in Bassingbourn.

M5: One of the guys doing 3 months’ worth of BMX-ing said we are not on any of \_\_\_\_{Regular unit] paperwork.

M3: Yeah, like myself.

M5: Been training for this like, 3 months before we turned up.

M3: Yeah, it’s just the uncertainty.

M2: Yeah I think I also have one to add to that.

GR: Please…

M2: I had a lot of med appointments that they checked for the same thing and they go, oh, you haven’t got it. And then someone else calls and goes, no, “we need to check you again”. And then we need to check you again, and again for the same thing and it just feels like a waste of time. In the end, they were like, all your tests are clear.

GR: So the system is not helping itself.

M5: No. There has been a lot of repetition, a lot of show us this, have you done this?

[overtalk]

M4: We must have shown our passports at least twenty times.

M1: Yeah. The amount of times I’ve had to show a driving licence, passport, everything…

M4: You run the risk of losing it every time you ask us to bring it in.

M1: You just have to carry it around everywhere!

M4: You run the risk of losing it bringing it in and taking it home. It’s safer if I put it in my top drawer and leaving it where it is. But it’s also separate, another thing, for me, I was quite apprehensive about the regular-Reserve divide.

GR: Yeah?

M4: Because it definitely exists.

M1: You can tell.

M4: And it…a lot of what we get is banter. You know, being called STABs and stuff like that. It is banter…but…wherever there is banter there is also usually, there’s got to be some element of truth to it.

M1: A bit of truth…

M3: So you feel there is a divide?

M1: I’ve had a few conversations where it’s like…oh you’re a reservist? And then they sort of, like, back away.

GR: So you feel like they treat you differently?

M1: Yeah.

GR: Do you worry that you are not up to the standard you think they expect? Indeed, do you see the regulars as the standard you need to meet?

M1: Not really, I think, for me we don’t do it as much as everybody else. Whereas they do it for their trade, is a month if not more long. Ours is two weeks. So we don’t get…

M2: Three months…

M1: Yeah, three months. Ours is two weeks. And we don’t do it as often. We do it four times a year. Plus two weeks’ training and you do that training, that two weeks, and you won’t do that training again for two years.

GR: So you recognise that, for practical reasons, you have a bit to catch up on.

M1: Yeah.

M4: That’s not always the case, though. In the med side of things, it’s…fine, they’ve spent longer on their initial training but then when you look at experience. Looking at, for example, my day job, I’m coming across trauma, week-in, week-out, and then, because I do the trauma element as a first responder…I do the med stuff within my day job. And then because of that, I then focus a lot more on primary healthcare in the Reserves. So things like Reserve OH, attaching to Sandhurst and stuff like that. So, there seems to be a divide of, actually, we do this, day in day out, I get that, but then at the same time, this is what I do, day in, day out. And that’s not so much here…

GR: So you have cross applicable skills from your civilian job.

M4: Yeah, which isn’t recognised because we are Reservists.

M5: See that’s-

M4: -And that’s not just here, that’s everywhere. When I go and work at Sandhurst, for example, that’s the same there. Yeah, but we do this, we’ll have to babysit you.

M2: I’ve also seen a few exercises, whether that’s shooting competitions, driving competitions where Reserve units have actually gone and done a lot better, like in these competitions, they’ve actually won these competitions. And being attached to \_\_\_\_[this Regular unit] we kind of meet every now and then anyway, and we do things like section attacks and things like that. And during those section attacks or doing something, they will go to someone, and even if someone knows that particular skill, they will say “oh, that’s not how you do it, we do it this way.” Whereas, the people in the competitions and things like that, they single out the individual and you are actually doing it right, you are doing it well and yeah…

M5: I certainly think with the Reserve-regular thing, I almost quite enjoy it. Because I enjoy coming in with this reputation that you won’t get a huge amount from them and nine times out of ten…

GR: Proving people wrong?

M5: Yeah! This was the irony…

M4: It makes it easier to prove it wrong when they put us at a lower bar.

M1: Yeah.

M5: I hadn’t even intended to do it. Like when I did my ALDP with a regular cohort at \_\_\_\_\_[regular unit] and ended up coming top student which obviously caused much entertainment. But at the same time, what we do is different from what the regulars do. They have a day job. We literally spend, in the run-up to this, six months just training for TOSCA. When we do weekends, we don’t do trade weekends because we have to do green weekends, so our green skills are, ironically, particularly when I was going into a regiment full of \_\_\_\_[RLC trade] and \_\_\_\_\_[RLC trade] my green skills were better than theirs because their day job doesn’t require them to sleep in a field!. Whereas on a weekend to get us there, oh, let’s go and do some infantry stuff because…

GR: So you were more comfortable and confident than they were?

M5: Comfortable isn’t the word I would use. But ultimately I like the element of a challenge and there is that bit where you go, are those people avoid me because you are a Reservist? But, certainly from my perspective, I felt reasonably welcomed into the Regiment.

M4: 100%, 100%.

M5: And people for the most part are…yeah…you get to talk to them, yes you have the banter about the Reserves and some of it is not always…you know it goes a little bit close to the line.

M1: Yeah.

M5: But ultimately you go, we are all being paid to be here, ironically, most of us are being paid more than our regular counterparts. For jobs that effectively, because we do, without being rude or flippant about it, that we do as a hobby. It’s a very flippant way of describing and doesn’t properly reflect what regulars do versus what reservists do, but ultimately, their basic training is fourteen weeks, ours is three. And yet, we can then deploy to the same standard as they can fairly happily and for everyone giving grief, I’m sure at the end of the tour it will be the running joke. That we have managed to do more than X, Y and Z.

GR: But you don’t…I’m detecting that while there might be the odd frustration about the regular-reserve divide, however you perceive it, but actually it’s how you manage it rather than it being a massive off-putting factor?

M5: For myself, it is a managing thing. And you would expect that the build and you sort of balance it out. But the initial contact is always a little bit…

M4: It’s an apprehension.

M1: Yeah.

M4: And it doesn’t need to be now. It was like, before, I worked with regulars a lot before at Sandhurst and stuff like that and it was an apprehension then and that was put at ease, but then, it was another, just personally, it was an apprehension of mine before coming here. Like being on the Public Order training, was great and it worked out perfect for me, because there was another medic who knew the people so it was easy for me to slip in. Whereas for other people, they’ve kind of just been thrown in the deep end. Ok, you’re…like the Reservists who are in this group split off, go into your respective groups and they didn’t have anyone to, like, ease them in.

M5: But ironically, the way the Regiment has ended up deploying us has kind of been of benefit, because for the first week or so we did basically, not necessarily stick to ourselves, but we did make…we stuck together as a thing. Obviously now…

GR: Getting the administration sorted before you were put in your respective sub-unit?

M5: Yeah, getting some structure, we’ve got guys out in other bits of it, and I know, with the exception of yourself [M3] we are all support company but we are all doing different bits and you guys are cheffing, but you are well embedded with the team now.

M4: But for the record, like I say, it was an apprehension. It hasn’t been a problem. If there is banter, yes sometimes it is frustrating, but, like there’s always things that are frustrating banter wise, and that’s fine. It goes both ways!

M5: Don’t get too hurt by it!

M4: Yeah, Exactly you take it on the chin and you give a bit back. But overall, I feel like, we’ve been very well welcomed into \_\_\_\_\_[regular unit] as reservists, I don’t know how you guys feel?

M1: Yeah, at the start it was a bit, oh, thingy, but as you have got to know people and they have got to know you, it has a lot leed [?]. But obviously like where people hear you are reservist they do have their own opinion.

M4: Yeah, and it’s usually people that haven’t worked with reservists before, though.

M1: Yep.

M4: That form these opinions. Rather than actually speaking to people. “Yeah I worked for a Reservist before and he was alright” or, “he was a complete mong.” But you get that in the regulars as well, so. We don’t want anything more than actually, yeah, you are happy to work with us. I don’t need to be…have praises sung on a regular basis, I just want to know that actually you’re happy working with me because ultimately that’s what we’ve got to do.

GR: Yeah, OK. SO professional relationship is the bare minimum and if you make friends, that’s even better?

M5: Yeah.

M4: I don’t have friends!

M5: But ultimately, exactly. If you can work with me professionally, cause if you can’t, that’s a problem. And if you can, brilliant. And if we end up being colleagues etcetera and getting a bit of banter as well it just makes the whole experience more enjoyable.

GR: So, clearly you all volunteered to be here. How do you feel about if that choice were taken away and it were the case that people were just compulsorily selected for mobilisations?

M4: That would make my life easier!

M5: Would make my life easier [overtalk]

GR: If there was less choice it would be easier.

M4: Genuinely, that would make my life easier. Because I could have told my missus, told my job, as far as my job is concerned it was compulsory anyway.

M1: [laughs]

M4: Because I could of…it was a worry that we had, that if someone put on a letter and sent it to the employer that Corporal so and so has volunteered, my job would have turned around and said “no! You are not going”. That was genuinely a worry and a conversation we had about that prior to it. But even then with the missus as well, I could have turned around and been like…

M5: It’s not my choice.

M4: Yeah. There might have been a bit of that conversation to be fair! [laughter]. But then I think she clocked on to the fact I volunteered for it. But yeah, that would have been easier.

GR: So actually, that legally mandated aspect of it makes it easier to manage your civilian life and relationships, as long as the other supporting elements are there, and there is not a worry of you having to say no?

M1: Especially work wise, yeah.

M4: As long as families are looked after at home, ie the finance element of it and there is heads up to it as well. If we got thirty days’ notice to move compulsory, it would throw a lot in the air. That’s different to getting three months and six months.

M5: But equally, now we have done it, thirty days’ notice to move wouldn’t necessarily be as much of a drama.

M1:Because we know what is going to happen, and what’s coming.

M4: Because we know what to expect.

M5: Having done it, I now know who I need to go to and a I can go, bang-bang-bang, done. It’s a process we know and it would be easier to follow the process next time.

GR: And do you feel like it’s different for each scenario. So, I know we discussed Op TOSCA is not a kinetic operation and you might say is not the most urgent in terms of the country’s foreign policy. Do you think being called-up at very short notice, thirty days or fewer…

M4: For example like for a Ukraine?

GR: Well, yes. Look at a warfighting scenario. Do you think your tolerance for having that choice removed is greater?

M4: I think it’s even more so. There is more understanding and it makes it easier. Being compulsory called-up to TOSCA would definitely raise questions and be like, hang on a minute. Definitely, enough people out there that would want to do this, it’s not that serious. Whereas something like COVID through to Ukraine or back into Afghan…

GR: Where people can understand the urgency.

M4: Yeah. We were going through people like, there was people rolling-in. rolling-out. It’s...yeah, that’s more understanding than if you were to be compulsory mobilised for the Olympics.

[pauses]

GR: We spoke a little bit about this earlier on. There is obviously quite a range of experience as to how much notice you all got for this mobilisation. We’ve got a year, we’ve got three months, that kind of thing. And thirty days has been put out there, which aligns with the policy side of things. Do you think it depends on the scenario as to how much notice is appropriate.

M5: Well, ironically, the paperwork did not come out for thirty days.

M4: Mine was even less. Mine got lost in the post.

M3: yeah, it was about thirty days, wasn’t it?

M1: Mine was-

M2: Before we came here there was a guy who turned up on the Friday before we came here. And he was like, I just got told about this last night.

M3: Was that the Welsh guy?

M2: Umm, yeah. There was one guy who came up on the Friday before we came here-

M4: -What, for Bassingbourn?

M2: No, for TOSCA.

M3: Yeah, the Welsh guy.

M2: He might have been.

M4: On one of the weekends? The training weekends at \_\_\_\_\_\_[barracks]?

M2: Yeah.

M4: Yeah, yeah, the Welsh guy!

M3: Yeah.

M4: But he got shit canned, didn’t he? I don’t know why. So we were given the heads up the year before. But, confirmation was about a month.

GR: I see. So the unofficial feelers-

M4: -but we can’t do anything until you have got your letter. And we were like, I wanted to give up my house, I was renting. I wanted to give it up.

GR: Well, given the uncertainty you described….

M4: Yeah, well it, like genuinely was stressful.

GR: You feel like it is not real notice if it changes so frequently and it is so, tentative?

M5: Yeah, but then I think that ultimately that comes down to the conversations we were having with the Regiment were actually, if we had gone…and yes, because you want to prepare soon as possible…once the paperwork came through, it was very easy to start doing stuff. Whereas when you’ve got people going, “oh yeah, you are on it, wait for the paperwork,” the extra conversation didn’t help.

M1: Well, yeah. So you had like thirty days for your paperwork to when you went to Bassingbourn and then come here. Whereas I got told I was to be at \_\_\_\_\_\_[regular Army location] on the 23rd, I got told that the Friday before. So I had like, nine days to sort my stuff out. I got my Bassingbourn paper on the 19th, on the Friday as I got to \_\_\_\_\_\_[regular Army location] on the Sunday. So I actually go Bassingbourn on Tuesday to get deployed.

M5: Mobilised?

GR: So you haven’t actually mobilised yet? So you will be on Reserve Service Days until you mobilise.

M1: Yeah. But I can’t be mobilised because of dental so I won’t actually get mobilised until October.

M4: Are they not going to back-date that?

M1: Don’t know. They are in conversation with it.

M3: Oh, so you are not flying out with us on any of the Main Body flights?

M1: No.

M4: Neither am I, though.

M3: Why? Oh, your situation.

M4: It’s not even the op, it’s a course. So I don’t think I’ m flying out now until the end of October.

M1: Yeah, so you will be on the flight with me.

M4: Well, I’m hoping not. No disrespect to you!

[all laughing]

M4: I’d rather…sail!

M1: I got my Bassingbourn paperwork on the Friday as I drove up to \_\_\_\_[Regular Army location] on the Sunday.

M4: Jesus!

M3: Very short notice.

M4: That’s bad. That don’t even happen, well, yeah…

M1: So I actually come here, I’ve done all the pre-deployment training done everything before I’ve even got deployed.

M4: They might turn round and say no. [chuckling]

GR: So very short notice for you even on top of that.

M1: Yeah.

GR: And does that make it unattractive? I mean, you are still here!

M1: Yeah!

GR: But does that generally make things unattractive and it just happened to fall into the right circumstances for you?

M1: Yeah, I think because it’s more last minute rush around get everything, be up there. Do this, and especially, like transport wise. Because, yeah, I drive, but I didn’t want to bring my own car up so I had to get a Squadron car. So I had to get a Squadron car but because they didn’t want to leave it here I had to get a hire car, so they had to sort a hire car out. And sorting all that out, in that short space…

M4: It always baffles me that you rock up to MT and say, “can I have a vehicle?” And they look at you like, “what the fuck is a vehicle?”..Like it’s your job to look after this.

M1: Especially when you go your MT and you go, I’ve got my drivers’ licence, can I have an FMT, no you are not allowed it. Why? Because you’ve not had your licence long enough!

M5: The irony is that we will all go back to our regiments and everyone will ask, “how was it?” Hopefully they will have great things to talk about, but when they ask about mobilisation, you’re gonna go, “actually, mobilisation was an ache.” Which potentially puts people off.

M1: Yeah, put’s people off. So at the minute, obviously I’m going RSDs until I actually get deployed which means I’m actually losing out on money because I earn more in my civvy job than I do my military.

M5: Which Bassingbourn won’t backdate.

M4: I don’t think they will backdate.

M5: Because, obviously, they will then pay you for mobilisation.

M1: yeah, so I’ve lost out. By the time I’m at the end of October comes, I’ve lost out on 2 months’ worth of pay.

M5: And again, all it does is sour the experience.

M1: It does put me off.

M4: This is it, this is the question that will need to be asked at the end of this tour, is, would you do it again? And then…

M1: I’ll let you know at the end!

M4: The benefits of being on tour are going to have to outweigh the negatives to the positives and obviously you’ve got a considerably bigger pile-

M1: -of negatives-

M4: -of negatives at the moment. Especially around mobilisation notice being so short.

M2: Like LCpl\_\_\_\_\_[reservist colleague] he is in the same situation.

M4: Yeah, he done RSDs for three months.

M2: RSDs for three months.

M5: And he’s a builder or a scaffolder?

M3: A builder, gardener, landscaper. So a lot of cash.

M5: Yes, so potentially quite a lot of not on the books stuff. Which at Bassingbourn, that’s again…

M4: That’s screwed him over because…

M5: Big bucks.

GR: Listen, we have kind of covered all the key questions I wanted to discuss. Before we wrap it up, are there any final points that anyone wanted to raise. Perhaps if the conversation moved on but had in the back of their mind on the topic of mobilisation and deployment?

M4: This is the reason we joined and there’s always going to be work-on points on both sides. But ultimately, it’s going to be a question at the end that we are going to have to ask ourselves, would you do it again? At the moment, I’m definitely a yes.

M5: Yeah. But we still have six months out there to decide!

M4: Yeah, exactly that.

M5: Will your relationship survive, stuff like that.

M4: That’s what I mean. And obviously other people have got different experiences where they would probably be a “no” at the moment. But hopefully that will change throughout. It’s going to be after, a personal question to ask yourself at the end of mobilisation.

M5: Definitely one worth asking.

GR: Great. Thank, you. I will turn off the recorder.