**Group: C**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 15 Mar 22, 1930 hrs

**Location:** Stoke-on-Trent

GR: Right, this is group C. We are now recording. So, really just to start us off a bit of an ice breaker, and I know, you’ve already filled in your questionnaires. Which of you has already deployed on operations with the Army Reserve before?

C1: Yeah, I have.

GR: OK.

C2: Yes, I have.

C3: Yeah, yep.

GR: All three! Excellent! Perhaps you could say where were you deployed to before?

C1: Uhh, I deployed on Op TOSCA with 2 MERCIAN.

GR: Yeah.

C1: Doing the UN tour over there in Cyprus. Six-month tour with them. Then we did Op RESCRIPT which was 4 MERCIAN getting deployed to help out with the COVID pandemic….testing people, that was 3 months long.

GR: Hmm, great. And yourself?

C2: I was similar on Op RESCRIPT with 4 MERCIAN.

GR: Excellent.

C3: Yeah the same.

GR: The same?

C3: Yeah, Op RESCRIPT with 4 MERCIAN.

GR: Excellent. So that’s really good! You might be surprised to find you’re the first group I’ve spoken to where everyone has deployed on operation before. Umm, in terms of your perspectives on that, then how important do you think it is that Reserves mobilise and deploy as part of their service?

C1: yeah, I think it’s good for them, ‘cos it gives them an insight into the, as a Reservist, it gives them an insight into the regulars, into like a regular unit, how they work, which is probably a bit different to what we do in Reserves. Like they are there every day, we only do so many days a year. So you can do a lot more phys, a lot more insight stuff. Like doing stuff every day, where, like, in Reserves you don’t do everything every day so you sorta, like, sometimes you can forget stuff. Like get skill-fade, and that. So it works both ways…

GR: So you feel it’s that it’s, you know, fitness and professional competence…?

C1: Yeah, yeah, well you’re there every day doing it, in the regs, aren’t you?

GR: Yeah….How about you?

C2: I definitely second that as well. It definitely helps with that with the fitness and sort of competencies. To sort getting up to the level of our regular counterparts are at. Umm, but also, I think that’s one of the main reasons a lot of people join the reserves as they want to be involved in operations of be mobilised….

GR: Sure.

C3: Yeah, I, I found that when I decided to join the Reserves I just mainly I wanted to do the training and get involved and I thought, you know, what I thought was that training would kind of satisfy my desire to do some military stuff. And then, umm, but the more you get into it, the more you…

[background noise – door opening interruption]

C3: …think well actually, umm, once you’ve done a bit of training, the next step will be to an actual deployment. You know, to progress a little bit for the same reasons that these guys are saying.

GR: So just a natural part of joining progression?

C3: Yeah, a natural part of progression. It wasn’t really for me, it wasn’t really for me. I didn’t have in mind straight away, right, all right. You know, go do, you know, do Afghanistan or anything [laughs] yeah.

GR: No great.

C3: It just, kind of, naturally becomes the logical next thing to do.

GR: Sure. And you’ve mentioned actually that you’ve, you’ve all done the MACA of Op RESCRIPT and you’ve done the peacekeeping as well. Do you think they are the sorts of operations that really suit Reservist units in general or your type of unit in particular?

C1: It’s a good insight, like, but I think we’ve got quite a few people went to Afghan and that, people you chat to and that. Said it’s good over there, like. Some people had it hard…with some of the attacks they had and that.

GR: Hmm. So you feel like Reserve units are quite broadly useful?

C1: Yeah Yeah.

GR: So you’ve got Warfighting at one end and peacekeeping and MACA, which, you know, danger or threat terms are quite opposite.

C1: We do quite a bit of training here, like. Where we swap from doing an active role in combat, or an active role out in the public or helping the country out, like….Peacekeeping and stuff like that. Like switch from one to another. I think that because we are Reserves, you’ve got, like, daytime jobs, which is different to being a regular all time. You got that to fall back on which make you, like, so you can do like combat tours or peacekeeping tours. You’ve got a lot more insight into different bits of jobs and that.

GR: Do you think it's helpful having a civilian job outside…like a different perspective?

C1: Yeah, Yeah yeah. When you go…I’ve just done a PJNCO cadre and I’ve been away with the regs and that and they are like, if I do your job I wouldn’t know what I was doing, like! And I’m just like, actually straight through. Yeah, like asking loads of questions, like what you do in civilian life. What sort of jobs are out there and how to get into stuff like that.

GR: Yeah.

C1: Yeah, just a lot broader.

GR: Yeah.

C1: Different, different areas and stuff.

C2: When we do training on weekends, so the sort of training we are geared to do as Reservists we definitely more suits a sort of warfighting role. Umm, the training we are doing is geared toward conventional warfare. Umm, whereas the sort of peacekeeping and MACA tasks, I think Reservists, to take a civilian and make them a Reservists it’s kind of easier to put them on? MACA tasks, I would say.

C3: Yeah,

C1: Yeah, I would say…

C3: Yeah. I kinda felt like, yeah, using Op RESCRIPT as an example, I thought that was quite, I know it’s not our primary role, we are a Reserve Battalion of an infantry regiment, but it’s…. I felt like it was quite like an obvious thing to use for and feel like we fitted into it quite well. You know? It didn’t. I don’t think anyone who was on it were like “why we been chosen to do this”? “ What are we doing this for?”

GR: So, so you found that MACA was, in itself, really worthwhile.

C3: Yeah

C1:Yeah

GR: Helping the local community?

C3: Yeah, especially at that time.

C1: Yeah

C3: It was the start of the pandemic…you know, it was sitting around on furlough or do something useful! So…

C1: It was just something different and everyone really got stuck in together. No one was moaning, like.

C2: Yeah, it was good, like.

GR: So you felt like it really brought you all together as a team

C1: Yeah

C2: Yeah.

GR: ‘Cos you were doing it.

C1: Yeah it was something different, wasn’t it?

C3: Yeah, I was very new at that stage. I hadn’t finished all my training at that point.

C1: Yeah.

C3: So it was a really good, like, in for me with the Battalion, kinda get to know people and it was just, just, really glad to get on it. It was just good timing for me. I know there some of the other lads who’ve done a lot more who maybe might have found it a bit more boring than I did. It was all new for me.

GR: No, brilliant. And you say, the…, you feel like it will brought you together as a team. Do you think it's really important to have the opportunity for Reserve units, battalions to deploy as a whole team?

C1: Yes, yes. It’s good to deploy as a whole team and everyone gets to know everyone else. I know all the folks out in the Battalion and everyone gets to meet everyone in the Battalion.

GR: So there’s longer term benefits as well?

C1: Yeah. So you go on weekends and you don’t see some people for a while. I’ve just been on this weekend now, and think, “I’ve not seen you for ages,” like. That’s how you get to know a lot, a lot of people.

C3: And it’s a bit, it kind of gives you a bit of confidence, you know. If you know that a lot of people you know from past weekends, the past, you know from Op RESCRIPT and done a lot of weekends together, if they’re going to be on, like, for example, Lithuania, we’ve got coming up, you know, there’s quite a lot of people you know and like going on that then -

C1: You tend to go don’t you

C3: Yeah, you’re a bit more, yeah, “I’d be up for that.” You know, some of your mates are going. Whereas if you, I would personal, if you were just to go and join independently go and join another regiment doing something, even if they’re doing something really interesting, I’d personally find that a bit harder, because you wouldn’t know anyone.

GR: Yeah. How did you find the MACA?

C2: Yeah, yeah, I definitely felt it was beneficial to deploy as a battalion on Op RESCRIPT rather than being sort of backfill, umm, for the Regiment, umm. Yeah, it was good.

GR: Yeah, great. And you mentioned as well about, I suppose, with the start of COVID, there was a lot of people furloughed and you didn’t have anything else to do…but clearly you still had a had a choice, especially with the key worker aspect. In general, how important do you think that choice is when it comes to, to mobilisation?

[group pause]

C2: I, I don’t think that the choice is necessarily important because as a Reservist that’s about, I said it before, I signed up to go on operations. So when an operation is pushed in my direction, umm..

C1: You try just to get on it, don’t you?

C2: I’d think on it, but I’m more likely to take it than anything else. I’m not really…

GR: You, you take it as part of your duty-

C2: Yeah.

GR: -and what you you’ve signed up-

C2: Yes.

GR: -for another things take a lower priority-

C2: Yep.

GR: - when the call comes? It is something you both, both feel as well?

C1: Yeah.

C3: Yeah…

C1: You have to think about it first, obviously –

C3: C3: Yeah…Yeah…

C1: -you’ve going away for 6, 7 months…

GR: What sort of things do you think about?

C1: Urrr, like when I did that TOSCA tour, things like my child. I was going through a bad time with my ex-misses through courts and that. That was all up in the air. I just ended up going in the end but managed to speak to my daughter most days. Like stuff to do with work if you got a job when you come back and stuff like that and other aspects and that…all the people in your family and stuff…they all start panicking don’t they. You’re gonna go to war and ain’t gonna come back and that [chuckle].

C3: Yeah. I think that’s why we do quite well with the COVID thing, because I was on furlough I didn’t really have to run it by civilian employers or anything.

C1: yeah.

C3: I think we could just go and do it. But I suppose if it was maybe now, so came up it would be…

C1: I’ve got a good relationship with my boss, like, we’s best mates. He was ringing me and ringing me every day. “What you doing, what you doing? When you coming back?”

GR: So, he was really interested in what it wanted to know, what you were up to?

C1: Yeah.

GR: Really good.

C1: Yeah, like he sticks by me. You just love getting away at weekends and going away and that. So he’s sound about it all.

GR: And well, when it comes to mobilisation and how would you have to explain it to your families and employers, do you say, “I’ve been asked to go”? or “I’ve been told to go”?

C1: I say to my employer I’ve been told [laughs]…it’s just easier.

C3: I don’t give them the impression I have much choice. It’s like, sorry mate, I’ve got to go! [laughs]

C2: Yeah, I’m the same. I wouldn’t really tell my employer I’ve been given an option. With my family and home side of things I’ve had prior discussion about that before I sort of join the Army, so that’s all, sort of, covered…

GR: So that you feel like they support you because they know it’s important to you?

C1: Most of my family was Army anyway, so.

GR: Right OK.

C1: So they are used to it!

GR: It’s good to have that family support, but do you feel that you’re your employers support you as well? Even if you do say well? It’s a direction, not a, not a volunteering side of things?

C1: Yeah, yeah.

GR: And do you think that idea of choice is different between different sorts of operations? Do you think if it were, we already said that MACA was fundamentally a worthwhile thing, did you feel like having no choice about deploying would be easier to stomach than something that was a bit more in the grey area, a bit more contentious?

C1: I think on that, Op RESCRIPT, we didn’t know what we’re doing at first…we were like, what’s going on? Will we get all the people that are deceased and all that?

C3: Yeah there was quite a lot of chat about it

C1: Yeah, no-one knew what they were doing!

GR: There was a lot of uncertainty?

C3: Yeah.

C1: Yeah, we thought we were going to be like a meat wagon, or something like that. Then it was on my TV though. It’ was that Zombie thing, wasn’t it? Like the dead in the streets, the way the come over. But it was nothing like that, was it?

GR: Yeah…How did you feel about that uncertainty when you were mobilised and you knew you were being mobilised to respond to COVID, but you didn’t know exactly what you’d be doing?

C3: I thought it was quite exciting. I was like…

C1: Yeah. I thought that.

C3: You know…

C1: It was like this has come out, whoa, this is something different.

C3: Yeah, I think morale was pretty high, wasn’t it? Everyone was quite up for it. Like you were saying about choice, like, everyone who was on it had chosen to do it.

C1: Yeah, they were up for it.

C3: Everyone was quite up for it.

[pause]

C1: Yeah, I think ‘cos no-one knew exactly what it was-

C3: Got a bit dull by the end though, didn’t it? [laughs]

C1: - kinda like this disease thing coming through the world. Everyone was like, “yeah, I’ll go off!” I don’t think they were worried about what was going to happen to them.

GR: So it sounds like because you were together as a team, the uncertainty was less important.

C1: Yeah.

GR: It was more important you were there as a, as a team…And although you weren’t sure what sort of task would be doing, how well prepared did you feel for it? So you heard, we’re going on a MACA, once you look through the book and find out what MACA means…?

C1: We did quite a lot of training prior to it, didn’t we?

GR: Yeah?

C2: We did 2 weeks…

C1: We went to Old Carr, did all the MATTs, and we did a little, stuff to do with COVID like cleaning vehicles and all the stuff like that and the background into it all in all, the disinfecting, suiting up, and all that, so we got quite a lot of on-the-ground training.

GR: So you felt like even the short time before you actually started working…you were confident?

C1: Yeah, we was confident, we’d had two- or three-weeks training, hadn’t we? As we were on Op RESCRIPT, everything started changing, like didn’t have to wear masks on certain tasks.

C3: yeah.

C1: Or gowns and stuff like that, all started changing as we were going through it.

[pause]

GR: And so that’s really interesting for the MACA side of things, how about for other kinds of operations?

C2: I think it sort of comes down to your own personal moral, sort of, opinion, as to how important the choice is. So if it’s, if it’s more conventional war, or if it’s sort of counter-insurgency like we saw in Afghanistan, maybe you would want more of a choice, depending on how you personally feel about the situation that you been asked to go into.

[pause]

C3: Yeah I’d agree.

[pause]

C1: Yeah, it’s like that UN tour I did…. It’s like conflict, innit but you don’t really get much action, it’s like peacekeeping, and there’s no actual…I don’t think anyone’s even fired for years, have they?

GR: So it’s low risk, but because it is United Nations…

C1: Yeah, it’s low risk but you could get shot, I mean, ‘cos they’re armed, and you’re not armed, are you? So it’s a bit, you know, they could just shoot us at any minute! [laughs]…if they wanted to, like.

GR: Yeah.

C1: It was good, though, like….

GR: Towards the start you…and I have forgotten who it was, I’m sorry, mentioned that you felt like for, on a routine night you train for warfighting.

C1/C3: Yeah.

GR: But for things like MACA, there is a much lower requirement.

C1: Yeah, we don’t really train for that, do we? Mainly we do a lot of FIBUA…warfighting and that.

GR: well, that’s the exciting stuff, right?

C3: Yeah, yeah, well if I’d joined the Reserves and they’d said, “this is how you do a COVID test” I’d have been very disappointed! [laughs]

C1: Yeah, we’ve just been away this weekend and done fighting in buildings and houses.

C3: Yeah.

C1: We do a lot of that now, don’t we?

C3: Well, ‘cod you wanna get on with the military skills while you are here…and if it happens that were are on a MACA task then fine, but…

GR: So for you, I guess the building blocks of being useful are having a strong team together and training for the hardest job that you may have to do-

C3: Yeah.

GR: -and you are confident that anything they might have to do, everything else you could pick up-

C1: yeah, yeah

GR: -just before you go.

C3: Yeah.

GR: Okay.

C1: Lower stuff is a bit easier, isn’t it?

C3: What’s that?

C1: Lower stuff.

C3: Yeah, yeah. To do the testing….it wasn’t….difficult, was it?

[pause]

GR: And… when it comes to deployments, how often do you think it’s reasonable for you or reservists in general to be called upon to mobilise and deploy?

C1: Normal? Hmm. You normally get every three years don’t you? They like you to go on one tour. I think it’s all [unintelligible]. But you get lots of choices, don’t you? It’s like you get PIDs like, if you don’t want to do anything you can go on then and get PIDs to different places…get deployments all the time if you wanted.

GR: So if you’re keen you can seek out lot of opportunities?

C1: Like now, I think there’s one in Estonia, is it Estonia? March ‘till September and then September till next March again, if you want it.

C3: I suppose, they are often 6 months, aren’t they?

C1: Yeah.

C3: It’s quite a big chunk of time.

C1: It is, isn’t it?

C3: If they were kind of shorter ones like? You know, like…

C1: I think one came up with the Ambulance service, that were three months, helping them out.

C2: Well, that’s the beauty of being a Reservist, you can kind of…you have that choice.

C1: Yeah.

C3: Yeah.

C1: You do get notified quite a bit, don’t you?

C3: Yeah. There’s always stuff getting messaged out-

C1: Yeah.

C3: -Anyone interested? You know, but, like I say, quite often it’s with other….you know, which is fine…and maybe when you have done a few you got more confidence to put yourself out there and join other regiments. But for me personally, still being a bit new, I’m more keen to do stuff with 4 MERCIAN.

C1: You get quite a lot of stuff with 1 MERCIAN, don’t we, like?

C3: Yeah….

GR: Doing it as part of a team. Again, we come back to…sticking with the team and the people you’re close to is an important motivating factor, really. Having that opportunity?

C3: Yeah. I mean, for me, it wouldn’t put me off. You know if someone from some regiment was doing something really fun and it was on a time scale I could do it, then it’d be up for it. But you know, for the longer, bigger things you know. It would help me decision making if a bunch of people from 1 or 4 MERCIAN were going.

GR: Interesting, you mentioned timeline. How much notice do you think is important for you to get for being mobilised?

C1: If you’re going on a 6-month tour, like, a couple of months’ notice.

C3: Yeah, Yeah those big things.

GR: Yeah. Is that to allow you to to get your personal life…your family...your employer –

C1: Yeah, Yeah.

C3: By and large, they quite often want…to be able to deploy you’ve got to be current on all your MATTs and everything…and quite often that takes time.

C1: Yeah. It takes quite a lot of work to get away. You’ve got to do all your MATTs and that…get your jabs…your passports.

C3: Yeah, it can take a good couple of weeks.

C1: Yeah, there’s loads of stuff, isn’t there?

GR: So it’s the military training and preparation but also your personal lives that you want to sort out as well? And which aspects of mobilisation do you think? Make it easy or difficult to actually make that decision and deploy?

C2:I think the most difficult thing is the employer. For me.

GR: Yeah.

C2: Getting the employer on side.

C1: I’m not too bad, ‘cos I’m self-employed. I work for me mate, like, for a good few years, like. He can moan, like, but being self-employed there is not much he can do!

C3: With my employer, I think if I gave them enough notice, they would be happy with me doing pretty much anything. But like for yourself, that’s a pretty common thing, isn’t it? That the employer is the big obstacle.

C1; Yeah, with you gone 6-9 months, isn’t it?

C3: Yeah.

GR: Yeah, of course they need to potentially find somebody to come up to cover your job.

C1: But I think the reserves have got something in place now, haven’t they?

C3: But a different employers have different interpretations of that, don’t they?

C1: Yeah, we had payroll train someone up or something, to take your place while you are away, or like, you get funding or something.

C3: Yeah.

GR: And when it comes to big, easy or difficult do you, do you think the Army makes it easy to deploy or difficult to deploy and mobilise? You’ve already said there are lots of opportunities that are offered out to you…

C1: Yeah, yeah.

C2: I remember on RESCRIPT, my employer was kind of asking me questions, but I was out day-to-day doing the COVID testing and there was somebody designated within the Battalion who was dealing with my employer or my behalf, so that made it quite easy. My employer was sending me E-Mails and I eventually managed to get them to contact the member, I can’t remember what the role was within the Battalion..

GR: They were doing liaison, basically?

C2: Yeah. So once they contacted that person, my employer wasn’t, sort of, asking me too much and they liaising together. Which made it easier for me.

GR: OK excellent. I’ll just look back through my notes and see if there’s anything else I wanted to cover. [pause] So when it came to mobilise, and I’ll use Op RESCRIPT, as an example because you will have the same experience, what did you feel when you were called-up, called-out to mobilise? When you got the letter or E-Mail through?

C2: Good, felt good.

C1: I got it through the post, me.

C2: Yeah, quite exciting to be going away and doing something with the Reserves.

GR: So, you were actually doing your job?

C1: Yeah, yeah.

C3: It felt like a really good opportunity. I felt, me being quite new at the time, that it all came around so soon. I hadn’t even finished all the training, yet. Going around, really doing something, really.

GR: And how did you feel afterwards? Did you feel like the, that it was worthwhile? What, what you did?

C3: Yeah.

C1: Yeah, yeah, I think it was worthwhile.

C3: Again, not so much the actual role itself, but just the kind of-

C1: It was good

C3: -…being mobilised….yeah…just knowing that much more about how the Army operates.

C1: We, we met a lot of public as well, didn’t we?

C3:

C1: Thousands and thousands of different people. Different ages and all that. Chatting to them through the windows and all that. And like old people were panicking like mad, thinking everyone is going to drop dead, shaking in their cards and that. And you had that police force coming through, fire service and all that. It’s all different. Everyone chats to you. People in households caught it but wives won’t catch it and asking why, and that.

GR: Did you feel like you got a lot of support from the public?

C2: Yes.

C1: Yeah.

C3: Yeah.

C1: They brought a lot of stuff down, didn’t they? Like the crates of food, like chocolates, and that. Children brought us all Easter eggs. And the church and stuff come down. Got all their pictures took and all that and donated loads of stuff.

GR: And do you think that…Did that make it feel better? Does the that you got that recognition from members of the public?

C1: Yeah, yeah. Everyone was on your side, like.

C2: I think it was nice to be to be recognised by the public but it wasn’t necessarily needed.

C1: No.

C2: We were all pretty high morale anyway.

C3: Yeah, yeah.

C2: Anyway, so it was nice to be recognised, but it wasn’t necessarily needed

GR: So you already felt like you’re doing something good.

C3: Yeah.

GR: And the fact that other people recognised it was nice. But actually you still you still would have felt good even if you’d been heckled or yeah, or whatever.

C3: Yeah, Yeah yeah. Of course, there are always people who will do that…. And we’ve spoken quite a lot about…you all feel quite strongly motivated towards being part of a team. What is it about potentially mobilising as an individual or being inserted into another unit you didn’t know, that makes it seem less attractive?

C1: I guess it’s like in civilian life, isn’t it? If you get another job. And you go to a new job, you’re flapping and that. It’s a bit scary, like, at first.

GR: You feel like you are starting again building relationships?

C3: Yeah.

C1: Yeah, jumping into a load of different military lads. Stuff like that. What are you thinking in the back of your head? Am I up to scratch? Do I know everything? Can I perform to their standards? Stuff like that, really It’s always there, isn’t it?

C3: I mean you can get settled into it pretty quickly. I was just like, just a little, like this…the first day of a new job. Well, yeah….[trails off].

GR: So you feel like if you were to go with a regular unit, say, you feel like they have a higher standard that you would want to meet, and you just need a bit of time to get up to, break into that team and become a useful part of the team?

C3: Yeah.

C1: Yeah. Saying how we went with 2 MERCIAN. I can’t think how many it was, quite a few of us 4 MERCIAN went with 2 MERCIAN and we were like on our own. And they were there, it only took about a week and then everyone, like, integrated, and everyone gets on with everyone then. At first there’s a bit of a thing, you’re reservist, you’re regs, there’s always a bit of banter and that.

GR: And having training before hand, of course, will help.

C1: Yeah. Some places you’re better doing stuff than they are and some places they are better doing stuff than you are…

[pause]

GR: I’ll just have another quick look over my notes...[pause] Okay. I think that really covers off all the questions that I had. Thanks very much. Have you got any final points or any questions that you want to mention or raise about mobilisation or anything like that? Great. OK. I shall turn off the recorder now.