**Group: K**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 26 May 22, 2010hrs

**Location:** Farnham

GR: The recorder is on and this is group kilo. The first question I’d like to put to you is, who among you has deployed on operations with the Army Reserve before?

K4: Yes.

GR: Okay, so you have. Anybody else? [shaking heads] OK, so could you tell me about where you went?

K4: So, overseas I was on Op TOSCA in Cyprus and, I don’t know if you wanna include it, RESCRIPT.

GR: That definitely counts. It’s a UK operation, very important.

K4: Yeah, so UK operations, Op RESCRIPT.

GR: Was anybody else in the frame for deploying, but came close but didn’t?

K1: Well, yeah I was…I dropped out of going to the Falklands last minute, but that was due to work opportunities that came around at the last minute and a family unfortunate event that happened also as well.

K3: I volunteered for RESCRIPT but I had to give my work 4 weeks’ notice and when I came back to the unit with the dates that I could do, they said they had already mobilised too many people and that I was no longer needed. So, wanted to and volunteered but didn’t end up mobilising.

GR: How about you?

K2: No. None of the above.

GR: So actually we have got a really good range of experience then, in terms of has actually deployed and then very nearly and then not, so I think that makes for good discussion group that has lots of different opinions. The next question then is, how important do you think it is that Reserves do mobilise and deploy as part of their service?

K2: Possibly rephrase the question or is that fixed?

GR: It’s not fixed, no. OK, I’ll rephrase it…

K2: Can I just, because there’s two things. I think there’s a lot of respect to those among our peers if you have deployed. However, I think depending on peoples’ civilian careers, then it is difficult for certain individuals to take time out.

GR: Well, so you really, you’ve obviously thoroughly understood the crux of what I’m getting at, I hope this this evening is…first and foremost, do you think it’s important that Reserves mobilise and then what affects that, later on? So certainly you’ve mentioned civilian employment and also you’ve been affected by that as well.

K4: So, personally I think Reservists should mobilise. Ultimately, it’s not a hobby or a club. We all here to do a job at the end of the day if needed, however, I don't personally hold it against anyone, as it was mentioned, people have careers, people have families. You know, fitting it in, can be difficult. I’ve got more flexibility, so I’ve been able to go away and do something. I understand others don’t have as much flexibility.

K3: For me, I think the flexibility element is really important and that, you know, mobilisations aren’t just six, nine months. You see opportunities coming up for three weeks here, four weeks that that are a short period of time and I think are equally as important because for us as reservists, fitting in around careers. Those can be a bit easier to fit in. And to sort, you know, take that amount time away from work, especially for me in my career shorter mobilisations would personally fit in better. So I think it’s important to have that flexibility and you know, length of time.

K1: I think I agree with that because, like what was just said, getting a deployment for six months when you’ve got a full-time job when you are employed, you’re not going to have employers who would agree to that. So like for example, these are people with the other services, the fire service for example, they can’t get six months away from emergency service to do something like this, which is also another service and I’ve got a couple of mates in the regulars who have been deployed and they’re only away for two or three weeks before they come back. So my question is, how come, you know, the regulars, I understand that’s their full-time job, but being deployed to Poland for three weeks and then coming back…how come they have the opportunity to go for few weeks, whereas we go for no less than three months by the sounds of things.

K2: So I'm in the opposite school of thought. I would prefer a longer deployment.

K3: But I think that's what the flexibility things come, like having both types of opportunities.

K1: Yeah. You know, if I could go on a deployment for 2 years, perfect. But then at the same time, in between everything you’ve got going on. If you can get a two, three, four week deployment. Then even better. And then once every couple of years or once every year, whenever you can, you go and do three, six, nine month deployment.

K2: So I think the problem you have there is the fact that you need pre-deployment training. So, a lot of the time when you go on a 6 month tour, you have three months pre-deployment. And because they’re regular, they’ve already met that standard where we’re not. And then for myself is, I’m self-employed and again, this comes down to what type of employment. So I’m my own director, you know, I run my business. If I’m having to commit to something and I would have to essentially give up a contract which is my, I got a single contract essentially and I would have to give that up and it's very difficult to get that again. Which is what my personal circumstances..

GR: So it’s not it’s not your employer that's problem ‘coz that's you! It's just the circumstances you are in.

K2: yes, my circumstances are that I would then, yeah…

K1: I am in the same boat with that, being self-employed. You know, you limited with. You’ve got the flexibility that you can just go, but at the same time you haven’t, because if you’re limited, to like you say, one contract at a time. Very hard to pull that back after being away for so long. And to find the contracts that are out there.

GR: Yeah. You have to be very aware of the sacrifices that you are making in your wider life is what you say?

K2: So if I’ve got...I have a mortgage so I need to be able to cover that. My reservist pay does not cover that. So, therefore, I would be, you know, the risk to reward scenario and again as you were saying, like, whilst there are also opportunities, for example, being deployed, but no medals. And you’re giving up a lot of your time, and effort, and all the rest of it? And you’re not being…I know it’s not just about the medals, and that’s a lot of the time, however….it is because you want to be something represented, the sacrifice that you made. And if it’s just a short deployment that doesn’t have one, then, why won’t I hold out to something that is?

GR: So, it’s interesting you mentioned medallic recognition. What does that represent to you? Because it means more than just the piece of metal and the cloth attached to it.

K2: Yes. Yourself. You have medals, and I do not. We’ve been in a similar time duration, haven’t we?

K1: Yeah.

K4: I didn’t particularly do it for the medals. It is a nice to have. Going to functions and it’s nice to show off and show that you’ve been. It’s that physical item that you have been there and done the job. The main reason I went away was, to mobilise and actually get out and use the skills I’ve been taught, put those into practise. [pauses]

GR: So if I could try and summarise that, for you mobilisation is being able to go out and do doing something worthwhile that you’ve trained for. And, as a side benefit, the medal actually kind of shows that you’ve done that and maybe remind yourself a little bit, and others, that that you have done that.

K4: Yeah, but on the only other side as well, if I had a choice of two twelfth-month mobilisations, one was medal earning and the other wasn’t, I’d probably go with the medal earning.

K1: I think the medals mean different things to different people. Some people see medals as a…like a push to do something, you know. They want that medal, they want that, showing it off, all that sort of thing. But then other people aren’t really bothered by that. And you don’t really see that often. Now, I think a lot of people are willing to go away when the carrot is dangled in front of them. But when that’s not there, they are not willing to go. I think you know it’s nice to have a medal, don’t get me wrong, I bet it’s lovely to wear it, but at the same time, it’s that personal thing, isn’t it? You know, it’s to you personally, it means a lot more when you see that that you’ve been away and got that and used what you’ve been taught.

K3: I suppose it’s not a recognition sort of thing, I don’t personally have medals either, you know. But, as reservists we sacrifice a lot from our civilian lives and our civilian careers to go away on a deployment and to mobilise so. You know, yeah a medal would be nice to have, to have that pride and have something to be, yeah, be really proud of and wear when you’re wearing the uniform that you’d wear medals with.

K2: Like I’ve always said that if there was a deployment, of a significant nature then I would be willing to give up the contract and I would want to go do it.

GR: By significant do you mean a serious war-fighting situation, is what you’re suggesting?

K2: War, yeah. So, there are certain operations that are still, you know, you could earn a medal by being deployed to it, but that wouldn’t necessarily, for me personally, that wouldn’t be a driver because you’re still managing to take-out significant risk from my personal career and all the rest of it.

GR: For what you might consider to be a war and operation of choice rather than necessity?

K2: Well, they’re not like, for example, like Op TOSCA and things like that.

K4: Op SHADER, possibly.

K2: Op SHADER, yeah, for me that’s…Yeah, I don’t know. That personally, that doesn’t drive me.

GR: So those two, I suppose, are examples which for you don’t break the threshold if you like, even though they are-

K2: -Medal Earning.

GR: Medal earning. Yeah, I see what you mean, okay….So we talked a little bit about the medallic recognition side of things. In some cases, that could be a motivating factor. What other things, do you think make it an attractive proposition to mobilise and deploy?

K4: Me personally, it meant I was on more money. Just cause what I was getting paid previously. And then you have all the entitlements as well. I really enjoyed having LSA.

K3: I think for me it would….you know, what are you being mobilised to do? Like, do I feel like I really want to be a part of it? Is it a humanitarian aid mission which I personally feel would be really worthwhile to giving up a period of time in my civilian career to go and do, that sort of thing could be important for me.

GR: For you, does it matter who you go with? If you went on your own, would that be a positive or negative thing?

K4: Personally-

K1: I think a bit of both-

K4: I would have rather gone with my unit.

GR: As in from this unit here?

K4: From this unit, year. However, my unit wasn’t going away but I still had that urge and there was opportunities, so I went with another unit.

K1: I think you got away with people you know is always a benefit, but then the same time you go with people you don’t know, there’s no distractions from it. So you completely focused on it, not going on FIRIC to the Falklands I was pretty gutted about it because, I’m just not too bothered whether there’s an aid side to it, if that makes sense. ‘Cos I more just wanted to go out and be basically just keen and green the whole time.

GR: So be able to do your job, day-in, day-out.

K1: Yeah, yeah. Exactly that and you know the money is not really the bother or anything like that. It's the self-satisfaction of doing it. So and everyone, everyone is different. Everyone sees things differently and everyone has the different perks to it as to what will push them to it or what will be pushing away from there.

K2: I think…when we, I mean, we’ve worked with, I’ve worked with regulars on numerous occasions. We all have. I think it’s, they’re amazed with how readily, you know, we all like we assimilate into them and that we are…our level of training, our professionalism and our approach as well as the social side and all the rest of it. We’ve just gone on two-week training courses and you know you’re still friends with regulars afterwards. You still have contact with, you know, individuals, so, I think that always sort of comes to have a shock from their point of view, because they’re always like…their expectation is that we’re…its quite low and then, on numerous occasions, we kind of proved them wrong, which is actually quite good. You get quite a good feeling by being able to achieve that and to be out actually, you’re not a STAB. And you know, you’re not whatever, you know, you’re not useless on the weekend and your weapons handling skills are shocking and things like that. So it’s being able to prove that point and to work alongside them quite readily, I think that’s quite good.

GR: Generally speaking to you, do you have confidence that whatever tasks you get asked to do, actually as individuals, you’re pretty ready for that?

K2: Regardless of complexity or quality or whatever.

K4: I think there is that apprehension initially, if you’ve not done it before, but as soon as you’ve done it. Like, oh cool, I do know this! My training that I’ve been taught is right and you slot in quite quickly and settle in rapidly.

GR: Okay. So how about as a group? If you were to deploy on a task as a team from this this Company here, how do you feeling kind of group training terms? Do you think you’re sort of ready for anything?

K1: Yeah, I guess everyone is on the same level as well, really, aren’t they? Because everyone from the same unit is going to receive pretty much the exact same training in the exact same time scale. The same, you know…I don’t know what the word is, you are doing it the same space time basically, so everyone’s the same Readiness. So you’re not battling with other people as such, you know.

K2: We are quite lucky here that a lot of the qualified instructors also train regulars. So, our training is the same standard. So should we if we were deployed by say a section level, we could, you know, integrate a section as a reservist section alongside, you know, regular sections within a platoon or something like that. I think that would, be able to operate at the same level.

K3: I think also as a company we’re quite tight knit, which if we were to, maybe, maybe you disagree [laughing]?

K4: No, no.

K3: But I think we’re quite a tight knit company. Which you know, if you mobilised from the same unit, there’s advantages and disadvantages to being with people you already know, but I think, for me, that would definitely be an advantage that, ‘cos you know, you support each other, when you already quite close.

GR: You close bonds and you’re already familiar with each other?

K3: You know that in a certain scenario, you know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. You know in a certain scenario this person might be in their element, whereas this other person might be struggling a bit and you help them out. So I think that that really helps when you are from the same unit.

K4: So I would say, I’ll probably overall say no, but it depends on who it was. So we do have that tight cohort group here with certain individuals and everything, who I’d happily go away with. However, if it would say the whole company, the people who don’t turn up regularly. Haven’t been training, passed out of their basic training, did their trade courses, haven’t seen them for the last eight months and then suddenly rocked up, are they still going to have that level of training and remembered what they’ve been taught at this level? Or even upskill themselves from what we’ve put on through the training weekends and the annual camp stuff. They’ve not been on them and not go back further still with that really base level, and if I was to take them away, and be in that group I’d be a little apprehensive at that level.

GR: So yeah, you’re quite happy with the…or quite confident I should say, in the core of people that turn up quite regularly, but you are aware that there are people who turn up much less regularly who might dilute that team because they are less familiar.

K4: Yeah, not just less familiar, but as in that skill fade and level, you know, the stuff we got onto the weekends, a lot more advanced than what they cover on basic training and their inf trade courses. Those experiences and putting it into practise cements them, makes them more confident. If you got some guys done the bare basics, the bare minimum not turned up done nothing for, say, eight months, rocks up and as it is unsure himself because he’s not done this in ages, hasn’t had all the up skills and the extra bits and bobs you know you may not have done huge amounts of live fire tactical training, all of a sudden is expected to be in that section of the guys you have done it before, and he’s like, never done this before, he’s on edge and unsure in himself then that puts added pressure on you, to make sure they’re up to that level as well, and you may not be able to trust them or task them for the same things. Like actually, he doesn’t know that, so I can’t use him I’m gonna have to pick someone else and that puts the workload on the rest of the section ‘coz they are picking up slack from his lack of knowledge.

GR: So for you, mutual trust and mutual familiarity is actually really important? When it comes to how prepared you feel as a team?

K2: I would add to that that that’s true, absolutely. I think that’s probably felt throughout, but then added to that, basically we are, you know, you would recognise that and then you would give them the time to try to develop them as quickly as possible. So one, so that reassures yourself, but also two, obviously they’re then upskilling and building them as an individual.

GR: So there’s always opportunities to develop and join the team rather than be the perpetual outsider because you’ve missed certain training.

K4: Yes.

K2: Because we all appreciate the fact that peoples’ lives are very busy.

K4: Yeah, but that, drop dead, you’re doing it tomorrow. There is that discrepancy. With the additional time, yeah, we’ll put the effort in an get more to that level.

GR: And what do you think makes it potentially difficult or unattractive to mobilise and deploy on operations? We mentioned a little bit about the stresses and strains of civilian employment, whether that’s for a company or for yourself. Are there any other things that make it an unattractive proposition?

K1: Family is a big one. You know if you’ve got something happen that wasn’t expected. Say you’re wife’s just had a kid, or she’s become pregnant and you only find out nine months down the line when you are two months into a deployment that she’s going to give birth, people are going to want to drop out. If you’ve had deaths in the family then last minute you could be dropping out because there’s all of that going on and the pressure. Gonna have your family members. Well, other than work and family, I think that’s it really.

K2: Financial. So, the Army doesn’t recognise dividends as a form of PAYE and all the rest of it.

GR: So when it comes to having your pay topped up to the level you are used to…

K2: They don’t accept that.

K3: And the same with bonuses.

K2: Yeah.

GR: So if you’re not at work, you don’t earn a bonus, ‘coz you’re not performing for your civilian employer, hence it’s your core salary.

K2: So when you, if you have an hourly rate or day rate and then so if you’re either limited company or an umbrella or a lot of these within IR 35, so you’re going to be a PAYE individual. It’s how the Army recognises what you are being paid and they only see what money you get from your employer as PAYE pay packet.

GR: Especially, which is a problem, if the majority of your pay is from that.

K2: Yeah, and people pay themselves in sort of various ways, basically, and then, what you see is that they only recognise one method and a lot of the time. That is a lot less than, so if they bump you up to the equivalent level within your Reserves, pay or you know they match you. A lot of the time, that’s a lot less.

K3: Yeah, so I suppose, the way that I’m paid, I’m full-time employed. I’m not self-employed. But on top of bonus I have you know, flexible benefits inside my remuneration package. My base salary compared with when I’ve added in bonus and, you know, benefits actually because, I don’t have children, so I don’t want childcare vouchers so I take most of that as cash. So when I compare my base salary to actually my remuneration packages, as a total they are quite different so, the financial element is…

GR: You can lose out quite a lot, adding onto the sacrifices you already mentioned.

K3: And what you’ve got fixed outgoings such mortgage, payments on a car or, you know, whatever then…I suppose for me as a Reservist, aside from mobilisation, you know, thinking about what time I can take off for courses. I get an additional amount of leave from my work, but anything else I have to take as unpaid and for me, so if I was to take two weeks’ per month, you know, not per month but two weeks in a month of unpaid leave, so I was essentially earning a private salary and two weeks of my salary, I don’t know if the mortgage would be covered! You know, because I don’t know if like losing a lot of my income for two weeks in a month or half a month. And then, you know, maybe I’d be dipping into my savings or just not save any that month. So you have the trade-off. I supposed that’s got a bit off track on the mobilisation. [laughing]

K2: Well it’s in together, as soon as you start doing the maths and you realise that…there are, there’s a…a lot of Reservists don’t do it for the money, at all. Because, you know, okay it’s a bit of beer tokens and all the rest of it. But it’s not significant amount. And because you only do it minimum, what’s 28, you know if you was getting a months’ worth of a private soldiers pay packet kind of thing. That’s what we could get, maybe in a year or you’re your bounty. You know, that’s that is quite nice. And that’s the driver for you to do those things. But, you know, if you’ve got car payments, mortgages, you know all these sort of things like that, outgoings, and that’s the only income you have six to nine months then becomes difficult.

GR: So we mentioned already, a few different types of operations. You mentioned about sort of a grand war-fighting scale and also you mentioned a different sorts of operations with TOSCA and RESCRIPT that you’ve all had various degrees of proximity to. What sort of operations do you think you and your unit here kind of best suited to or best prepared for?

K2: With regards to our change of…focus?

GR: Well, yeah. By all means. What are you changing from, to?

K2: Well, I guess we go from traditional infantry battalion, light infantry war-fighting, to now, we are sort of doing, is it not the….

K4: Security Force Assistance role?

K3: We change brigade next week.

GR: To, 11 Brigade?

K2: Yeah.

K4: In that, it’s gonna be more, looking at the short term training teams going away to foreign countries and supporting their armed forces with training.

GR: How well prepared do you feel for that at this stage, noting you have actually changed onto that role just yet?

K2: I think we have a number of individuals that have experienced something similar already, so they can pass on their experience and training to us. I think it might be….

K4: I think level wide, were pretty ready for that.

K2: Yeah.

K4: I think the issue is, as we mentioned earlier, three weeks, or, right, we need you there for three months…but as we mentioned mobilisation, how’s that going to work?

K2: Absolutely. It’s easy to mobilise a regular force. A small contingent of regular force to do that. You would have literally a handful of seniors, senior NCOs to go do some training. I think, two-fold is going to.. as a private soldier, you probably won't be picked for that, because what level of training can you provide to someone? But then on the flipside, that might inspire our juniors, or our private soldiers to promote quicker, to therefore have access to those opportunities.

K3: I think for the shorter periods of time, at the moment we often don’t get enough notice. As I said earlier, for me personally, my employer requires 4 weeks’ notice, which for RESCRIPT wasn’t…ended up being too long. Actually, for those shorter periods of time for 2-3 weeks whatever...we can sometimes get two, three weeks’ notice. Do you wanna go? Anything? I can’t, I would love to, but I can’t. Just this evening the CSM had called myself and another female private soldier over and said there’s an opportunity. I think starting on the 6th of June or something like that for two weeks and I, you know. We need more notice.

GR: Yeah? So even for something as short as two weeks. Having two weeks’ notice before that even starts is still quite tall order.

K3: Even if you take it as annual leave, an employer will often expect you to give more notice. You know, at least the amount of time you want off is at least the amount of notice you need to give.

GR: Obviously, with this big change on the horizon, there’s a little bit of uncertainty. How do you feel that the leaders in your unit are responding to that? Do you feel excited about the opportunity because of what they’ve told you about it?

K3: I don’t personally feel like I know enough about it just yet, but looking forward to hearing more about it.

K4: I think there’s good anticipation and bad at moment, they’re putting on some good training in preparation for what they think we’re going to be doing. There’s always that anticipation of, yeah, it’s going to be great. We’re going to do this, this and this and then it turns out to be that. And that’s not what was originally promised. [pauses]

GR: OK.

K4: It initially sounds, at the moment, quite good. So for me I’ve got quite a lot of flexibility to go away and do short term training teams, go away to foreign countries and help them, that sounds really appealing to me. But that is that what we’re actually gonna end up doing? When they realised what capabilities and how many people they can mobilise. They may just push us into a corner and be like, we wanted 120 from you, you didn’t provide that last time, so we’re just not going to ask you again and then the opportunities disappear. And then so what was originally promised isn’t there. [pauses]

GR: Yeah. So actually that’s a case of the system not making it as easy as it could be, perhaps?

K2: Its expectations, isn’t it? At the higher level? Have we been able to demonstrate capability of what’s been asked of us already, and then to show that we can then demonstrate that we are in position to pick up this new tasking kinda thing and run with it. But you’re right, I think, if you’ve got the flexibility, and again, and there are a number of full time reservists that this is their job. So essentially you are, in a way like a regular that you can be deployed in OK. Well, your employer, the Army is telling you have to go here for three weeks, you have to go to whatever, then it’s actually fine. I think, there’s a threat that essentially you will be, and you might well actually end up asking the same individuals and then they will be burnt out. Because only they have the flexibility within the Company. Within each company, let’s say.

GR: And a lot of that comes down to the notice period and individual circumstances that were mentioned slightly earlier. What about…How do you feel about the leaders in, and their mobilisation habits? Do you think they are, they ask you to do things that they don’t do themselves or not able to do themselves when it comes to mobilisation?

K1: Do you mean as in seniors at such?

GR: Yes, do you think they set the example, ultimately when they’re asking you to do thing? Noting that everybody has their own personal circumstances.

K4: I’d probably have to say no to that, if you look at The Falklands the moment, you look at all of them there, it ain’t the people that have pushed it down and said get on this, it’s going to be great. This could be this, this and this. Out of all those who have pushed it down, they are still in the UK. The guys who’ve gone out are the volunteers who accepted that what they said was going to be what they get up to out there. and took their word for it. But those guys selling it, they are not the ones out there.

K3: I thought the OC was out there?

K4: The OC has gone. But he did for his career and everything. You look at the higher ups past him and where the Battalion all the original generation came from the Battalion. None of them have gone.

K2: They are moving on. So, yeah, I think obviously it would be…would that be a driver though? To see maybe the CO out there leading from the front as we go over, you know, you know with a lot of us over there?

K1: I think I think a big part of it would be you know if you’ve got your senior officers out there, you’ve got these people who have such a big view on everything they’ve decided to go out there and chose to go out there. I think a lot of people would then see as, like a, more of an inspiration to go.

K2: There is a huge difference between being… when we are…if you were, and what was on offer specific to FIRIC, obviously, it’s and then you say you know the availability of all of us. If you were told that you are being mobilised and there is a difference between being asked and then being told. Then we’d all be out there as a battalion and that would be a very strong contingent because you only have to see what we can do on a weekend and the numbers that we could generate on a weekend and all rest of it and it is, we have a very… were actually very lucky that as a Battalion we actually have a very close bond, like we have a strong bond inter-companies as well. There’s a rivalry there, but we we’re also very close. Yeah, that would be hugely different to the numbers that are out in, in the Falklands right now and the individuals who is, and more importantly who isn’t.

K4: So I think it would have made bigger difference to me. I was on the tasking and went up to B HQ and there was a lot of, fingers pointed to me as a Junior NCO, “Why aren’t you going to the Falklands? Why aren’t you doing that?” I’m looking at the people who are asking the questions and thinking, why aren’t you going out? Why aren’t you leading from the front? And it didn’t fit in with what I’m doing at the moment, and I couldn’t really fit in my time scale and everything. It didn’t appeal to me, but it was those people higher up and head up and push it down as this great opportunity. You need to do this, go and do it, but they are not out there themselves.

GR: And you feel that…?

K4: And I felt slightly personally attacked! It’s like, “why aren’t you going to the Falklands? It’s going to be a great opportunity.” But no-one else is backing it.

GR: Yeah, you feel it’s a personal attack and in some respects, does that make it less attractive?

K4: In a way. “Oh, why aren’t you joining us out in the Falklands?” “Come on, join us, it’s going to be great,” is a lot more positive than, “why aren’t you going?”

GR: “Follow me,” rather than “you go first?”

K4: Yeah.

K1: I think the people that are higher up as well, a lot of them have been there already and everyone I personally know, family and friends that have been to the Falklands, have all said they would rather not go back there. So you know, you get told their stories and the people that are now…before they were pushing you to go there telling you how crap it is basically. And now there’s this come up they’re now, pushing people to go. Whereas a lot of people are remembering how crap they said it was and they know they’re not gonna go because of that. So why would brand new people want to go? Because they’ve been told the experience was awful, to a certain extent, because of how it is out there. Whatever the reason was, why would someone want to come out there?

GR: So it’s quite…the other people’s experience is, I suppose your peers, but also your superiors, at least important influencing your choice.

K1: Yeah, it’s influence isn’t it?

K3: I think that sometimes the leadership can come across a little bit as telling rather than doing and leading by example, as you said, you know. Sometimes doesn’t fill you with confidence that you know you’re joining the team efforts. You go and do that, you know, but we don’t want to do it!

K2: Also, I think there’s an element, so historically we’ve had a number of excellent overseas annual training exercises in two weeks, in Estonia, Denmark, Michigan. And then we had a period, obviously COVID and what not, that we haven't had that, it’s all been here. And so there was at one time an opportunity, or at least it was, it was actually vocalised. We were told that we would be able to have two weeks in the Falklands, so don’t worry if you can’t get on FIRIC, which is like four months or whatever, you’ll still be able to go out there. And a lot of what they were using to sell FIRIC, was exactly what we can achieve in two weeks because we’ve done that. We’ve done an LFTT, we’ve done full…I don’t think we did a company, we did platoon live fire, you know and all sorts.

K4: For the deployment they went up to company level. So a lot of it, they have offered the selling points, you could do in the UK, you don’t have to worry about mobilisation. You’re not worrying about your job, you don’t have to worry about all the extra rubbish.

K2: So all of the things that they were trying to use a positive to get us to mobilise to FIRIC. We have personal experience that we know we can do within a two-week period. We have a lot of beat-up training. You know, I wasn’t actually able to go on that deployment actually, but it’s one of those things where you were, you were able to achieve a lot of these things. So because of that, that then compounds the fact that, well hang on a minute. I might be losing my jobs not going to be happy. My family aren’t going to be happy, when I know I can achieve those big ticket items, you know, being able to fire at platoon, company level and go through it, at home.

K1: I think I think as well, like you were just saying….FIRIC was sold in that way, so for you guys who have been in longer, you know, you can do that for, but for the people that have been a shorter period time, like myself, when it was given to us and people are out there, they don’t know that can happen. So they get excited in this, and it’s the brand new people are going out there and the biggest selling points for a lot of people on it was the…it’s the Army Navy and RAF out there. So you got all three on the Onion Ranges, live firing overhead. Everyone’s thinking you can have, you know…planes above the air flying over your head-

K2: Battleships!

K1: -just getting really, exciting and worthwhile. Yeah. So that was that was the biggest selling point. But for anyone who’s been in long enough, realises that you can just do what they were doing out there, you can do here and not have to risk anything. Whereas for people like myself and the other people around there now, you don’t know that.

GR: Like it’s glamourous and shiny.

K1: Yeah, you haven’t experienced it for long enough to know that you don’t have to sacrifice everything.

K2: 2017 on NORTHERN STRIKE, we were in Michigan. It was live fire, we had JTACs with us. They were calling in A-10 tank busters, they were doing the whole thing. We were doing helo insertion. We had artillery, we had tanks going. You know you name it. The full works! And it was awesome! We’ve been very lucky, if not, probably spoiled with even just that experience.

GR: Yeah.

K2: And then. But then on the we also know what you know what a heli-bedford is. And so you know that will be, well, this is your notional helicopter. This is your notion…and it’s…so you become…that becomes the norm, and that’s what’s expected. So there’s almost a level of trust, then, is like well really? Is it gonna be? Is what you’re promising, coz on numerous occasions what you promised you haven’t delivered and…we become just…

GR: Desensitised?

K2: Yeah, desensitised to it, to big things that never turn up. So when they say, going to be naval bombardment, things like that, you’ll see it and whatever…because all these things. Well you have the Navy doing it in the RAF around there, so they’ll be dropping ordnance and stuff.

K4: I think on the other hand with that. If they didn’t necessarily sell these things that weren’t really going to happen, you’d probably still get more people to go and do it. People know that people are bull-shitting.

K2: Yeah.

K4: And as soon as it’s happened once to you, and they say “no, no, but this time “it’s definitely not going to happen,” you just thing, no it ain’t! And you just not going to believe them. So that instantly lost that trust-

K2: -Less is more!-

K4: -at all sorts of levels.

K1: If you don’t give them that, and then it does happen, then it’s a bonus.

K4: Yeah.

K1: Then more people are going to want to go before you know it.

K4: It’s about managing those expectations.

K1: Yeah, like you with that Michigan, if I went somewhere and I had all that around me, I would drop, but I will drop my day job and join the Army full-time like I wanted to first place, straight away. But it has to be something like that. Yeah. You know, I don’t want me to do it now and then did not happen because at that point I just be giving you my finger and be walking out, simples!

K4: I think a good example of that was when we first had 4 Battalion and Denmark.

K1: Yeah.

K4: It’s sold as, you’re gonna be a lot of basic low-level skills over there and then over out there we had an educational study, we got to stay in Copenhagen for a couple of days, we has simmunition, which I’d never touched before at the time.

K2: A full kill house.

K4: A full kill house with smells, lights, the lot. Full urban ops village and everything and all within kilometres.

K2: Force-on-force, wasn’t it?

K4: Yeah, a lot of force-on-force stuff.

K2: And TES, we had a full set, we were all kitted out with TES is really fantastic bit of kit.

K4: And it has been sold as harbours in the woodblocks and some basic skills and everyone was a bit like, hmm, you can do that in the UK, but it’s Denmark so you know it’s kind of cool and had all these extra little bits in there. I know the mortars went away and worked with the Danish forces and fired their mortars and used their vehicles. We had a day where we used their weapons systems as well.

K2: Yeah.

K4: And all of that was not promised. But when we got out there, we were like, wow, this is much better.

45:34

K2: So I think that it is managing expectations. I mean when you come back to it, it’s what you said. None of that was promised, but we was, like, above and beyond what our expectations were. So for this, this is amazing and then when we come back and it’s like, well, we’re doing a, you know, we have two annual training exercise or whatever, two weeks in the UK, we have a day off. Well actually we could have had an opportunity to go and do, you know, go to a battlefield or do something educational, but it’s a day off and it wasn’t. It was us doing phys for the day. That was our day off between doing, we were like basically classroom based pretty much for the first week, then in the field for the second.

GR: Which feels much less imaginative.

K2: Yeah, again it was fantastically promised, this will be taking a lot of your MATTs and of course it wasn’t. So we did all that for nothing, really. Just a bit of phys. Which again okay you can’t, but when you’re given an opportunity or at least you’re presented with an opportunity where you have the potential to go and do something which is a bit of fun and team building as a Battalion, really, wasn’t it? I think it was, you know, inter-company? And then they just don’t act on it or no one organises anything. That’s frustrating and disappointing. I think that’s the thing. [pauses]

GR: One of the things that you mentioned a little bit earlier on, actually, was the difference between, “being told to mobilise” and “volunteering to mobilise,” in legal terms, in both cases, mobilisation is always mandatory, it’s just a case of who they ask, who they tell to be mobilised. How important do you think it is having that choice and that opportunity to volunteer first before, you know, rather than the organisation just telling the people that they want?

K1: I think that’s a big part.

K3: Incredibly important.

K1: Yeah, huge.

K3: Because everyone’s got their individual circumstances you might have a pregnant wife, or you might be in a really critical place in your career. You might be about to get married and you think, oh, gotta cancel the wedding now because being told that I’m being mobilised. Everyone’s situations are different, so I thought, yeah, for me that’s very important.

GR: And looking at the type of role that you’re going into in the near future, the short term training teams. Do you think that’s the sort of thing that you would expect a volunteer for or, sorry, the organisation would expect to ask for volunteers for? Or is it the sort of thing you would expect to just be told, you need to go on this?

K4: I think initially it would be volunteers. But if the Army expects an output out of us and they’re not getting it, then they’re probably go down that route as well, you’re qualified and they’ll start cherry picking the people who qualified and in-date. You’re going, you’re doing this.

K3: But then I think the notice is really important because if, you know, they’ve gone through a period of asking for volunteers and then they’ve said that they’re going to say, OK, now this is going to become mandatory for these individuals who we think are going to be best suited for this particular task. If they’ve left it too late. What can we do? If you know for me I need four weeks if they’ve left it till three weeks before, I could lose my job. And then I’ve got nothing to return to.

K1: The big question is, are they going to reimburse you for your job?

K2: Well, if they can, they won’t!

K3: I just wouldn’t have a job to go back to and then I’d have a period of unemployment after I get back while I search for another job and get a start date any everything.

K2: I don’t think that’s a reality. I really don’t. It’s basically the equivalent of going on maternity leave you can’t like, the law that's behind it and all the rest of it, they can't force you if you are to have a potential to lose your job. I think, numerically, we’re not going to be deploying as the same, at the same level.

GR: The same scale?

K2: Yes the same scale.

K4: It won’t be company level.

K2: It’ll be small teams and it will be as a battalion. Could the 4th Battalion be able to provide probably 5-6 people? That’s the reality.

K4: Yeah, I’d agree with that.

GR: And you think that scale is pretty achievable?

K2: Yes, that’s achievable.

K4: But as mentioned earlier if it’s the same people constantly going, going, going, they get burnt out. Alright, so the guys who volunteered now burnt themselves out. What happens then? That’s why I think it might switch. And I’d rather be away with people who volunteered them were forced to and think, why am I here? I’ve got all this stuff back home.

K1: Yeah, ‘cos if you’ve got volunteers, you are more willing to do it. If you’re forced out there, you’re not going to have the enthusiasm to do it. And that’s when things start going wrong. You know, if you if you’re out there with a bloody broken heart, crying yourself to sleep every night.

K4: Yeah.

K1: It’s just not going to go well, is it?

GR: To some extent, for the two of you who are employed rather than self-employed. It doesn’t sound like you have a lot of confidence in the legal protections that are there for people who are mobilised? [pauses]

K3: The policies that my employer has in place should work fine. You know, four weeks’ notice road for a deployment to be mobilised should be fine. So I have a lot of confidence in my employer, that they will hold up their end of the bargain. They love Reservists there really, you know. They want to employ Reservists but they’ve got an organisation to run. They’ve got clients that need their services delivering. They’ve got an organisation to run. So, if the policies are followed, which should be relatively straight forward, then I have full confidence that everything would be fine. But it’s, you know, from experience you don’t often get the notice that you need. Dates change. I know someone else who’s \_\_\_\_\_[other sub-unit] who works at the same office as I do. She was supposed to be going on FIRIC and the dates kept on changing and in the end she had to pull out because, you know, it was very difficult to then follow the processes and procedures required.

GR: So uncertainty is a massive disadvantage?

K3: Yeah, when dates keep changing. It makes it really difficult. But if the normal processes are followed, then absolutely no problem. I full confidence that m y employer would recognise my time off, I’d have the same role to go back to, I’d have my normal salary to go back to and everything would be fine.

K4: Going through the mobilisation process on some initial briefs if I’m correct, from what I remember, your job is protected by law. And if when you return, no matter what your company policy or they have to offer you the same or equal job. So if your job is still there, they have to offer it to you, if potentially that job no longer exists in the company, they have to offer you something equal to what you doing, if that’s correct.

K2: My understanding is relatively similar. My only issue is further, that’s fine if you’re a large organisation and there are people there that are going to be bringing money into the business and all the rest of it. If you’re a one-man band.

K4: Yeah.

K2: And you’ve only got one contract.

GR: So it’s all on you and if you disappear, then you start again.

K2: Yeah, if I don’t work, the business disappears.

K1: If I have another bloke come up to me, he said, listen, I got this roof, blah, blah, all that need’s done and I go, yeah, all good. And then I disappear and say, you’re gonna need to find someone else to do that, I’ll be back in six months. He’s not gonna want me back to do another roof for him.

GR: And your reputation will be junk?

K1: Yeah, exactly. Word of mouth, especially with what I do. Word of mouth is a huge part of it and round here, everyone who’s big building business and what I am, word gets spread so easily. So straight away, no matter how long you been in business or not, your reputation will just come straight down and you’ve lost everything and you’re starting from the bottom again. And you just go round in vicious circles like that. So it is really hard.

GR: So I’m having that choice in all circumstances potentially to defer, to give you some more notice at worst, you know, can be incredibly important.

K1: Plus, if you if you’ve had a, ‘specially for me, the build-up to the Falklands. All this, it was very quiet due to COVID, and all that sort of stuff. Very, very quiet. And then all of a sudden, you have all these opportunities come out and you’re young, fresh and then, you know, you started out for yourself for the first time, and you’re about to not take those opportunities to do something, and they come back and you’re not going to have those opportunities. When are they going to come around again? How long is it gonna take them to come around again? You know how they even come around again? So there’s, like scales, isn’t it? You gotta wait, wait them out and see what works.

K2: I think what’s instilled, at least what has been instilled in me is fact that your civilian career always takes precedence; regardless. Because we choose to do this as long as you’re fulfilling your minimum requirements and all the rest of it at the end of the day. It’s your civilian career comes first because it’s…

K3 It’s what pays the bills.

K2: It’s what pays the bills.

GR: So you feel like the Army Reserve accepts real life, as it were, non-army life comes first?

K4: Yeah.

K2: Yes. Officers will and leaders push that. And are accepting of that and then anything that you give on top is a bonus. So your ability and yes, whilst it makes things very difficult to organise, training events and training weeks and things like that. At the end of the day, if they can show willingness to be able to be responsive to your commitments and issues and things like that then you’re more likely to come back. Into okay, I can’t do that week because such as such, however, I can do this and then you’re giving up as much of your availability as possible, and then that gives them sort of greater scope to work with.

GR: OK. [pauses] We’ve covered all of the specific topics I wanted to talk about, so thank you very much for your discussion this evening. Before we finish, are there any points that anybody wanted to mention, perhaps things that had in the back of their minds but the conversation moved on?

K4: Well for a negative after you’re going through it. The mobilisation faff…

GR: As a process?

K4: As in, to remobilise, if I was to mobilise again, I would question it with some of the faff that went on before.

GR: Do you mean like the paperwork?

K4: Particularly with the medical? My medical records with my civilian GP are online. My military medical records are online, but I had to book an appointment with my doctor to have a in-face medical with them. Same with my dentist and everything, all my records are online. I had to book an appointment for them to go in, have a quick physical. Doctor signs the paperwork and then we take these physical paperwork plus a full write out of all my previous medical appointments and my med history, jabs and everything, and then take it to the Army to then upload. What can they not just grab that across? And just, oh, it’s electronic, boom. I sign something saying I'm happy for the Army to have my medical and dental records and it just goes across. I then had to take out time in my life to go and sort these appointment and do all this when I've already volunteered to mobilise. And it's just that extra faff.

K1: I had that the same. Cause’ I had to do all that with the lead up to the Falklands because it was last minute. You know, I had to take time out of work for the dental, the medical and then I got to the Aldershot medical centre and then they say, oh, we’re going to have to see you tomorrow, ‘cause we just thought we got staff down and I said, hold on a minute, I’ve booked in to come in today. You tell me to bugger off then come back tomorrow, they can come back tomorrow. Send the regulars away! That’s their job. I’ve got another job tomorrow. I’ve gotta work the country for all you know. So. I’m not flexible like that.

K3: One big issue we have on RESCRIPT. Obviously I didn’t end up mobilising, so it’s not from personal experience, but a lot of people said they weren’t paid right. So they went through all the paperwork to make sure to declare their civilian salaries to make sure that they had, I don’t remember what it’s called…

GR: The Reservist Award?

K3: Yeah. And from what I’ve heard, the vast majority of people were not paid correctly and it seemed like the leadership didn’t think it was a big urgent issue when people were going without their monthly wages without their monthly salaries to pay the bills to feed their kids, to do all of those things. I don’t think it was dealt with urgently enough and it wasn’t seen as a big enough issue.

GR: As a massive distraction when you are trying to mobilise.

K3: Exactly, especially if you have a family you know you should have. The Army shouldn’t be forcing you, if you volunteered to mobile. It shouldn’t be forcing you to dip into your savings if you have them. To pay for day to day expenses for, you know, for kids’ school uniforms, for food, for your mortgage, for your electricity bill. You shouldn’t be put in that situation.

K4: It sounds like that’s what happened with RESCRIPT. Everyone was at a disadvantage number should not just for those who are taking so I get more money from Reserve way but ended up on basic rate. And they actually messed up my basic rate and I went on to Recruit basic rate from a Lance Corporal, that because we missed the pay cut off. So they then did us all emergency funds and for some reason, when the funds went through, I got base rate recruit, from a Lance Corporal’s wage. Boom, that hit me hard.

K2: And If you’ve got bills coming out…

K4: Yeah.

K3: So, it sounds like from people’s experience from that and even those of us who didn’t do RESCRIPT, we’ve heard all about it. That’s a major put off from mobilising in the future. If you think I need to be in a financial crisis situation, I need to be in the financial situation to potentially not be paid for a number of months. Yeah, I know. I know some people who. Their monthly income, every single penny, every single penny of that gets spent. I know people who are twice as old as me. They’ve got no savings offer. I’m 20 years old and I’ve got more savings and some forty year olds you know because they live off of their monthly wage. And I said and there’s not then if it’s not someone we know streaming on somebody that happened to someone in that situation where they didn’t get paid. That’s that. Game over.

K2: That’s the biggest issue is the fact that. You go into it and you have come to an agreement with the armed forces, with the Army to say they’re going to pay you X amount. So that is a written agreement. And when that’s not fulfilled, then that is a huge driver to again be like, well, this isn’t acceptable. I’m not doing this again if they can’t get something simple as that, you know that’s, that’s that.

K1: Yeah.

K2: And spreads like wildfire! Everyone knew about it and behaved. The numbers of individuals that were paid incorrectly was quite shocking.

K3: I think following also following on from your point about dividends as a full income, we have so many people in the Company that self-employed it simply it’s a really common thing in the Reserves.

K2: It’s not just company level, it’s throughout.

K3: So it’s a huge factor that if that’s not being recognised as your form of income, then. Doing a deployment, mobilising, it’s a really big financial decision count. Can I actually afford to do it?

GR: Yeah, so the practicalities get in the way of your what you might consider to be your duty or responsibilities or your desires, just won’t work.

K4: Once it was all sorted mobilised in the actual mobilisation and being away, but it was all just that initial bit. And as you said, once you start hearing about all this like, well, that’s not great. Then you’re going to have the backing. That’s potentially another, I’m not gonna do that again, especially if it’s in smaller, less menial as you said. Full-on warfighting, it’s all gone down, yeah, it’s a bit more worrying than 3 months out in the Falklands less the Falklands in their winter. Why would I then risk them messing up the mobilisation process.

K1: Especially when it’s this time of year!

K3: But I also think the…if it’s an emergency and you have to mobilise to potentially a warzone. Do you want to be? You know, if you, if you have a family then do you want to be away, wherever. Afghanistan, Ukraine, wherever. Do you want to be that worrying that your partner, is worrying about paying the mortgage, paying the rent, you know, making sure that the house is heated. You don’t want people to have that in the back of their minds worrying about their loved ones.

K4: When I mobilised as well, they’re going about, make sure your finances all in check, make sure it’s squared, you know you’re not going to be, this is sorted. You got bills to pay or other bits involves your family, got dependants, it’s all looked after, you’re ready. Because you’re not going to be ready to sort out things you know, if you got a joint credit card and it’s, you know that your misses uses but it expires and we’re three months in, deal with it to make sure it’s all square beforehand. But then as you said, you don’t want to be worrying about that. What if the Army fucks up? How’s the misses gonna pay the bills? Especially if it did come down to an all-out warfighting thing where you were told tomorrow in to be here because you’re going. And obviously you are like, you haven’t paid me for the last month and a half. School fees, bills, food. Yeah, it suddenly drags up a bit.

K3: Yeah, that shouldn’t be…focusing all your energy in that situation, or your mental capacity on what you’re doing, not having to worry about.

K2: But we shouldn’t even be there in that position wherever discussing this. Yeah, it should just be done correctly and unfortunately it probably the largest negative for this whole, morally what would we do? Because morally, yeah, of course. I’d like to put myself forward.

K1: It’s trust.

K2: But I know that they’re not going to cover what I pay myself.

K1: You can’t trust…

K2: You know so financially its unviable for me to ever be deployed.

K1: Basically you get told these policies are in place, but it’s just trust. People…there’s no trust, people don’t trust the, anybody, to actually do it, that’s what it all comes down to.

K4: For RESCRIPT it was, don’t worry, there are policies in place. We’ll get you the emergency funds. No one will be out of pocket. And then everyone was put on basic rate. Some people got basic rate for their correct wage, for the correct salary and wage. And there was others who didn’t. People who had claimed the Reservist Award were put on basic rate. So if you were claiming for, say 70,000, and all of a sudden your now on private’s wage basic rate, you’re at a massive disadvantage. I was disadvantaged by the fact that I was put on the wrong rate completely. Yeah, and that takes a big hit. So those policies albeit they are in place, still didn’t cover what was needed.

K1: It’s not like the trust was broken once or twice, it’s happened so many times to people that you hear stories about that. It puts everyone off. Unless the Army is your number one, your focus. That’s your life, you know, that’s your job, you’re a regular. Then it’s not a problem, but when you’re doing it for self-satisfaction or whatever reason and you’ve got another income supporting your life and then you drop that to let the Army takeover for a short period of time and then they don’t go by what they say and it puts…

GR: They let your trust down?

K1: Yeah, they let you down. And you’ve put in the sacrifices, you’re life basically. You know.

K4: You know, when you mobilise, the Army’s asking for huge amounts from you. But we can’t ask the Army back for these basic necessities that should be correct.

K3: One person in the Company, on RESCRIPT declared their civilian salary and then was asked, “but do you actually need that much?” As if they weren’t going to honour you know, the policy that they’ve got in place to protect reservists from their financial commitments. And while I think it was eventually on it, I don’t know, you know, don’t know for sure. I don’t think that conversation should have ever taken place.

K1: I got questioned as to my wage, because of how old I was. I got questioned because I’m 20 years old. They said, “is how much money you really earn?” Why should they even, if I’m giving you proof, why should that question even be asked?

K2: I think it’s that they… This is what we are now finding is that because of the salaries and the way in which, I mean, if you look at your hourly rate. As a whole, you know, if you’re a regular, the fact that you knock off for 12:00 o’clock on a Friday, well, I knock off at 5:30, you know? And I have to do a 45 hour week. But I don’t know how many regulars do a 45-hour week? Week-in, week-out. They don’t. You might then end up having to do, you know, okay, I’m on guard duty at night and there’s other ways that you look at it, but what you have a look at your, your annual salary. I think there’s a…they still can’t…I don’t know whether they can actually just comprehend the fact that you can get a Private soldier that is on Colonel’s wage. That’s the reality that they still shocked, but that’s just how…that’s being a civvy. And we don’t choose to do, you know, we don’t choose to be a reservist and to give up our time, and you know. I mean, I said this to a friend of ours, you as a Reserve, I give up 25% of my weekends. And they are like, “what?”. And I say, yeah, 1 weekend a month! And then two weeks on top of that. And the rest of it, because I think last year I did 55 days. And how many? I mean, most people do more than the minimum of 28.

GR: Yeah.

K4: Yeah, it’s one of those things, it’s, I think it’s not about the money, it’s not financially driven. You do it for many more reasons than that is you know for that higher purpose.

GR: Okay. Well, we’ll draw stumps tax, and then we’re getting quite late and I know your staff will be itching and think I’ve kidnapped you, but I shall turn off the recorder now.