**Group: E**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 6 Apr 22, 1945 hrs

**Location:** Farnham

GR: This is group ECHO and we’re now recording. So the first question I’d like to start with for the discussion between you is an ice breaker and I know you filled in your demographic questionnaires already, but I wonder which of you has deployed with the Army Reserve in the past?

E1: I definitely haven’t.

E2: Yeah, I have. So I did, obviously the COVID response and we did a couple of very… it wasn’t official mobilisation, but do you remember the floods that we had all round sort of Windsor?

GR: yeah

E2: So we did it short and sort of short term. Sort of response to that, but the COVID mobilisation was only three, just over three months.

GR: Sure. So the and the other things you might have done on RSDs rather than rather than mobilised?

E2: Yep.

GR: But, you’ve not really done much in the way of operations?

E1: So, I’ve only been in before… or trained since end of last year really. So there’s not really been opportunity. The closest one is that mobilisation to the Falklands….next, end of this month.

GR: And is that for the rotational, incremental company, I think they call it, is it?

E2: Yeah, FIRIC.

GR: FIRIC, that’s the one. Yeah. Okay and people from this unit are supporting a regular battalion going out?

E2: Yeah.

GR: Are you able to go on that or?

E1: No. So I’ve missed it.

GR: OK. Hopefully the next opportunity, then perhaps? Well, it is good to get an idea of where you’re coming from and your point of view. So my next question is, how important do you think it is that Reserves do mobilise and deploy as part of their service?

E2: OK, for me, for me, it’s really is really important and I am...I know lots of very good soldiers who’ve have got rank and haven’t mobilised, but it does seem to add a bit of weight to it, if someone has mobilised and sort of being through the process because there’s so many questions about how it works and relating your training to things, I think it’s…I think it’s really useful to see that.

E1: This is important as we get smaller army as well. You’re trying…the more deployments, you’ve done the easy it’ll be to integrate with regular battalions, even if you’re short or a small detachment.

GR: So you think it makes the Army Reserve more useful if it gets used in many respects?

E1: Yes.

GR: It’s interesting you say that you feel like you can, you do know good soldiers who just haven’t deployed for whatever reason. Could you tell me a bit more about that? What? How did you come to that?

E1: I would say…those that have very good training capability or a management style that can deliver things to soldiers and could keep good, sort of, team cohesion. Some people just very naturally, very good at that, and that is a big part, which some people may have all sorts of really good, sort of, skills and things to offer, but naturally they are not very good at delivering that.

GR: Hmm.

E1: So maybe they just need that kind of that person to bring those points out of people.

GR: So I guess what you’re saying is, there are other important things that actually, perhaps even someone who’s never deployed, still can help lots of other people deploy even if their personal circumstances, for instance, don’t allow them to do it themselves.

E1: Yeah.

GR: So they are good for the whole unit, even if even if they don’t go themselves.

E1: Definitely.

GR: Very useful to understand I think. And we’ve spoken a bit about…we’ve had Op RESCRIPT as an example, another MACA task, the floods and also the training and, sorry, the reinforcement to the Falkland Islands. What kinds of operations do you think you and your unit are best suited for? Do you think you’re really geared up for MACA tasks, for instance?

E2: I think we are as the Army generally, but we are very good at delivering immediate training, picking things up very quickly and then being immediate response if there isn’t anything suitable out there in place already. And I think delivering the mobile testing units, you know, we trained for that in a day and when we were training, it wasn’t G4S, was it?

E1: It was SERCO, who took over from us…

E2: But one of them anyway. But it took us ages to train them up, whereas we picked out really quickly and we could deliver it. So we are set up for that, but, you know, I know lots of people who’ve deployed into combat roles and done really very well. So I think we can mould to both but, you know, you will pull out more people who are going to be available for shorter term postings which are likely to be those, kind of, supporting roles within country, most likely, because their jobs will allow, their wives will allow, their husbands will allow, et cetera.

E1: Certainly, jobs is quite a key point in my mind. Being able to plug gaps in workforce is… my private work is with the NHS and being able to get people out to even, sort of, things like… getting people from, I don’t know if they’re Reserves or Regulars but coming to drive the ambulances. It doesn’t take much to do the training but actually just having those people that could just come in, do it while we’re struggling, and then clear backlog of work was fantastic.

GR: So yeah, the ability to support other departments with keen workers who can do what’s needed to be done and then…

E1: Bring in their own skills, especially.

GR: Yeah. And you mentioned with the FIRIC side of things, I suppose it ultimately, that the point is its to deter warfighting, but is ultimately, I suppose, a warfighting opportunity, if that’s the right way to put it? How well geared do you think your Company is for that kind of thing and supporting the regulars?

E1: I think knowing that it was coming up on the horizon, lots of the training was geared towards that. Before the pre-deployment training, there was a lot of weekends were geared towards it for parade nights were trying to get people to a place where they would actually be able to add as opposed to being a burden on the forces there.

E2: I think what makes it difficult is that it’s kind of discussed for a long time and you’ll get, you’ll say “who’s interested in this?”

GR: Everybody is always interested!

E2: Yeah, absolutely. It was three months at first, and three months turned to four and you kind of think, actually, you know, that’s a longer deployment, it doesn’t work quite as well. And then you realise, you know, all-sorts of other things that feed into it, which makes it makes it sound less appealing, I suppose, on a base level. But lots of people are kind of floating around the idea of it potentially working, and then things can pop up in life and you haven’t committed to it in that run-up before when you thought it was a good idea and so you can kind of turn off it.

GR: People drift away from it?

E2: Whereas I think if it was, if the mobilisation was more direct ‘coz I spent the whole time asking, “dol I get my civilian wage for mobilisation?” It’s like, “yeah, I think so…maybe, maybe not!” And I can’t do it an Army salary.

GR: Yeah. So, that uncertainty was from within the unit? You were asking your admin staff, you know, do my wages get topped up so I don’t lose out here?

E2: Yeah. So I mean, the head-shed really are asking, “do we have enough blokes?” and we are asking, “what’s the detail on it?” and so it’s all hazy because they can’t nail it down ‘coz they don’t know if we’ve got enough blokes to support it. ‘Cos we wanted to do, it is a whole, as a company and initially we kind of had the numbers and then and then we didn’t. So we pulled from other places and so that kind of uncertainty I think was what made it a little bit, a little bit tricky for me personally to commit to.

GR: So yeah, general uncertainty of, what the job is and the time frame involved is, is quite unattractive for the reasons you mentioned. You can’t then give certainty to your family, to your civilian employers.

E2: And there’s this sort of, you know, if I’ve volunteered for it in theory. I’m not sure if the laws changed, but if I volunteered for it. I’m a volunteer rather than having been mobilised so I don’t get my civilian wage, so I can’t really know it’s coming and sort of and give my employers the heads up ‘cause as far as I know, you know, and I think most people are like, it was their wives and husbands, et cetera. You know, “it’s a surprise! I didn’t have a choice!” You know, “this is this is what’s happening, I’m being told.” Does that make sense?

GR: Yeah! So it’s interesting you say that. One of my questions further down is how you might present mobilisation to families and employers. So, I suppose you’ve suggested that you would present it as something that is a direction that is compulsory, rather than, you know, something you’ve volunteered for.

E2: Yeah, I mean, no, I don’t think anyone in my life would be delighted by the fact I was, you know… my work certainly wouldn’t. My wife certainly wouldn’t be kind of delighted by the fact I volunteered for it. Whereas it’s just much more simple as far as I’m concerned if it’s just a, “this is what’s happening.”

GR: How do you reconcile that with the fact that as you both said, joining the Army Reserve, you do it primarily to deploy mobilise on the one hand, yet you feel like you have to present it as something that is compulsory, on the other hand?

E1: So it depends. My work’s reasonably open, within reason. So it is a bit more with dialogue, it sounds like. This opportunity has come up and pretending it’s an opportunity for me to go away and practise skills that I wouldn’t get with their own personal development.

GR: Yeah. So, you sell the benefits of it to your employer. I’ll be more useful, better motivated in my civilian job when I come back?

E1: Yeah. That is, they are losing one small cog in a big machine. It’ll affect them slightly but in the big picture. The benefits I can sell them for doing it.

GR: Yeah.

E2: Yeah, that makes sense. I think for…from my side, I mean, I’m in the Army because I enjoy it because I’m maintaining my training and a Readiness state if something big happens, for the mobilisations which, kind of, ultimately, are fairly unlikely to be actually, actually mobilised. Unless its directive, it’s a huge headache for, you know, for my company. So I manage their sales office if I’m taken out of the picture, it is an absolute drama to get someone who you know’s going to be good, who’s going to actually, you know, six months out, nine months out, 13 months out is, you know, that can be…on it

GR: Yeah, it’s not quite the same as hiring somebody else for lower skilled job that could be, you know, you can just recruit straight in. You need somebody who’s already got the experience to cover that off.

E2: Yeah so there is a big financial impact for employers. And then I’ve got I’ve got two children, so which I’ll be leaving my, you know, leaving my wife. And that was principally what the issue with FIRIC was that she was going back to work after you after my daughter who’s two. So, that would have really put a spanner in the works for her.

GR: Sure.

E1: Sorry, I’m not jumping on you?

GR: No, please carry on. Carry on!

E1: Do you know if, people who are here longer was just turned off the mobilisation to the Falklands, cos they’ve just been round the block? And I think the benefits didn’t outweigh the sort off….

E2: I think some of the ex-regulars who were saying you’re going into the Falklands in winter. You’ve been sold on summer pictures of Penguins and it’s going to be miserable [laughing] You can’t see your hand in front of your face for three months. Some of them definitely, yeah. It wasn’t something they were diving at, for sure.

GR: Yes, so, you get the reality of it, perhaps, people who have been there before the experience. So I think we’ve kind of really spoken about the uncertainty being unattractive and actually making it a difficult proposition to mobilise. What things do you think do or might make it easier or more attractive?

E1: So definitely in the wage is a big thing for me. Going as a private soldiers is massive pay-cut!

GR: Of course

E1: Obviously there’s less outgoings if you deployed somewhere. But it’s….

GR: Yes. Just £50 a day doesn’t go very far if your own earnings are significantly higher.

E2: I mean. The actual, the turnout, so if you, if you look at the deployment, if you look at the COVID response. It had a huge turnout, you know, one because no one was likely to be doing anything else, and two, because it’s sort of, it was very immediate. So you know this, this opportunity’s come up, we need as many as possible. People aren’t really doing very much and it’s a short-term decision. And so yeah, absolutely, I’ll jump on it and it all happened quite quickly. The issue was that, and I know we’re not necessarily looking for issues right now, but the issue was that the actual mobilisation, because it was the first time they’ve done it since World War Two, et cetera, et cetera, it was really messy. So finances were messed up. I didn’t get paid properly in my first month. I got my private pay packet in my second month, so the actual experience of that is what most people, you know, are aware of beings with mobilisation now, so coz it didn’t all go with it didn’t go through Chilwell like it normally would which is a much smoother process.

GR: Yeah.

A1: I think there was an obvious benefit to people as well, whereas something like going to the Falklands is not. You sitting on an island for three, four months whereas a deployment like helping out with COVID, you actually doing something that you can see the benefit of.

GR: So yeah, your… Even if you were mobilised and you didn’t know exactly what you were going to be doing before you were mobilised, you knew that you were serving your country in your local community, and it was worthwhile. But as you say that the benefits of the Falkland Islands are a little further removed, you know the existential threat posed by Argentina feels very far away.

E1: ‘Cause I think that that would be a difference. If 2 mobilizations were on the table and one was going to be, doing something around this, but this is a benefit you’re going to give people, against; this is exactly what you’d be doing and I just can’t really see the benefit apart from having bums in seats. I’d probably lean towards doing something, I can see the benefit of.

GR: Yeah. So it sounds like both the fundamental intrinsic benefits, you could call them, the moral benefit, is the right thing to do, but also the understanding the logical benefits so. Having you’re your wages and other things like that, on top of that makes it easier. Is that fair to say?

E1: Yeah.

GR: And it sounds like you’re some of your experience and that of your colleagues is that the organisation ,not necessarily deliberately, but it wasn’t as easy as perhaps some people felt it could be to mobilise.

E2: Yeah, and I think some people, you know, pay’s obviously hugely emotive thing. And I think that, that being messed up and certainly being very vocal about that was a lot of people didn’t come in for a huge amount of time after mobilisation…

GR: It left a bad taste?

E2: Yeah, because they were really messed around and that kind of all feeds into this sort of morale of everyone and to a certain extent I think it’s affected the numbers on FIRIC.

GR: OK. Yeah. So, the poor experience, administratively one time can really undermine future activity….And, we mentioned a little bit about choice and volunteering for mobilisation. How important is it, do you think, that is, in the grander scheme of things? That you opportunity to volunteer to mobilise rather than just get told every single time.

E2: I think you will have the most highly motivated people there if they’ve got the opportunity to look at the numbers from the volunteers first. But, you know, we train as a unit and we like to do things as a unit so that the more of us going out, the better experience is going to it is going to be generally. You’ve got, you know, your integration to the regulars. You know, historically we’ve been we’ve been very good at. But you know your confidence going into a situation if you’re with more of your mates, it's going to be it's going to be higher and morale will follow that, I think.

GR: Okay, it’s really good. You mentioned, actually, the deploying with your unit. Do you think that’s a big motivating factor; the opportunity to go with other people from \_\_\_\_\_[this sub-unit]?

E2: Yeah.

E1: Yeah, people you know. A structure that you know as well, short trying to trying to fit in and form a new team. Do you feel that…Does that extend to the other companies in the Battalion and maybe to your to the other regular battalions?

E2: I haven’t done a huge about of training with the regular battalions….You probably haven’t either, have you? I’d obviously done some, but not necessarily with, you know with the ranges is now on there, yeah, not necessarily with those. I’ve done more with Anglians on mortar shoots and sure RAF Regiment and things like that. But we’ve always…specially mortars. Mortars are kind of a different breed. We all, well we all get along quite well is less of the kind of…standoffishness at first. But normally if we deploy out, I probably wouldn’t be deploying as mortars and whatever we did, yeah.

GR: So I think from what you’ve said, you know, there’s a real draw in deploying with you’re your \_\_\_\_\_\_[sub-unit] team, the people in this building, but also the people that do the same job as you regardless of where they come from. It’s interesting you say that mortar operators from across Defence kind of club together around their tubes.

E2: Yeah…

GR: Which is… quite a nice idea.

E1: And, looping back to what you said about sort of the importance of volunteering. I think the majority of see having the opportunity to volunteer and assessing then the pool from which you might use more enforced mobilisation from. I think everyone is accepting that we’re in that situation that you that might that might happen. So you know if you’re like well, Johnny’s got a 2 month old baby, probably won’t go for him. But as long as that’s kind of being taken into account to a certain extent. Then, you know, you’ve got the volunteers first, or the highly motivated and whoever, you know, is being sort of dragged along a little bit more is going to be much happier to be in sort of a group of motivated people.

GR: So yeah, as long as, as long as it feels like the Army’s giving you a fair shout? You know, you take the volunteers first.

E1: I’d like to think that if it was a minimum numbers thing, that if you wouldn’t meet it with volunteers, I think people would be quite good at talking it out and being able to say, okay yeah, we need to get three more blokes in-

E2: it’s from you lot, yeah.

E1: Yeah. So almost being able to deal with it internally.

GR: So if you feel like the organisation is fair and grown up about it, there’s probably…a decent compromise to be found, perhaps?

E1: Hmm [agreement]

GR: Okay. And, just circling back around to the idea of deploying with other people from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_[this sub-unit], either as your platoons or company as a whole, how well prepared or trained do you feel for that? I know you mentioned that there was some talk of \_\_\_\_\_\_[this sub-unit] a company being able to deploy to the Falklands just on its own, but that evaporated a little bit. In principle, had you been, had that been taken forward, do you think that would have been a good proposition?

E2: If we could get the numbers up. I think we struggled even on sort of training weekends to be able to put together enough people, even from different companies to be able to really see the scale of things. I certainly never really seen, sort of, more than really a company mustering during the weekend as a total.

GR: So from across the across the battalion, it’s a company. So you feel like it would be good if you could get the company together, but it’s getting also the same company, as in the same 120 soldiers together routinely, is a difficult proposition.

E1: Yeah, and I think you know, in my mind, it’s not necessarily, sort of, talking about \_\_\_\_\_[this sub-unit] and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_[this sub-unit] only, but a good group of you bolting onto someone else. Because usually if you look at the SPSI [Senior Permanent Staff Instructor], we’ve got, he’s brilliant. You know, really good, really knowledgeable and he’s… the unit that he was with, he was, you know, they were out there training all the time and of course they’re going to be a better quality. But it all depends on what your pre-mobilisation training is going to be like. Because if you’ve effectively got months to really hone your skills based on whatever activity you are going to be going out and doing, as long as that is really good quality training, then, you know, we should be at the level we need to be, otherwise we shouldn’t be going.

GR: And do you think that good training breeds good attendance which then makes the training better? You have like a virtuous cycle where word gets around the last weekend was really good. More people then turn up and so on and so forth? Very much like the mobilisation idea.

E1: Yeah.

GR: A bad mobilisation means people get put off for next time.

E1: Yeah, I think, um, yeah. I think it all comes down to the morale within the within the group, and sort of, our feeling of kind of belonging and actually we should be turning up to make the training good for everyone. And that something is, you know, I’m sure you’ve experienced it kind of goes up and down, doesn’t it? Sort of ebbs and flows a bit? But….[pauses].

GR: Yeah of course. Moving onto the last couple of questions really. The last big topic, which is to do with time. So, how often do you think it might be reasonable for Reserves to be mobilised?

E2: As in length of time?

GR: Well, both, the length of time but also how frequently in that what like the gaps in between being called-up. And the notice period you get as well.

E2: So in my mind it depends on that…are you being mobilised and it’s compulsory mobilisation or are you being asked to volunteer for something. And it depends on peoples personal circumstances. So, a friend and he did a lot of six of deployments, they’d come back, they just work for a little bit then go on another deployment.

GR: But that works for him and he was happy?

E2: It worked for him. And obviously it worked with his money, so time management for him when he was away is great. So different experience. Whereas at home, that was six months. He didn’t have to work that much. He was doing a job he enjoyed, he was able to spend time with his family. That was great for him and it worked for his circumstances. For me, and it’s sort of the same as my friend. I prefer, so, blocks of time, rather than bitty; go away and do a couple of weeks here a couple of weeks there. Having a larger block, so again, with work they can be prepared that they won’t have me for a period of time. And they can sort of have some solid dates.

GR: Yeah, so it’s something that is more predictable, maybe with a longer notice, makes it easier to manage, but of course, everyone’s circumstances are different. Okay.

E1: Depends on what it is, because I suppose if you’re saying okay, we’ve got an ongoing conflict like Afghan, like Iraq, you know, are you, are other Reserves realistically going to fit into a three-year, four-year, six-year cycle? And maintain the right numbers. Probably not. But having ongoing opportunities to make up to make up numbers I think is realistic and you would, as we did before, you would keep, you always got a strong number of volunteers for that. But I think it’s, I can’t, I can’t see there would fit into a rigid cycle like that, realistically.

GR: So yes, one year on, two years off kind of thing is actually quite difficult. You think for a Reserve unit to keep the momentum going, it’s much better to have a constant cycle of opportunities and actually the holes in the Swiss cheese aligning for different people at different times works better?

E2: Yeah.

E1: You’s almost accept with that you wouldn’t get as big a mobilisation from a single unit. So then it’s a couple of individuals here, a couple there…

GR: So you accept maybe going as individuals or smaller teams might be better for the company as a whole, without having the whole company able to go away together?

E1: Yeah, but, you know, if it’s 10, it’s 10, and then that and those 10 are kind of as together as they can they can realistically be.

GR: Yeah.

E1: I think that’s it, a much more generally more daunting prospect if you are going out, one man joining into a squad of people who have been together for ages.

GR: Yeah. So even going with another colleague from the company or the battalion would be really encouraging?

E2: It depends on trade. So you were talking about mortars. If there was a deployment for me to go as a medic somewhere, I’d be quite happy to go on my own provided the opportunity was interesting enough for me.

E1: Yeah.

E2: Whereas if it takes a bit longer in the infantry cap-badge overall, I would want to go as a group so yeah, it’s that sort of. If I’m going with the trade.

E1: Yeah, that’s a good point.

E2: I’m happy going on my own. Just slotting into a team as opposed to going as part of it.

GR:OK. That’s very useful. Thank you. One thing you mentioned at the start and you mentioned again with the your PSI, is the idea that you can be a good soldier and not deploy. You can still really contribute to the Regiment, and you’ve got the PSI who puts together really interesting training that gets people enthused about their service. Do you think that’s the case at all levels? Do you think that the leaders…that it’s important for leaders to show the way, if you like, and set the example when it comes to mobilisation?

E1: I think it, I don’t think it’s essential, but I think it does hold, you know, it does hold a lot more weight in, certainly in a pure combat role or delivery of training.

GR: Yeah.

E1: I think a lot of stuff like for instance, mortars. You could never have seen combat and deliver fantastic training, which is going to just be as good on the ground when you actually do it.

GR: Yeah.

E1: It’s not as essential. But if you are….trying to describe, you know, real time experience of being in close combat than actually that’s I think…

GR: Particularly for rifle platoons?

E1: Yeah. It’s very useful to have someone actually describing it and why you might be trained to do something in particular way, but actually this for this reason is going to be better cause, you know, I experienced this. It just it does. It does hold a bit more weight for me I think.

E2: It’s a little bit showing they put in the time as well. So they made that sacrifice again. If you talk to young families, things like that, the expecting people to do it and being able to go, “look, I’ve done it as well. I’ve been away, and had to leave my family for six months when I was…wherever it was.”

GR: Yeah. So you’re, let’s say, platoon commander says… you know they’ve deployed and then when they come round asking you to deploy, you can recognise that they know what they’re up, what they really asking of you? It’s not just going on a trip for six months if it’s all the things that go along with it. Leaving behind family, jobs, other social activities that you enjoy again.

E2: But again, not the be-all and end-all. If they are able to do the organisational part of it really well, then actually, even if they haven't been on a deployment, but it can sort out some of the softer edges of it.

GR: Yeah.

E2: We talked about the uncertainty and they have to get solid answers. So, almost just as good as enthusing people to go.

GR: OK,

E2: So being able to have that experience behind them.

GR: Great. Thank you very much. That covers off all of the headlines that I wanted to mention before we finish, are there any questions you’ve got for me or any other points that you maybe wanted to offer? That maybe haven’t come out about mobilisation?

E1: I think some of some of the you know the default you go to are kind of 6-9 months of mobilizations, which are combat deployments, but things like FIRIC, for instance, I think are amazing opportunities. But you know, we’ve had shorter two-week deployments to certain places. You know, training troops in Mali, which I think was… something like that anyway… sort of two months which a few of the guys went on. I think opportunities like that are brilliant. And actually as far as you know, experience for the guys, I think that goes that goes a really long way and it just keeps people doing something and keeps people in the process if the if the opportunities to kind of fill in those spaces keep coming up.

GR: Yeah, okay great. So staying used and match fit. Any final points from yourself.

E2: No, I think, it is a reason why I joined. I look forward to going away on them, yeah. I’m hearing people that have been away is always keep that enthusiasm. As time goes on and some of the excitement wanes a bit, is just getting to some of the more routine. Being able to hear the guys that have been away again when people come back from FIRIC, they’ll probably have lots of stories that will get that enthusiasm going again, ready for the next time.

GR: Hopefully you are in a position to exploit them. Yeah, okay. That's really good to hear. Thank you. I shall now turn off the recorder.