**Group: A**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 6 Mar 22, 1930 hrs

**Location:** London

GR: There we go, so the recorder is on. So the first question really wanna open with is, which of you has deployed on operations before? Was it both?

A2: No I haven’t been, never.

GR: Okay sure, so, where and when did you last deploy?

A1: Last deploy, HERRICK 14…Afghanistan.

GR: HERRICK 14. OK. Great. And whereabouts before then?

A1: Ummm. HERRICK 7, well ISAF 10 B in Kabul in the ISAF HQ…

GR: Hmm.

A1: …As a formed unit that one so I’ve done both formed unit and individual replacement.

GR: Great. No, that’s really good, really good. And you said you haven’t?

A2: I haven’t, no. I joined in Army Reserve in 2013. Since then, there was nothing like. Ehhh. Never asked me to be mobilised. Never asked me to serve anywhere else.

GR: Uhuh, sure. Well, that’s OK. But, umm, how important do you think it is that reserves mobilize

A2: [interjects] It’s very important, I think.

GR: As part of their service?

A2: That’s what we do, I think. For the last nine years, I’ve been in Army Reserve. We, we trained and, and [muffled] I think, that would be nice, nice to see the other side. You know what I mean? All the years you put on the trained, what is like to be proper war, or proper mission to do.

GR: Hmm

A2: Definitely, that’s very important for all, I think.

GR: Yeah, sure. What do you think?

A1: I’ve never really had the same as \_\_\_\_\_ because I, basically the first week I turned up, everyone went on TELIC. So you know, I spent sort of like four months, basically being the only person turning up at the TA centre.

GR: that would have been 2003?

A1: 2003, Yes. So yeah, I turned up the week before all the Reserves were mobilised. Umm, And it kinda for me was always something that was going to happen. So, I was only four years in, in 2007 when I got mobilised first time. So obviously you’re a lot further down. I was a private soldier, just traded. Umm, so it’s kind of, I found that I kinda see where you’re coming from, but with no personal experience of that, because tour was just something that was kind of happening all the time.

GR: So yeah, you joined it, a period where.

A1: Hmm

GR: The Army was campaigning, if you like, whereas you joined

A2: when this

GR: slightly later, when it was maybe tailing off a little?

A1: Yeah, I think by the time you were traded, I think HERRICK had finished and we’d got into the other one. Was it called? That Peacekeeping one?

GR: TORAL?

A1: Yeah TORAL. And so yeah, you use the peacekeeping operations, whereas when I’ve joined, you know, it’s basically 10 years of operations. Tell everyone leave is cancelled, and then HERRICK and then.

GR: No, that’s really, really interesting actually. I think you’ve you both got quite different perspectives, but almost the same opinion. I would say.

A2: Yeah.

GR: That it’s just an expectation.

A1: So one of my staff at the moment, he’s ex RLC posty and he joined the old regular Army at the same time as I did. He left after six years and he never deployed.

GR: Hmm.

A1: But by the time I got to where he got to in his career, I’d obviously done operations so it just goes to show how different the Reserves are now to what may be peoples, the public perception is and I’ve met other people, regular soldiers who are five years into their career and I’d already done one tour of duty before that. So before I got through five years. So it’s quite an interesting sort of dynamic.

GR: Hmm

A1: Now obviously you missed the opportunity, cancel, you haven’t had that opportunity…

A2: [interjects – muffled] I know I’ve not [?]

A1: …but I know you’d take it though.

GR: yeah. So, we talked about it a bit about operational experience, I guess looking towards the future or a hypothetical future. What sort of operations do you think you and your unit and the reserve in general might be suited for if I throw out a few types to, or themes. There’s warfighting, peacekeeping, humanitarian missions, security, MACA, training support missions overseas and engagement, NATO training missions, that kind of thing.

A2: I think it’s NATO, that kind of stuff, we’ll do more like it. We can go to the wars as well, that’s not a problem. I’m thinking our role is a like the background, it’s not in the frontline and stuff. And if you look at it our people, I think that. If you put up put them on the frontline, I think most of them there’s gonna be, umm, ehh, not happy. I think they’re not gonna be… because you can see you can see people, I think, I don’t know. You can see people who would go forwards and try to fight and, you know mean, even die, but I think we are like people, like, more to support other people to do everything to, you know I mean, to not be on the frontline.

GR: Hmm.

A2: I mean, They going be frightened to be on the frontline and that could be a problem for other people who are with them.

GR: So, so what you’re saying is it could be a warfighting operation but not necessarily executing the close fight.

A2: Yeah.

GR: Yeah.

A1: I think that if they mobilised RLC reservists to fight in the frontline, something’s gone very wrong.

GR: What is it, do you think, that makes reserves less suited to that fighting? Is it just there? Less…

A1: I think you mean their role?

GR: …less used to it?

A1: You mean their role, don’t you \_\_\_\_\_\_? [together] Yes, I do.

A2: [together] What we really do.

A1: I think if you are used to it you will be fine.

A2: I think what we do, what we kinda do. If you look at it, there’s the most people work as different thing outside for nearly 90% of their life. They could be accountant, that could be a lawyers, different people, and to be honest we will have to put them up front to see exactly how they’re going to react. And now I think that things would be. I don’t know, It could be different reactions to different people, yeah. It could be more if you if you want to use them as a whole, as a full power, then if you gonna step them back later that they would pull lots of effort in. If you put too much into I, it might be a little bit too scary and that’s gonna be a little bit of a downside that. But, I dunno, I dunno…that’s what I think.

A1: Personally, I think with the correct training all of the above. The reason why I’m saying this because obviously because when you say warfighting for me, that’s all we’re doing – third line logistics in a wartime. So we might have a bit of air threat and that’s about it. Yeah, you know, we wouldn’t be, it’s gone spectacularly wrong, you know, if you’re sticking a load of truck drives a trench. So I think you could do all of it. I think it is, the thing is with is what you’ve got to look at, how the reserves are being trained at the moment. Now, one thing I’ve taken brilliantly from this exercise here, is we are looking at what the regular Army are doing. It doesn’t really matter that we can’t use EPLS lesson, we can’t actually get, we have been integrated as much as possible. So about four weeks ago myself, and \_\_\_\_\_ [a Warrant Officer] did a planning operation, to give you an example of this, where we had to design a CSC. None of us had seen the CSC before, and I’ll tell you straight away it looked nothing like what’s out there, okay. So not going with most depths; I could probably get about four hours on that, but the thing is with it is, I think that: if you know if you know that you’ve got a load of it, a lot of people who can drive SV or drive the vehicle, that is most likely to be used. So for EPLS all of the above would count, like we would be using that for every single element of operation MACA tasks etcetera. And we’re just getting ‘em through and we want to get people trained up. If people are trained on the equipment, they’ve got a basic standard of soldiering, umm, then you can adapt through RSOI packages, pre-deployment training if there's enough time for it. TELIC, I think TELIC scared the reserves because there was people get mobilized at 2 days’ notice, a weeks’ notice and getting chucked in the theatre, but normally through HERRICK we didn't learn again where you had three months build-up training. Urr, even now, they are having that for TOSCA, for a TOSCA tour. I think that if you, if you. We have to be really good at our trade. And then, sort of, the other parts are, are important, but not the main focus of what I would do is but ¾ of our training for us as RLC reservists into trade training, looking at what \_\_\_\_[regular unit] do it cause, even if we’re standing on a hill looking at you doing it, we’ve got an insight into it. Myself and \_\_\_\_\_ have been saying this, I mean, XPs. I’ve never done one before and the theory that I had in my head was different. When I went on \_\_\_\_[exercise] with \_\_\_ [regular unit]. I saw a DP that was completely different to what we’ve been trained to, how we’ve been trained to do it. And as I said, if we can do that we can narrow the integration because otherwise you end up fighting your previous war. So if you mobilised me tomorrow for the Ukraine or Poland or wherever, all of my HERRICK knowledge goes straight out the window and all you really care about is whether or not I can drive the truck or end and lead, and you know, in my in my junior command position. So I think that what it probably is what we don’t really want to do is as a fighting force, especially with the reserve because it takes a longer time for us to change direction in training, is to start fighting the previous war. I think that we’ve gone coz we’ve gone into a weird Cold War- HERRICK hybrid at the moment there IEDs and tanks and all sorts of stuff.

GR: Ah, so what you are saying is don’t train for something too specific…

A1: Yeah

GR: …’coz inevitably you’ll get it wrong.

A1: Yeah, because as I said, you will be fighting your previous war or two wars ago because we can do the Cold War stuff and it’s like, we now know how fast the Russians could advance, and it’s not as fast as we thought, you know, so you know. It’s, I think that, you know, keeping the generalised training. We could do all of those as long as we keep up with what we were doing with HERRICK, which was the three months prior pre-deployment training. Because we’ve had people deploy as infantry, because the \_\_\_\_\_[other Reserve Unit] another regiment were deploying. And they did a trawl out. \_\_\_\_\_\_[Senior NCO], well he went.

A2: But we’ve got a few people from the infantry anyway.

A1: No, no. This was RL…, \_\_\_\_\_[SNCO] did all the training coz the \_\_\_\_\_[reserve unit] asked for a trawl out.

A2: oh.

A1: I, I deployed as a different RLC trade. So as long as you got the build-up time and you’ve got the basic building blocks there, I think you can do all of those tasks, possibly with a focus on MACA. And because one of the reasons why the reserves are taking it over is obviously we’re in the community, we have, and like for RESCRIPT, the was, what was that one? That was narrow gauge forklift operator and regular Army didn’t have one. We had two in the Regiment.

GR: Yeah.

A1: Because of civilian jobs I mean that that maybe slightly different. Maybe that that one we could focus more on. CGS just said that we were going to be looking at that, I think so.

GR: yes, from April 2023. Yeah, I believe, yeah. I mean, picking up on a couple of key themes that you mentioned, and please correct me if I’m wrong…time, like the notice period, is really important…

A1: yep, yep [in the background]

GR: …For you, but also the ability to prepare yourself and your skills are really important.

A1:Yeah.

GR: Is there anything else about the time, the notice period, that you find important?

A1: Well, The thing is with, with being a reservist. So, well what you probably find even on this exercise would be a good example, so day one. Right now I’m gonna be \_\_\_\_ the Civil Servant. I’d a payroll problem last Friday, I spent most of the day on phone to HR, then a bundle all my kit together Friday and thrown it in the back of the combi-van driven all the way to \_\_\_\_\_[barracks], got dropped off. [unintelligible] How effective would I be in my rank then? Probably not very much. However, 14 days later, what am I going to look like? 30 days later from that moment, what am I going to look like? And 90 days? I reckon I’m gonna be giving everyone a run for their money. At 30 days are going to be competing. At 14 days I’m going to pretty much going to have the hint of it. I think one of the problems as a reservist is people look up what that looks like on a Friday afternoon, really. And it does take a little bit of getting to the military mindset.

GR: Yeah.

A1: So I think that what you see if, what, if I was, if I was looking at the training and the mobilisation I’d be looking at, right; what building blocks do we give them so that they survive first day? What they look like after two weeks? There’s a month and three months. ‘Cos three months is when we could be deploying, but TELIC, it was two weeks so you know. And then sort of breakdown the training and see what you need to get to that point.

GR: That’s really interesting. I, I, and you say that: the training at the time available to you is really, is personal to you, as in you as an individual as a soldier. You feel that the time is…

A1: Uhhh, I think, well, I said so, second tour I originally was gonna mobilize as a Pet Op, ad had to re-role as a supplier but I did that in a three month and I took to it quite well, so it was a node supervisor with three months

GR: Hmmm.

A1: I was, you know, doing a class one job after three, after class one, after class three course. ‘Coz I had those three months I managed to not only re-role but we would, myself and the other reservists, but we want the ‘Best Troop’ at \_\_\_\_\_[regular unit] when we had the MRX before the deployment. So, you can achieve an awful lot in in that period of time that sort of the ideal, but you’ve also got to look at the high readiness state; for us is 30 days and the realistic situation that actually happened in it with TELIC which was, you know, that you know if you’re a Port Operator, uhh, they got mobilised in something like two days…

GR: hmm, yeah.

A1: from it because we needed those things off at Umm Qasar. So I think you can have a look at it to see, right, this is what an RLC driver would do, what could they achieve in two weeks? Well hopefully they’ll be able to drive an EPLS and we can sort of throw them at it pick the rest up on an RSOI. What could they achieve after a month? Well, they probably would have done dry drills of XPs, DPs and the things that you gonna be doing in theatre. In 90 days, what, will they be at the same level as their regular counterpart, and possibly hope even be upskilled because you, you could potentially put another courses such as ADR Hazmat, you know that sort of things that we can carry ammo…

GR: yeah

…etcetera, etcetera. So that’s what I’m saying at the time period, it depends on the deployment and obviously you know you can’t, you can’t always build up to it…

GR: ‘course.

A1: …’cause I mean, you know, the Russians invaded Ukraine. It seemed to take everyone by surprise. Even the Ukrainians hadn’t even deployed their, hadn’t even mobilised their reserves until the day one of the invasion. So, it’s, you know it’s you have to have those graduations and phases and say, “right, well, what can we achieve in that time?” that’s what I think kind of, if I ruled the world, I’d probably try and do it with the Reserves.

GR: so…well we…

A1: It get’s better, mate! [chuckles]

A2: No, no, no. Please do. You’ve got, You got more experience than I…I’ve never done it. I don’t know what the process is…[unintelligible].

GR: Yeah. Well, that’s OK. I mean, you said you have not deployed before, but if you were to be deployed, how important is it for you that you have a choice?

A2: Oh, definitely, very important. That’s most important ti-…The more time you’ve got and more choice you’ve got that’s superb.

GR: Hmm. So, ahh, by which I mean, of course, all mobilisation is compulsory, but of course we have a policy of ‘intelligent selection’ whereby essentially the Army only asks the people they know will say yes to mobilise. How important do you think that policy is? That, that essentially they ask the people who want to go first?

A2: I think so very important because that’s what you need really. You need really need people who want to do go somewhere. You don’t want to force people who, because then the people never going to be effective as much you want to be them. And then if they are only there to be there. Then, you know, I mean that’s not going to be good for anyone for definitely not for the team you gonna work with.

GR: hmm. And how would you feel if you were, I suppose, mobilised against your choice? The Army just said we definitely need you. There’s nobody else. You’ve got to go.

A2: It’s fine, it’s like. For my side but depends what my [other] half is gonna say it because that’s what you have to look at it because you don’t want to come back, and she said that’s the bags and now to go, off you go, because you know you left me.

GR: So it’d be a huge strain…on your family and your employers?

A2: That’s the stuff. That’s, that’s how you’d have to look at it. It’s not only you, like, all the regulars how they do all the time and stuff, we’ve got other stuff which we have to commit all the time. If you are gonna leave everything and leave her to deal with it and she’s not gonna cope, then you gonna have a problem and come back.

GR: So you think the that for you and your family choice is really, really would be really important.

A2: Very important.

GR: yeah. How about you?

A1: Yeah. I mean, personally I think this happens extremely rarely. I mean, I can only think of 1 case off the top of my head with something happened and that was this, uhhh I won’t say the rank because you know him. Ummm. We had, we had someone who…couldn’t deploy on tour on the on the HERRICK that we went on because his other half was over after halfway through cycle of IVF.

GR: Hmm.

A1: Now I’d totally back him up on that and I have told him that, like, quite a few times because he always feels that well, you know, they had this massive bonding experience cos the whole squadron went off and then he was behind

GR: And he feels maybe he let them down? Was he in a command position?

A1: He was in a junior command position.

GR: Junior command, OK…

A1: He would, he would, he would probably have been a packet Commander.

GR: Yeah.

A1: He was I think Lance Corporal, at the time. But I still think that he made his Sergeant. Umm, but now. But I still think they made the right decision and I think in the regular army that would have happened as well. The interesting one is with the split ups because that does happen as well. But it happens in the regular army as well. So, I think it with it I think that, yeah, because what happens with, don’t know if you know the process of what happens, because I had to say “no” once for Op OLYMPIC but the reason was because I’d only come back from Africa to work in Afghanistan three months before and they were going, “yeah we gonna think about mobilising you for Op OLYMPIC,” cause there’s no way my employers going to like that and I’ve lost legal protection anyway at that point.

GR: Because you’d waived it?

A1: Well, no. Because, like, obviously if you, you, could only be mobilised a certain amount of times.

GR: Yes.

A1: So three months afterwards, it’s like the... So, I spoke to my employer. It was a pretty short conversation. And to be fair, I backed him, backed up on that. “I’ve just got your back!”

GR: Hmm.

A1: And because of the civil service was an important national event. They was like “no”. And I agree with them; I, I completely agree with them and I never had a problem with that decision. Umm.

GR: But it was a frank and honest conversation with your employer and they trusted you-

A1: Yep

GR: -You trusted them to have that-

A1: yep.

GR: - grown up conversation.

A1: But it happens before the envelopes hit the mat normally. And yeah, it normally is the PSAO, in our case, who gives you a ring around, you get a phone call going, “Right, got this tore up. Do you want to go on it? Looking at the matrix you’ve got skill set. Do you wanna go?”

GR: Hmm.

A1: So it’s not, thing hits the mat and then you’ve got seven days an employer can go through and things like that. So normally there’s a pre… On pretty much everything, There’s been a pre one. I’d have to speak to the TELIC guys and I can get back to you today on what happened with them. Ahh, but I do believe it was roughly similar then, but was constricted, constricted one with it. As I said, TELIC, was the real one where which is out of the ordinary. But we’ve done many more tours than that, but the TELIC one was the one that everyone looks at, going right, yeah. It’s gotta be ready to rock like, you know, a day and that [chuckle] and then sitting in the desert wearing 4 ROMEO for like, days on end. But yeah, that did happen, but that was, you know, 20 odd, 20, I mean, it’s 20 years ago, 20 years ago now. And, you know, I think things have changed and I think that it’s become a lot more organised now.

GR: That’s good. That’s good. Having the feeling of organisation. For the, for, for… having the sense that the Army Reserve is better organised, does that give you more confidence?

A1: I think the mobilisation progress process even through my two mobilizations, has improved. I think there’s certain things that they did…they can take a bit cavalier attitude on like your *pay* [emphasised] Umm, I, yeah, I did at one point next year list to be returned back from theatre to because I was only earning £300 a month for some reason and my rent was becoming an issue and it, it like two months in. So I actually presented myself to clerk, and said, “you’d better book a flight, mate” or sort my pay out and they sorted my pay out, mystically. Despite me moaning about it. But yeah, I mean I think that there are certain bits of elements of it. I mean, I know that moved from Chillwell. So I hope that might have changed things. Umm, I haven’t heard any similar problems with it from recently from the MACA tasks. As we have got people through with it, I suppose one today.

GR: So of course, I mean you don’t join the army for the money, but not getting the money is a huge negative factor, of course, because you-

A1: yeh

GR: -because of your life in the background.

A1: Yeah, and obviously. We’re not like regulars. Most of us got mortgages or rent to pay and the landlord, normally very, err, you know, very…[trailed off]

GR: Of course. They have bills to pay as well.

A1: Well, yeah, so. You can get away with it for a while, but occasionally you is. I mean, it happened on TELIC. It happened on HERRICK. I know myself, being one case, HERRICK 7 and HERRICK 14. Well, somebody happens to people and yeah, you could do without, you know, being in camp, back in Camp BASTION, phoning the camp up, phoning the mortgage provider explaining why you haven’t paid your mortgage that month.

GR: Which really undermines. Your motivation?

A1: Yeah [sighs]. Yeah. I mean, there’s two things you don’t cock up in the military; is food and pay. But yeah, hopefully, but it has got better. I’ve got to say that because some of the TELIC horror stories I heard were, you know, amazing. But that was when we first had, first big mobilisation. But I do know, I don’t know what happened on the last one on the last one, I haven’t heard any, any horror stories. Noone’s phoned me up and demanded that I go and pick them up. So yeah, ‘cos they’ve gotta earn some money. So I mean, you know, it might have been cleared up now, but that’s a real kind of worry when you do get mobilised.

GR: No, that’s good. Thank you. We spoke a little bit about training and how time and preparation training give would give you more confidence. How, how well prepared or well trained do you feel now for deploying on an operation?

A2: As me?

GR: Yeah, you personally. Maybe, maybe your sort of immediate team as well.

A2: Um, Um, quite well really. I don’t mind really. I think, I think I’ve been prepared pretty well. Because that’s what I do for a living anyway. I’m HGV driver that’s where it helps to be honest to be deployed as a driver to be honest, to deploy. I can learn quickly any trucks or any skills I kinda need. Uhh, yeah I’m fine. But we know definitely there’s other people who got problems focus to get to different courses working for Class C, Class C + E for two years, begging everyone and there’s always problems.

GR: So it’s a slow individual training progression?

A2: Too slow I would say.

GR: It’s the waiting times. You feel people are available for them, they just can’t get on them?

A1: It takes less time to train and familiarise an Apache pilot that it does for an SV driver from cat…

GR: In the Reserves?

A1: Yes, if they’re coming with no driving licence that was that, that pathway will take 3 ½ years versus two and half as an Apache helicopter pilot. ‘Cos you only got to do 1, 1 licence to get an Apache helicopter pilot and you need to have at least three to get…well you need, well you need 2, to, to become an SV driver.

GR: Hmm.

A1: Personally, I’d say not at all at the moment because we’ve got one EPLS driver in this Squadron, in my Squadron. She’s over 50 and probably undeployable. Umm, we would not be able to support \_\_\_\_[regular unit] as EPLS drivers unless there was some kind of familiarisation training laid on immediately. Being a TELIC style situation. Looking out in the yard, we've only got about four box bodies as part, so if you wanted us to one if you wanted \_\_\_[my] Squadron, both our squadrons to support it, we’d be having a massive punch up over four vehicles, basically that we can drive. So whilst I appreciate there’s been an impact of the pandemic etcetera and you know we are having problems getting people on courses. In answer to your question, brutally speaking, not at all because you would…\_\_\_\_[regular] Squadron, let’s just say, if they wanted us and \_\_\_\_\_[regular unit] I don’t think they’ve got enough six and a half six tonners or any use for a 6 tonne driver.

GR: The other people simply aren’t there to do it at short notice?

A1: The trained people, no. I mean the people are there.

GR: Yeah.

A1: We are just all six tonne drivers. And so realistically looking into vehicle yard I would say, if you, if you say 14 or 30 day readiness I would say not at all. 90 day you might be able to ramp up, ramp it up. ‘Coz that’s way I look at things. We had this discussion about how I look at things. So in the TELIC 1 situation…hopeless. We might be able to turn it round at 30 days. And 90, err, 90 we’d probably get it squared away, but yeah, \_\_\_[A2] is right that he points out that. I mean, it’s not totally everyone’s fault, ‘cos there’s an HGV driver shortage with trouble getting people C and C + C tests. But yeah, at this moment in time, yeah, we could probably deploy one EPLS driver out of our squadron. Probably from across regiment I think believe there are, 3 EPLS and 5 operators. And, yeah, that’d be an interesting conversation with\_\_\_\_[paired regular unit].

GR: Yeah, I imagine so…That’ actually very, uhhh, quite…quite detailed and there’s a lot a lot in what you’ve just said.

A1: I do think about this a lot!

GR: I’ve just even in terms of if… you do think about it a lot?

A1: yeah, because, you know, having been deployed and everything and you always kind of looking at things and people…

GR: Do you feel like the organisation should be doing better?

A1: Well, it’s a little bit of a tricky one this because everything got shutdown a pandemic we’re talking about completely unprecedented situation. That having been said…when, something like the Ukraine kicks off…as a Sergeant…the lads are asking me questions. And so I have to think about a feasible answer because normally when we have those conversations, I go “yes,” “no,” and “I don’t know” a lot of it, “I don’t know”! So I have to think about that, you know, these sort of things ‘coz the guys will ask me that.

GR: The broader political questions or just about-

A1: Do you reckon we’re mobilising?

GR: Yeah, so how does it affect the unit.

A1: We get two feet, we get 2 inches of snow – “are we be mobilising?” There are floods in Kent, where you would ask if we are mobilising, you know the guys are willing to do it and they are very keen to do, to help out and especially when they see their community or in geopolitics kind of thing to do it. So that’s kind of where, where the senior NCOs do have these conversations going, “right where are we at?” “ What would this look like?” Yeah, you know exactly.

GR: So you, you mentioned about being asked questions. How, how important is it for you to set the example when it comes to mobilising or being available, being ready?

A1: Umm, well, most of most of the senior NCOs in our squadron definitely, well, have done at least one tour.

GR: uhuh.

A1: Okay. And I do think that… So the guys obviously when you… Especially so pre op, post 96 where we become deployable overseas, the TA and now the Army Reserve, uhh, it’s more than reasonable for the guys to want to know, well, “what happens when you get mobilised?” or, you know, “Am I gonna end up in a slit trench in eastern Georgia?” Well, probably not mate! You’re gonna be supplying the slit trench in Eastern Georgia ‘coz you’re a driver. But you know, they want to know these kinds of things. And did you know it’s, a it’s a…

GR: And they expect you to have the experience and the answers?

A1: Well, well, we kind of…As I said, we are always fighting our last war.

GR: Yeah

A1: So I've got the HERRICK experience of mobilisation. And I’ll tell you it, the good, the bad and the ugly. Umm, but, umm, you know, it’s more the reason was the guys were reserves will be, will be asking those questions to the senior, the senior NCOs, the more experienced guys. And I think that works throughout the army. I don’t think it’s just, you know… otherwise what’s the point of having a rank structure really. I mean, especially in your non-commissioned friends. You know we’ve done through experience and competency.

GR: Yeah, so, so you, I suppose I summarise I guess what you said and say: Setting the example is important –

A1: Yes.

GR: -and I think from what you said you clearly do try and do set that example…and…because you think it’s important which is…

A1: Yeah, I mean do got awesome mental questions as well. There was a rogue shooter somewhere in London and someone asked me if we’re going to be mobilised! I’m like, no, they don’t pile the army in because someone’s got shotgun, mate. There’s like there’s a police force. Yeah, I mean hopefully it filters out some of this stuff! So it doesn’t get asked of the officers who would probably think you’ve lost it.

GR: Yeah. How about you? You’re a little bit more junior. How…do you look at the higher ranks above you and think, they’re asking for things that are not willing to give themselves when it comes to mobilisation deployment?

A2: Ahhh, I would say I’m quite disappointed with the volunteering of whole, huge…of the seniors and stuff. For example, because we had COVID, we couldn’t train people as well because they are off work, for example. I don’t know what is the aim for that. For us to be how many people are going to be a driver or kind of drivers being and stuff because that has to be, from major above to do that. The kind of way you wanted to us to be. Because we never hit these numbers.

GR: Hmm

A2: And even, even I try to be instructor, driving instructor. I said to them, 2 years, to be a driving instructor to train other people, because that’s why they would even try other people as well. Never, ever, no-one came back to me. Yeah, we go because we’re gonna need you because we need more drivers, or this. Then if it did not.

GR: So, you feel it can be a bit short sighted and opportunities get missed.

A2: Of course. All the time. They don’t…Of course, big time. You know what I mean? And if you want to have a good drivers and stuff. And from people I was begging to do civilian C, C+E for 2 years. Yes, they never get nothing like that coming, never. Always late, or this, or that. If they’ve got course, they say, “Yeah, you got two days to give me answers because otherwise, the slots, someone else is gonna take it.” That's more like this.

GR: Yeah.

A2: We don't….

GR: Yeah. So I'm missing the opportunities and then giving short notice unrealistic opportunities.

A2: Yeah, fairly short, yeah.

A1: You are at a disadvantage if you’ve got a job. I mean, saying about GSDI I, that’s been one of my objectives the OC gave me for three years. Now, the bottom line with it is, ‘cos I’m one of the first class one drivers expected to be on it, most experienced drivers our squadron because we re-roled from Pet Ops. Umm. GSDI, driving instructors; we haven’t been able to get people through for years, as I said.

A2: …after three years, GSDI, they say, all the time.

A1: Yeah, yeah, its…

GR: You’ve been trying for 3 years…

A1: Yes, I said the pandemic has changed things with it and you do have to be very careful through with it? But it’s yeah, it’s kind of. It’s one of those things with courses especially. I think one of the things that does worry me a little bit is that, do I feel like I’m a slight disadvantage because I’ve got a job? Well, yes, I think I probably…! Because, the thing is with it –

GR: purely practical reasons, you have less time?

A1: Well, I, yeah. No, no, it’s not that… you can’t…so…my employer is more than happy . So I get additional leave for where we are at the moment now.

GR: Hmm.

A1: …As almost all civil servants do get three weeks. That’s fine and my manager is more than happy to give me that and its not a problem. However, as \_\_\_\_[A2] quite rightly said, if you if you said to me, on Friday, “Yeah - got this GSDI course starting on Monday, mate. Could you be at St Omer Barracks? There is absolutely no chance in Hell my…even the world’s most supportive employer’s gonna be able to do that.

GR: No…

A1: And I think that similar to my CBRN instructor course, like we only got the dates out quite late for that. I’m going to expire, in fact, everyone in the Regiment is going to expire, so, by July.

GR: So, so, we are back to this idea of notice and planning. And do you feel it’s quite demotivating, demoralising as this happens?

A2: Big time.

A1: I’ll see how it goes, I’ll see how it goes as it comes out, after, when we go back to a new normal. The one thing that’s a bit worrying, I find about it is that the new normal looks a lot like the old normal, and as we see with rushed back into a system that didn’t really work.

A2: No, but, I think if you don’t move forward to the next…I did, I haven’t did move forward for three years. I don’t feel like having to move it forwards in the next one or two years.

GR: In your Army Reserve career…?

A2: Yeah, of course, yeah, because every time I try to do, everything we aim, some problems all the time, problems. “We haven’t got this, we haven’t got that…” ADR, had ADR, I try to get a new one; no chance or nothing like this and everything all the time that we have since then. In two years time I’m gonna look at it and I think “waste of time.” Because what am I gonna do?...I’m not gonna [unintelligible]

A1: I don’t think that’s gonna last for another two years ‘cause I know, I know exactly where the instructor for those courses went… they went to the DWP coz we’re doing, ‘coz there was a national shortage and I can go…I can give you paid through the system coz you’re on benefits, a Kickstarter programme…close… if you got car licence to class one I do it in 12 weeks. That is that, you know that all the army instructors went there. So, you know, I think, but that’s a little bit harsh and short-sighted.

A2: So it is true but have a look at this how many people who are reservists going down, the numbers gone down, the weekends go down, everything goes down, it doesn’t go up. Why? The question is, why? This one only because whatever they do normally, I mean other people, whatever they do, want the angle. That is. No way. No way. Yeah….And I think that definitely is no give you any, any, any boost, anything. Here we go. Let’s go. I wanna be there, I want to do this. No way, no way…because you don’t have to go on, I’m never going to get it. What is the point in asking?

GR: So the organisation doesn’t make it easy, doesn’t help itself-

A2: Yeh

GR: -and doesn’t help you-

A2: yeah

GR: -In terms of motivation, that’s what you feel?

A2: Hundred percent. The problem is, we don’t know where you want us to be? You know what I mean? Do you want us to be the way we are? Do you want us to be someone else.

A1: I think the one thing that could hurt, which doesn’t help, is that you have to be certain ranks to do certain things…but that doesn’t put your experience into it. So, you could be like… we’ve got really, really high class personal trainers but because they are Private soldiers, they can’t become PTIs, even though they probably more qualified than most of the PTI Corps. Umm, GSDI instructors, you have to be a full-screw. Well, if you haven’t made that yet, well you’re not going to get on that course, are you? So yeah. If your CBRN instructor is Corporal and above, I’ve got loads of Lance Corporals who wanna be a CBRN illustrator but they can’t because of that. But they might be working in those fields in the in, in, the real life and that, you know, they could be working, working…I know someone is working in a hospital and you, know, he does the nuclear stuff on the X-Ray machine probably knows more about CBRN than anyone else. But because he’s a Lance Jack, we’ve gotta wait for him to at least get a local promotion to full-screw before he can become a CBRN instructors course. I think that’s kind of one of the problems, ‘coz as I said with PTI it’s quite interesting. So we got loads of PTIs who are PTs in real life, but I can’t become PTIs because they got through it, even though they may have a degree in sports science. Umm, I do think that sometimes the Army system does shoot itself in the foot in the Reserves. Obviously you can’t send like a Corporal on a course for a general, but with where you’ve got instructor qualifications. I mean it's quite right, you could be a HGV instructor in real life, but because you’re a Private, you can’t become a GSDI.

GR: Yeah

A1: I think so, I think that you’ve gotta be a full screw for that. So. You know that…. Because what makes Reserves a little different is what we bring from our civilian life.

GR: And if, if they are, if the Army is not helping you and helping itself ultimately exploit that it’s missing a trick.

A1: Yeah. Yeah, ‘coz people could well get through with it.

GR: So that undermines,-

A1: yeah

GR: -the readiness and the preparation for operations, so it’s really tied in together

A1: I mean, ‘cos I was speaking to \_\_\_\_ at our unit and go, “Yeah, mate, I know you do it everyday. I know you’re a HYSTER instructor, but according to Army, can’t be a HYSTER instructor. I know you’ve got loads of experience, and you earn loads of money, drive around the country teaching our people how to use HYSTERS but I’m afraid until you’ve done your PNCO course, mate, yeah it’s not happening!”

GR: Yeah.

A1: We can have…that’s just an example I thought of off the top of my head. I could think of some more!

GR: That’s very useful, thank you…Just to cover off, I suppose my final area of interest. Umm…back to a time factor… How often do you think it is reasonable for you to be deployed?

A1: Uhhhh…Right…

GR: How frequent?

A1: Right… it depends on the situation.

GR: Hmm.

A1: I think that, anything around the sort of HERRICK-y tempo… every three years?

GR: Yeah.

A1: Maybe two years. Obviously..

GR: But if it’s regular, programmed, lots of notice-

A1: Yeah, Yeah,

GR: -that really helps.

A1: Yeah. If you were on a tour cycle and you know what it is and it normally ties in with your high readiness year, which is reasonably easy to find out…I don’t know\_\_\_\_[my unit’s]…So don’t ask me! Umm… which is reasonably easy to find out then, and it normally ties in with your sister regular unit because they go through cycles, that would be fine. I think that, obviously if this an absolute national emergency then, you know, you can shorten that down once every 12 months wouldn’t be too much of a problem… I mean if the Russians were suddenly in Calais. Ummm, but yeah, I think once I think at the moment, once every three years for a HERRICK and then for MACA tasks…that’s a really good question because obviously it could almost be every year depending on where you live in the country. It might be just for three weeks…I mean, how long does a flood go on for?

A2: I, I, would say a little bit different. 3 Years could be good because you have to prepare yourself beforehand, 3 months, and afterwards and stuff. And you have to have wife time, and kids to spend with them before you going to pick deployment again. Three years is kind of a pain, but there is no nothing wrong to have a more opportunity for people who are single, for example, who wants to go somewhere who wants to do it.

GR: Hmm.

A2: That can go more often. That’s no problem.

GR: Hmm, you can volunteer more frequently.

A2: Why not?

A1: But you always can. Well, \_\_\_\_\_{SNCO Colleague} was with me on HERRICK 7. He was a reservist but he’d done 12 tours of duty, including back to back tours in Bosnia.

A2: But, But..

A1: Mostly you can always…You can always do it. You can, there is a way of doing it. So when you go back through Chilwell, through the demobilisation process, that’s a question they ask you. So, and also you can be a make it wherever your chain of command. So, I think that does-

A2: But, but..

A1: -exist under normal circumstances ‘coz yeah a lot of people who got house deposits, me included, [aside] just saying, Through do-doing the tours. So you can you can do I think. Yeah. I think that you can do that. Yeah. That may change though, that was in the TA, the Army Reserve might be different.

GR: Let me just have a quick look at my notes and I’ll see if there’s anything I wanted to swing back around 2 seconds, please…. So, you mentioned particularly about families and actually that’s., a, in some respects, a negative factor. How do you, do you see them as a positive factor as well? Do they support you? You said that, broadly speaking, your civilian employers support you. Given enough time, did you find families are supportive?

A2: I think they. It all depends, but of course they are. There are a couple usually, they should… that’s what you want to support whatever you do. And, and, ehh, of course you need a bit more time talked through and to explain to her exactly what we’re going to do, with how it looks like. You know what I mean? That’s fine. The finance is all the time going to be there, which is very important for her. She can find out there, someone who looks after the kids. How many kids you’ve got and stuff. You know what I mean?

GR: So it’s notice and information about what you’re going to be doing?....The certainty?

A2: Certainty. Exactly. Then that’s what I think.

A1: I disagree with that but that’s because we’ve got different situations, so I’ve got a five year old child. And so I’ve got away and obviously I’m getting paid by my civilian employer and getting additional leave. However, my wife isn’t and she had to take two weeks leave and one of those next weeks unpaid leave because otherwise we can got to Butlins in the summer. Ummm, financially speaking, because she’s had to do reduced hours last week, and is unpaid next week, actually I’m gonna earn no money off this, no additional funding.

GR: Net, as a family, is net zero?

A1: Yeah. Net Zero. But if I don’t qualify for bounty because that kind of like your expects goes on.

GR: That’s your 13th month almost.

A1: I will lose money. So, it depends on your age of your kids. It depends on, you know your family unit. But from my position, and it is literally everyone's individual here, ‘coz obviously as a Sergeant, people tell me stuff that they don’t tell you as a \_\_\_\_\_\_{Corporal]. I mean, we have personal conversations anyway. You know more about me than lots of people...[aside] that’s a point, I’ve got to stop whining at Lance Corporals! But the problem is…but 4-5 years ago I completely agree with you. And, you know, up to when his was two and a half, this like, jackpot! We’re going to Euro Disney? Here we go now. Now it’s like, hang on, I’m making no net gain here. So the money I make out the Reserves pretty much the weekends now and then that causes you problems ‘coz then you start thinking, well, is the strain on my relationship worth it? Do I really…is the bounty that enough aggro? Because it’s not that much really.... It’s two weeks wages. You know…

GR: So, you add up all the time you’re away, and you’re only going away so that you can afford to go out more?

A1: Yes, and I think that that’s kind of it, depends on the circumstances, but this having been said 5-6 years time when my daughter’s in secondary school bit more independent….yeah, jackpot! We’re going to Euro Disney, we’re going to Orlando, you know that this will pay for that sort of thing. So it does depend on the time, whether or not it can do. My wife’s pretty good with it, she told her own sister that I’ve been with the Army longer than her and so she has to put up with it…But he did…You know…individual experience, I mean. But if people are lose, leaving the reserves. When you speak to people, the two major reasons are relationship and employment.

GR: Hmm.

A1: Umm.

GR: Not personal motivation? They probably still want to serve? Real life gets in the way.

A1: Yeah. I mean, especially, I mean, if you’re looking at, in terms of what… so our target demographic for recruitment under 35, you’re looking about 70% of people in retail, there’s a labour shortage in retail. They have to work on weekends. So unless you’ve got a really big employer and they’re really understanding, you’re not going to be able to do their weekend training. Because I know one of our Squadrons they’re having major problems because they have got loads of people working in a local IKEA and IKEA want to support, but they’ve just so short staffed. So it depends. It’s, it’s a very fluid situation and I think that... What should be done is more sort of a localised approach to it and give him the flexibility to know probably commanders at a regimental level, perhaps even down to a Squadron level to say, right, these are me problems, how do we get round ‘em? ‘Coz they will know who they people work for, what sectors they work for. Whether or not it’s pinch-point, how old your kids are, etcetera, you’ve probably met them all. You know, so local OC’s, probably, I was going to change my answer there… local OCs are probably going to be quite key in that if you want to keep ’em. Because in my only be for one year 2 year period, but the amount of people that just leave…

GR: Hmm.

A1: …is just insane whereas you could just quite easily say, “yeah I need a leave of absence for a year, sir”…

GR: Rather than just disappearing?

A1: Yeah. Rather than just…Yeah…then you’ve lost the close to up to hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of training, just wandered out the door and ain’t coming back.

GR: Because they feel like the organisation doesn’t support them doesn’t make it easy?

A1: Or they don’t know about leave of absence.

GR: Yeah?

A1: You know, personally, I’ve taken two 3 months once because work, ‘cos like one was at start of pandemic. Like the poo hit the fan ‘cos I had to go into job centres and we had, like, 3 million customers where we normally have 88,000, in two week period, because everyone claimed Universal Credit as per the Chancellor said. And I had one sort of had one of the start of when I got my new job as an armed forces champion because it was unprecedented and I had to set it up and I was working weekends. I didn’t do a weekend for three months! So, you, it can be done. It’s just, but I know that as a Sergeant would a Private, know that No, probably not!

GR: Hmm, sure. No, OK. Thanks. I think we covered a lot of the areas that I was really interested in, so thank you and thank you very much for your contributions before we finish, is there anything you, any final points you might wanna make? Any questions to ask me?

A2: No I think so. If that goes to be everything, you know what I mean. Next two years, we gonna see so. I mean, that’s where we go. You have listened…we change everything. That’s great. It before and if you do what you did, but that would be make different for us both on double. That would make sense.