**Group: H**

**Interviewer:** Gavin Randell (GR)

**Date:** 27 Apr 22, 2000 hrs

**Location: Portsmouth**

GR: This is Group Hotel, the recorder is on. So the first question I have for you is just a bit of an ice breaker. Which of you has deployed on operations with the Army Reserve before?

H1: Did you do...?

H2: No really, wasn’t really…I did RESCRIPT but that wasn’t really ..

GR: Yeah, that counts!

H2: Yeah, Yeah RESCRIPT.

H1: Yeah.

GR: All three of you?

H3: No! I had to isolate as my wife got COVID the day, two days before.

GR: Oh, I see. So you weren’t able to deploy.

H3: I was hoping to join the second Op, but there wasn’t one.

GR: Right, I see. So you were very keen to go, but unfortunately…

H3: ‘Cos, yeah I was in a different job at the time, but I absolutely hated it. So I was, when the when the opportunity came too say goodbye to them for a few months, I couldn’t wait! But we don’t mention it, I’m not bitter about it, but still…[laughing]..we’ve moved on.

GR: So, you’ve said you were keen to go, but unfortunately couldn’t. And you two guys did do Op RESCRIPT in the end, how important do you think it is in general that reservists mobilise and deployed as part of service?

H2: Yeah, quite important.

H1: I think definitely the option should be there, for those who want to, but giving like fam… ‘cos at the time, I was at university so I couldn’t do it. Sometimes in full time job it’s not really viable that time to go. So I think the option should definitely be there. Unless things really kick off then you are mandated to, I think it should definitely be there. Especially working alongside regulars as well, not just like an individual reserves mobilisation. I think integrate with regulars, so it could also be quite important definitely, moving forward.

GR: Yeah. So you all see is something that’s really a central part of being in the Army Reserve.

H3: Yes, certainly. I haven’t mobilised yet but that that was one of the reasons why I joined, to be able to do that. I know our role’s changing now, with swapping from \_\_\_\_\_[Brigade] going into the new brigade role. It looks like there will be a lot of short-term mobilisations as well which is perfect for me. So I’m looking forward to hopefully get on some of those, for sure.

GR: Yeah. Okay. Great. And you say you’re moving to a new brigade. Do you think that will change the sorts of things that you might be asked to do compared to now?

H3: Yeah, we are being told so. We are being told it’ll be more like short term training team side of things. Also more UK based stuff as well, isn’t it, like. Disasters…

H2: Yeah, that’s all MACA tasks.

H3: Yeah, that Military Aid to the Civilian Authority.

GR: Like Op RESCRIPT.

H3: Yeah. Some of that but also going over to places like Africa and helping with their indigenous armies, that sort of thing.

GR: Yeah, OK. So, overseas training and also the UK operations side of things. Do you think they’re jobs that your unit would be suited to?

H1: I think definitely some people, more so than others. Just given, really, experience…

H2: Job qualifications as well. There’s enough people if you trawl a Reserve unit to do it like an STTT, do a Short Term Training Team for a West African Country. You’ve got all the people you really need to hold qualifications, you will find within that unit. They may be spread out between companies, all the people willing to do it. But I think you could form, quite easily, an STTT, from at least our Battalion.

GR: Yes, so across your Battalion, across the companies. OK. That’s interesting to understand as part of the overseas training side of things, what about the UK operations side? Do you think that’s something that you’re prepared for?

H3: Well, we’ve not had any training in it. [overtalk]

H1: Yeah, But it’s like RESCRIPT for example, although it was a very basic task, we all worked within different teams and they were all pretty, ours especially, was just our Company.

H2: Ours was just this Company. Maybe just one other person.

H1: Yeah. And within a day, we had that, sort of, squared away. And we didn’t really have any issues with it.

H2: It was just in afternoon trade, wasn’t it?

H1: Yeah, literally two hours training, up at Battalion headquarters and then, sort of, out into it, really, and that was that.

H2: Yeah, we started another two for a day and then just us doing it, trotting around the South-East for a few weeks.

H1: So I think definitely things which, sort of, maybe like more general duties tasks, I think pretty much anyone can do it so I think the benefit of being in the Reserves is, you know, if it’s a customer facing role, pretty much everyone in their day job would do that, give or take. So I think, I don’t wanna say we are better suited, but in a sense, we would potentially handle those situations potentially better. Just because we are bit more used to interacting with public and we’re not in this regular mindset, which sometimes, regulars don’t see the see the outside world.

H2: Yeah, the last mobilisation I did was at the Land Quarantine Facility item in York.

GR: Yeah.

H2: And when I went up there, went out to be just like basic block monitor. But then when I got there, they said, “well what do you do for your civvy job?” And I said, “I run testing sites. The lateral flow ones.” And they decided, well, he’s not going to do that, he’s going to do this, because, like, your civvy job means you’ve got to be good at this! And get involved in all this kind of stuff.

GR: Yeah.

H2: So it, but that helped because the chain of command there were Reservists as welI so they have that mentality of, well he’s a Reservist, he’s got a life outside of this, he’s not just a rifleman.

GR: So they could be a bit flexible to the skills you could bring?

H2: So they’re quite good at getting a Reservist, asking “what’s your real job?” OK it’s that, we’ll get you to do this, because you’re going to be good at this because you’ve got experience doing this kind of stuff.

GR: So on the whole, I sense you feel that you’re pretty well prepared for the jobs and the tasks that the Army might throw at you with a bit of specific training for the actual job? It would be relatively achievable?

H3: Yeah.

H1: Yeah, yeah.

H2: We’d have a bit of pre-deployment training for most things, wouldn’t you?

GR: It’s interesting you mentioned that being Reservists, actually UK public facing roles might be really suitable for you. Do you think it will affect the way the public sees you?

H3: In what way, sorry?

GR: So do you think the public will be more supportive of the organisation as a whole if they see you out and about helping?

H3: Well, we’ve has, sort of, like… public engagement is like Armed Forces Day, isn’t it? Things like that. There’s no…It’s all treated pretty…good really.

H1: I think the biggest thing in public in terms of Reserves is that no-one really knows what we do.

H3: They just see it as the Army.

H1: They just sort of see it as part of the Army then like, yeah, you go away. And like, people don’t understand it. Or see that it is completely different in the way that it is ran in certain cases. Like when we were doing the COVID stuff everyone was…everyone knew we were Reservist. They were sort of like, better than what you normally do? Sort of, making small talk. So…

H2: Well, no, my normal job is this…[laughing]

H1: I think it probably would if people, sort of…I think, again, it depends on the role. So you do like the Commonwealth Games and that’s not really much of a discussion, you are sort of there as an administration person.

GR: Yeah.

H1: But I think if you’re actually talking to the public, their perception would definitely be improved, just because of the interaction with them.

GR: Do you think UK-type operations are inherently a worthwhile thing for you to be doing?

H3: Yeah, but I don’t know if I’d want to be on them forever. So, it’d be nice to go to rotate, through it.

GR: Do something of everything?

H3: Yeah. But it’s certainly a role I’d happily get stuck into.

H2: Yeah.

GR: And how about the overseas training teams idea? Do you think that is something that is worthwhile doing that?

H3: Ah, yeah, 100%.

H1: Yeah definitely.

GR: What is it about it you think makes it worthwhile?

H3: For me, it’s the whole, without being too cheesy is one of the whole reasons why I joined up, which was to give something back a bit. Do something different, but give something. You know, make a difference somewhere. And if it is just, if you got an oppressed country that’s trying to fight off terrorists or something like that. To be able to help them, maybe pass a bit of knowledge on. If you do that, you’d go away from there with quite a sense of achievement.

GR: And you said so to have two of you have mobilised and deployed. You unfortunately missed out. What sorts of things do you think make it hard or unattractive to mobilise?

H2: What do they call it? MTMC Bassingbourn.

GR: The training centre?

H2: Yeah. The mobilisation centre.

GR: OK, what is it about that?

H2: Well, when we mobilised for RESCRIPT, we did it down here. Then when we went up to York, I had to go to Chillwell for it, before they moved to Bassingbourn. And it’s just so clunky. It’s just you sit there just queuing all day. It’s just…I think it’s better when I de-mobilised, because you are literally in to see the clerks, asked “do you want a medical?”, “no I’m fine,” and you are done. Off you go. But it’s just you get there in the morning ridiculously early. You sit in a brief. Get your paperwork pack…

H1: Which makes no sense!

H2: Yeah, right. You’re now, going from here, you’ve got your medical at this time, make sure you there. Right, then you go again do J1. Then you gotta go do this. And you just get sort of bounced around the place. And at the end of it they go, yeah, right, you can leave. But you are just constantly waiting for someone else. You are just sat there queuing all the time. I think the day I did it, they were mobilising a load of blokes to go and do SF selection or something like that. So they were trying to get us through first, but even then it was still just, clunky, slow.

GR: So not such a good experience the last time you went.

H2: No. And the blokes that they were in front of me that were…they were trying to get the Reservist award so they can pay for dog care. Like someone to dog sit their dog for them while they’re away and all sorts of stuff like that. They were like, well, I need money for this, money for that, and this and this and this and this. I was there like, this is my civvy wage, this is what I earn in the Reserves. Put it together and, oh yeah, done, thank you. That’s it.

H1: Yeah, I think another thing, sometimes the length of deployments. Because as I alluded to earlier. They are going to the Falklands now and there is quite a big push to get the lower ranks through, but. But none of us here are clearly going till you go in and like myself, I’ve just has a baby. And then we both still got full time jobs and where we can’t just sort of, up and leave. Because while we are away. Life still goes on.

H2: Yeah.

H1: Trying to slot back in, into the rhythm of it, means you sometimes get put being behind the people as well, so I think you gotta weigh up, civilian career versus the actual, your Army career, in a sense.

H2: You won’t get sacked if you go but someone else will be the one that was there getting the opportunities for training courses, getting a pay rise, getting promotion where you’ve been? So, you’re back here and I can you rejoin here and they’re up here already?

GR: Yeah.

H2: It’s not just pressing about it, but you just explain to your boss.

GR: It’s a consideration for that you make, OK? So civil employment, but also the notice that you have to deploy to get your personal affairs in order?

H1: I think it will be, I think it depends what it is. Sometimes it's sort of quite you get quite a while because it's like if you volunteer to do it, which a lot of the stuff in Reserves, you got quite a bit of time, most of the time.

GR: Yeah.

H1: But then sometimes it can be quite quick-

H3: Like, “what you doing Wednesday?”

H1: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. What you doing next week? Do you wanna go somewhere? And then it’s very much sometimes the information is only getting passed around as well, then you start getting angry emails or phone calls being like, “why haven’t you done this?” “Well I didn’t know I had to!” Yeah, I think, sort of, the time, notice wise, isn’t that much of an issue, I don’t think. From what I’ve heard.

H3: No, I don’t think it’s that.

H2: I think if you are able to, mobilise and disappear within, like two weeks then, fine do that but I think the vast majority of us need to give at least a month’s notice to work, if not more,.

H1: Get all the paperwork ticked off. For instance, with my job down there trying to hire someone, but they just they can’t find anyone to do the job.

H2: Yeah, unless you go away for like only a couple of weeks disappearing for like a month or two months doesn’t make that much difference. But if you are going for six months. You can’t just go, oh, by the way, as of Friday, I will be gone for six months.

GR: It’s a big gap for your employer to stand.

H2: And if they need to employ someone else to do your job. Well, you’ve got to get an advert out. Got to get it approved before you get it out, advert goes out, people apply, interviews this, that and the other, so by the time they’ve actually found someone, there’s only about two months left and then you are back!

H1: And then I think as well on that sort of notice. It’s like when we went to Kenya, the times, the dates you are given when you initially get told and then especially if you work with a regular unit, are then different to what they are told. So we get the issue where we had to leave to get back to employers and they were like, trying to organise getting his flights out of the country from somewhere with the Wi-Fi was pretty much non-existent.

H2: Yeah, there wasn’t Wi-Fi, it was a satellite dish.

H1:Yeah.

H2: Crappy connexion to your phone.

H1: So it was…I think that sometimes is an issue as well. It’s, again with the Falklands, going, oh right, three months, you’re going to be leaving in April, coming back in July and then it’s gone from that to now be leaving at the end of, you’ve got to deploy in March.

H2: Well, in Kenya, we weren’t mobilised though, so-

H1: Yeah.

H2: Yeah, so that was quite lucky, in a sense. In the sense that, our employers said, “you have to be back on this date or else I’m going to kick off!” Obviously, if we were mobilised, that wouldn’t have been an issue and they couldn’t do that.

H1: We went on safari and ended up bashered up on the fence line!

H2: Nah, we never ended up on the fence line! We just got dumped in the arse end of nowhere! [laughing]

GR: What would make it difficult or unattractive for you?

H3: I mean, it’s difficult my work now. I work in a small team so well, there’s only, literally, in the company, like five of us.

GR: Yeah.

H3: So, no one else does my role, so that would. It be putting on, obviously, putting on, my employer was also my best man. You know, it’s like, I don’t want to…

GR: You don’t want to put them out unnecessarily?

H3: No, but the same time. He knows that at some point I’m gonna have that conversation with him. My wife supports it. She knows again that at some point it’s coming. Right this second, just had a baby boy.

GR: Congratulations.

H3: Thanks very much. So that would put me off at this second. And that was a big thing with the Falklands. Thinking, do I miss his first four months…Or should I really be there for that. And I mean, she was probably a bit amazed that I even considered it [laughing] but we discussed it, yeah, and I decided it was more important to be here. If you’ve got the choice, I won’t get those four months back, so... Yeah, I think that, work I could have a with and get over it. Hardest bit would be, probably, leaving your family for a little bit, but that’s the same for anyone who is in the forces, not just me specifically. But yeah, I think that’s probably, yeah, current situation. The baby. But other than that, it would just be, just work really, just managing it for work.

GR: And what sort of things do you think make it easy or attractive to mobilise?

H1: I definitely, sort of think, where you are going and what the job role is. ‘Cause if it’s, sort of, you getting some sort trip to the Gambia, for example, that is somewhere you wouldn’t really go with your day-to-day holiday or whatever…

GR: Something different and exciting?

H1: Yeah, definitely something different, something different in a role in which excites you would definitely make you, especially myself, I think most people would be a lot more keen to try and make those extra efforts, outside of work, outside the Army to get affairs in order so you could go. So I definitely think, destination and job role is really important.

H2: And also, Reserves need that job security. ‘Cos you know you’re not going to be financially disadvantaged by going and you gonna come back and your job’s still gonna be there.

GR: So it’s about legal protection is also really important for your Peace of Mind.

H3: Imperative.

H2: You know, we’ve got more people have mortgages, families, so yeah. You couldn’t have a full-screw on crazy money like you couldn’t…well, they probably could deploy his full-screw wage, then I think people would pretty soon get pissed off.

GR: So making sure your pay is in order is…you know, you don’t go for the money, but it’s important to get it right.

H3: Yeah, you don’t do it for the money, but I think it’s important to know that you still got bills to pay for if you’re away. Yeah, you need to know mortgages and tax is taken care of.

H2: I think it’s a bit different to, like your…not saying that this is a standard thing, you know, a regular private soldier living in the block. His rent comes of his pay, he does not have to think about it. With us, we get paid, then the mortgage payments, council tax, rent, car insurance, electricity, gas, water, all that stuff. You gotta think about it. If the Army’s let your pay go and said, you’re not going to get your Reservist award this month, but you’ll get it this month and we’ll back-date it. Well hang on a minute, that’s not going to work.

H1: Yeah. Yeah. And then I think some people as well. When you’re at university where you just leaving and lads going to the Falklands for them. It’s like ah great, it’s six months of employment where I don’t go to a training or graduate job so. Here’s an easy 20-odd grand. So I think if you’re unemployed or in between work, that again, is when it’s really, really ideal. Yeah, pay award, definitely.

H3: But the other good thing as well. Is if you’re out work especially in the current climate. Say something happened and the company you work for folded, something like that. You know, you could either get on courses. Or you could get on something, some way.

H1: Yeah, that would be something that would be able to do.

H3: You wouldn’t have a silly jobs. You would probably be matching any major wages, but it would still be something. You’ve got work.

GR: You mentioned, before we talk about the money, that the job role was potentially quite attractive. What is it about a job role that would be a good thing for you?

H1: I think sort of, like \_\_\_\_[H3] was saying about. I already was said about potentially teaching other nations or to involvement with them as opposed to them…I think generally overseas, would be more attractive than UK time dependent just because again it’s just more interesting. Any sort of job role really, because it varies as to what your unit does.

H2: Definitely, the teaching job role, is more exciting than what we were doing.

H1: Definitely. Teaching is more exciting that, say, force protection or something.

H2: Filling sandbags!

H1: Yeah or filling sandbags.

GR: So something that’s interesting, but also in itself worthwhile and let’s say a good thing to do?

H1: I think, to be able to as well, use your experience. You don’t wanna go away for six months on the mobilisation to stand in a sanger, knowing nine times out of ten, if not higher, that nothing is going to happen. You are just there for the sake of being there, so.

GR: So something that is both relevant and challenging to you that is worthwhile?

H1: Yeah, definitely. So essentially, you know you can sort of feel why you’re there, you could acknowledge or appreciate that is sort of valuable.

GR: And having an impact?

H1: Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

GR: Yeah. We spoke a bit about different types of operations that you might be doing and you said there way a change of role on the horizon. How prepared do you feel as individuals when it comes to mobilisation? Do you think if you were called-out you’re ready to go?

H2: Depends what for. And if I can find half my kit in my loft! That’s always a fair…you know, put it in a box

H3: No, well I think, we are at a level personally, if you were suddenly sent off as a battle casualty replacement somewhere and you had to fit into a section, you’d do it.

H2: Yeah. I think if you are going into a role that you weren’t trained for. Like one of those MACA taskings, like right, you’re going to go and do, I don’t know, you’re going to go and work in a hospital. Doing this, that or the other in a hospital. I’d be a bit like, “whoah, OK” [uncertain]. But I think the actual mobilisation process, leaving, actually going away would be fine. I think if it’s role specific and it’s not a role that we are trained for beforehand.

H3: As long as you get that training.

H2: yeah, as long as you get that training, it’s fine. I think everyone gets a basic understanding of pretty much everything, just by being a Reservist and getting about a bit. But I think just, yeah. A bit of pre-deployment training, or the job training as well, that will get you up to scratch.

GR: And how about as a team, within the company or within your platoon, say?

H3: Yeah, I think so. There’s a lot, you tend to find a lot of the weekends we do, you’ve got the training nights. There’s a certain, there’s a regular…

H1: Same faces…

GR: Like a core of people who always turn up?

H3: So those of us, normally if you do a weekend, there is always a section at least a section strength, so you tend to work together quite a bit. So you sort of know each other’s strengths and weaknesses, shall we say. So, I think we’ve got a strong team here.

H2: I think as a team…when we did COVID testing we were basically, like we said, our team was all from our company.

GR: Yeah, was that good, was that an attractive prospect?

H2: Yeah, definitely. Because we were pretty much mates beforehand anyway before they shoved us all in together. Someone must have gone, oh, they’re all friends, put them all together…probably not the best idea! But you know, it worked well for us!

H1: Probably would have been effective to say standard, but enjoyment wise I wouldn’t have enjoyed as much if it was a complete gash from the entire Battalion merely because when do we ever-

H2: Really work with?

H1: When do we ever really work with the rest of the other companies as one unit? Not really! You don’t. You speak to them in passing or some of them we are mates with. But we work, sort of, as a company.

H3: Yeah.

GR: Is the friendship aspect particularly important as well?

H3: Yeah, it’s another reason.

H2: Yeah, I think if you mobilise it is a lot easier to go with a mate.

H1: Yeah, 100%.

H2: I mean, in York, one of our mates was already up there. So I’m basically I’m going up and meet him, and that was great, because, you know, my mate was there. And I didn’t know anyone else before I got there.

H1: Definitely, you presume you feel like you’re not alone.

H2: Yeah.

H1: Like, if anything goes wrong or you’ve got any issues, you know it’s not just you in that boat.

H3: Well sometimes, if you can do something, like if you go and integrate with the regular course, you can be a bit, especially if you got a promotion or something, even if you go with people from here, the unit or from your battalion, wherever you might see him again for the course. You might wave at them across the harbour area or something like that. That’s about it! You won’t see ‘em. And that’s like, sometimes it’s a bit like “ooooo” [unsure/worried].

H1: Sometimes when you go on like, you know, when that pressure’s on, the regulars have always, like, ‘cos you join halfway through the course, in that example, they’ve already got to know each other.

H3: They’ve already had a few weeks together.

H1: You’re the new kid.

H3: And you’ve gotta fit in! But to be fair it’s always a lot better than…

GR: So yeah, if you deploy to anything or do anything as a team, you actually feel like it’s better than if you were a bunch of individuals, ‘cos that comradeship is already there?

H1: Yeah, even if it’s just like two of you. It just makes it better!

H3: I think so. ‘Cos you already, I mean, you’ll know it from operations yourself, but you go through it with your mates, you’ve been in horrible situations, but funny, since you’ve been through it all, so whatever you go into then, it just feels like it’s just going to be…just that little bit easier.

H2:Yeah.

H1: Yeah, be much more attractive if something came up. And someone’s like “ooh, not too sure” and then, say, you messaged me and said, oh yeah, do you want to do this? Like patrols comp.

H3: You love it!

H1: Yeah, it pushed me over the edge, just because its…[chuckling]

GR: OK, great. Just to circle back around, something you mentioned at the start. With the prospect of more frequent, but maybe shorter deployment or mobilizations. How realistic a prospect do you think that that is?

H3: I think it’d be a lot easier for me to have a conversation with my employer. But, to say, look, “this is what I’ll be doing, this is where I’m going, I’ll be gone for eight weeks,” as opposed to six months.

GR: Are you worried that be a bit more unpredictable?

H3: No, I think we’d still get….Good point, I don’t know, I always envisioned it would still being similar, sort of gentle notice period-

H1: I think we’d still get a fair warning [overtalking].

H3: So like, I think they’d be saying, right, I think we’re going to be saying we’re going to be sending someone over to that country, to take over from whoever is there. That changeover will happen-

H2: On this date.

H3: Yeah. So then you’d start off…I know I’ve got a bit of tinted glasses on. But that’s kind of how I saw it.

GR: Still having that notice is still important?

H3: Yeah.

H1: I think it’s also easier to get it around your family because we’re still very much used to the idea that…obviously I am, I could go to wherever, I’m sort of okay with it. But then partners and that where they’re not in this Army mind. It’s sort of, to them, you’re going off for two months, like that’s more manageable than if you like, I’m going away for even three or four months. Just because, to them, that’s not normal. If you like in civilian life. Noone really goes away for their job to another country for two months at a time. So I think that would do…It's definitely easier to persuade, I think.

H3: And again, it’s easy to say, the families will be able to countdown 3 months as opposed to six months, the best part of a year here.

H2: It’s definitely especially, but work, ‘cos in two months, there’s less chance of your peers getting, overtaking you. You’re not going to have to get replaced or anything like that. Alright, well he’s gone for two months, we can survive that. We’ll just have to pick up his work a little bit. But you know, when he’s back, he’ll work for leaving us on our own!

GR: Yeah, okay great. That kind of covers off the key topics that I had had in mind this evening. Just before we finish off, are there any points or anything like that you thought about but maybe the conversation moved on, that you might want to add?

H3: I don’t think so no.

H1: No, my big thing was just the families. It’s another factor that we didn’t really touch on. Them being OK for you to go ‘coz it’s not just making a decision on your own. So there’s other people there think about…

GR: So having an element of choice is important. So you can take into account things that are important in your life?

H1: Yeah, I think ‘cos a lot of time it is just weighing up your normal civilian life versus. What you gonna get out of doing the Army stuff? ‘Cos I think it can be hard sometimes to be like, OK, I’m just going to go away for two months. Well, then you still got a missus living at home, on her own, if you live together, for example. It’s just all things like that, I think have it never board is also one of the biggest factors things. Especially if it’s Overseas. UK based, you’re pretty much always going to have some signal. If you got into middle nowhere things, you could go out there without problem, but I’m just not speaking out for two weeks, but-

H2: [inaudible]

H1: Yeah. That definitely, sort of, helps. So that we know that you can still keep your friends at home, mid-mobilisation.

H3: You have to!

H1: Not saying we’d stand teaching someone in Gambia looking at your phone all the time on Whatsapp. But just in certain situation…[pause]

GR: Okay. Great. Thanks very much. I’ll turn off the recorder now.