



ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

ON THE OCCASION OF

RESERVE FORCES DAY

KESWICK BARRACKS, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

12 AUGUST 2007

Captain Barrie Newman, Chairman, SA Reserve Forces Day Committee and Mrs Newman
BRIG Hanna, COMD 9 Bde
Parliamentarians, State and Federal
Senior Defence Representatives
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here today in this beautiful city. I wish to firstly congratulate the tri-service guard and Australian Army Band – Adelaide, the re-enactment troops, reserve organisations, cadets and my old battalion association.

As a young Duntroon graduate who first cut his teeth in a leadership sense in command of a National Service platoon in 1958, who later in Vietnam had the privilege of commanding 50 magnificent national servicemen in a rifle company of 110 and later still had two reserve formations, the 7th and 11th Brigades within my 1st Division, I am delighted to be in Adelaide for the 2007 Reserve Forces Day Parade.

All around Australia, men and women have gathered to commemorate their service to the nation in the Defence Reserves, as National Servicemen and in the Citizen Forces, and also to remember friends and colleagues with whom they served.

It is of interest to note that today young men and women of our Reserves are engaged in operations in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Africa, Solomon Islands, East Timor and on non-active service in Butterworth.

They all carry forward the proud tradition of Australia's Reserve Forces, including, in many cases further stepping up to serve their country by performing full-time service when called upon to do so, or for many, opting to join the regular forces as a result of their part-time reserve experience.

Our Reserve Forces have been involved in every conflict in which Australia has been involved since the Waikato War of 1863-1864 (New Zealand), to more recent times as contributors to the International Coalition Against Terrorism and in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Indeed part time soldiering in Australia goes back almost to the beginning of settlement with the first volunteer force raised by Governor King on Norfolk Island in 1794.

By World War II, Militia numbers had grown to approximately 80,000.

Citizen soldiers took the initial brunt of combat operations in the Pacific when they went into action against the Japanese in the rugged and unfamiliar terrain of Papua New Guinea against a highly trained, determined and ruthless foe.

Who will ever forget the valour of the 39th militia battalion, particularly under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner in its magnificent contribution to the defeat of the Japanese on the Kokoda Track. As an aside I note with great pleasure that Army has recently re-raised the 39th in its order of battle.

With the return of peace in 1945 and the restructure of the world order, young Australian men and women were again asked to give up a weekend a month, Tuesday nights and 14 days on annual camp to prepare for the challenges of the post-war world including the Cold War.

The first 90 day National Service Scheme was established in the 1950s and from this the Reserves received a boost of "Nashos" who completed their service obligations in part-time service in the RAN, the Citizen Military Forces and the Citizen Air Force.

My first command as an RMC graduate was as a Platoon Commander of a National Service Platoon in Western Australia in 1959. I still have soldiers from my old platoon come up to me in the street and tell me how their service experience had taught them much.

In the 1960s, Australia's defence effort focused on its involvement in South East Asia, with Malaysia, SEATO duties and confrontation predominating. While the Reserves of all three services continued to provide the mobilisation base for large scale conflict, the government of the day chose to introduce a selective two year National Service obligation to meet the high manpower needs of operations in Vietnam.

And what a splendid contribution our National Servicemen made to that 10 year war. As an Infantry Company Commander at the time, I can honestly say that one could not tell the difference between regular or part time soldiers; we were all one company; the one battalion; the one Army, united in a single purpose to do a very difficult job to the best of our individual and collective abilities; and I like to think we did it well.

After Australia withdrew from Vietnam in 1972-73, the Defence Forces adjusted to the new strategic situation. The Reserve continued to fulfil its role of providing an opportunity for young Australians to gain useful skills and serve their country, but still in the context of a mobilisation base for expansion in the event of major crisis.

Until the early 70s, many National Servicemen dedicatedly joined the Reserves on completion of their two year full time obligation and continued to serve on a part time basis.

In the 1980s, the Reserve Forces continued to be viewed as the essential Strategic Reserve for the Australian Defence Force, but with the end of the Cold War, in 1989, the likelihood of major mobilisation lessened and the rationale of maintaining a large mobilisation base became increasingly under question.

However, nothing stays the same for long and soon we found ourselves facing new challenges in an uncertain world.

The prospect of peace, so welcome at the end of the Cold War, has again been challenged, particularly with the threat of global terrorism.

The Reserve Forces are now required to be a more ready Operational Reserve, rather than our Strategic Reserve for mobilisation. Indeed, they now do much the same basic recruit training over several weeks as their full time compatriots.

Accordingly, since 1999 Army Reservists have seen active service in East Timor, Solomon Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan including provision of the first Reserve infantry company to be integrated within a regular force battalion since World War II.

Reserve brigades around Australia now regularly deploy rifle companies to Malaysia, as part of Australia's commitment to the Five Power Defence Arrangement.

Reservists also took part in the provision of humanitarian relief to devastated communities in Rwanda, Somalia and Papua New Guinea. In recent years we have seen Reserve Forces called upon to assist in the evacuation of Australian citizens from the devastating bombings in Bali.

Here at home three splendid Reserve Regional Force Surveillance Units (one with 236 indigenous soldiers in its ranks) conduct ongoing land based operations in remote northern Australia from the Pilbara, across the top end, through the Torres Strait and down the cape to Cairns.

More than 2,000 Reservists from around Australia contributed to the security support for the Sydney Olympic Games and more recently in Melbourne for the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Brisbane's 7 Brigade played a similar role for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2002, as well as the 2003 Rugby World Cup.

Our reserves also make a valuable contribution to the community, providing assistance in times of natural disasters such as floods, droughts and fires and in emergency rescue operations.

In recent years, we have witnessed the professional commitment of many of our Reserve specialist personnel to a range of humanitarian contingencies. This has never been more evident than during the humanitarian relief operations in northern Sumatra after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Aeromedical Evacuation Teams, supplemented by Reserve medical specialists, deployed at very short notice, evacuating critically injured citizens by RAAF C130 aircraft from Banda Aceh to Medan.

Today, the Reserves are being geared to bolster our defences against terrorism in the protection of vital national installations and in other functions.

So it is a long, proud and distinguished history of service and I extend my thanks on behalf of the Australian nation to those of you who have served in the Australian Defence Reserves and those currently serving.

Finally in closing, I wish to formally acknowledge the families and employers who have supported, or continue to support our reservists in their service to our nation. Without your flexibility, commitment and understanding it is doubtful our reserve forces would be as capable and proficient as they are today.

Well done to you all and keep up the good work.

Thank you.