

Senator the Hon Sandy Macdonald
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence
Speech at the Launch of NSW Reserve Forces Day 2006
Defence Plaza, Sydney
Wednesday, 22 March 2006

I am honoured to represent the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister this evening at the Launch of New South Wales Reserve Forces Day 2006. Mr Howard and Dr Nelson regret they could not be here, but I am sure you will be heartened by the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister in the Reserve Forces Day community service announcements screened a short time ago.

As some of you may already know, I am the son of a returned soldier who rose through the ranks of the 2nd Division. My father helped shape the affection and respect I hold for our Reserve Forces. I am now charged with portfolio responsibility for Reserve Policy and I can assure you the Government will be very much reminded of the vital role reservists, their families and employers are playing to help maintain the current high operational tempo of the ADF.

The professionalism and reputation of the Australian soldier, sailor and airman is well understood by a grateful nation, but we have never had a Defence Force comprised purely of professional, full-time, personnel. We have always looked to the citizen soldier to boost our permanent forces.

The Militia, or Citizen Military Force, made up the main part of the Australian Army in the 20th Century, with Reserve forces forming the backbone of our defence capability from Federation through to the First and Second World Wars.

CMF members who enlisted in the expeditionary forces of World Wars I and II helped forge the modern Australian identity and ethos of the modern ADF. Let us not forget that many of the original ANZACS who fought valiantly at Gallipoli and on the Western Front were ordinary citizens and part-time soldiers only a short time before going overseas. In 1942 it was the militiamen of the 39th Battalion who were the first to confront the Japanese advance along the Kokoda Track.

By 1943, amidst critical manpower shortages, the transfer began of 200,000 men from the CMF to the 2nd AIF. Their contribution helped save Australia from possible invasion.

The Militia, CMF, and subsequently the National Service and Selective Service Schemes of the post-World War II period, served as precursors to the Reserve Scheme adopted in 1980. We owe much to the sacrifice and service citizen soldiers, in their different incarnations, have provided to this nation.

Australia now has about 20-thousand Active Reservists across the three services. We are living in an era where the Defence Force Reserves are both complementary and supplementary to the Regular Force.

More than 1,100 Reservists are at this moment serving at home and throughout the world alongside permanent members of the ADF. They wear the same uniform and do the same job as the regulars. They are a part of the one strong team that is the Australian Defence Force.

Reservists have also demonstrated they can hold their own when given specific tasks in their own right. The deployment of a Reserve Platoon to the Solomon Islands as part of the Regional Assistance Mission has freed up regular personnel for other operational duties while allowing Australia to fulfil our responsibilities to a near neighbour. The annual Reserve contribution to Rifle Company Butterworth and participation by Reserve units in major international exercises gives reservists valuable experience while allowing the capability of the ADF to stretch further. Here at home, Reserve Response Forces are on stand-by right now at the Commonwealth Games, contributing in their own right to Australia's anti-terrorist capability.

I would like to congratulate the Royal Australian Corps of Military Police and Number 22 City of Sydney Squadron RAAF for the milestones being celebrated this year as part of Reserve Forces Day. With 160 years of combined service, both have given much to Australia over past decades and they continue to play an important role in the modern ADF. The MP Corps motto - *First in, Last out* – is quite poignant when considering the MPs have the highest combat mortality rate of any unit in the Australian Army in per capita terms. Some 6th Division veterans will tell you of the gratitude they have for the efforts of military policemen during their withdrawal from Crete in 1941.

I am pleased to see the support given to Reserve Forces Day by the Australian Defence Force Cadets. Whilst not being part of our Reserve Forces, the Cadet Organisation has a long and proud history of creating interest in military service and developing the ethos and skills that have allowed numerous young Australians to go on to permanent and part-time service in our Defence Organisation.

The 2003 Defence census revealed more than 17 per cent of Reserve members had cadet experience and nearly half of the Reserve Officers of 1-star rank had been cadets. Former cadets account for between 35 and 40 per cent of new entrants to the Australian Defence Force Academy. The Minister, Brendan Nelson, and I are eager to ensure the Cadet Experience continues to develop the leaders of tomorrow through the promotion of positive values and exposure to challenging activities in a military setting.

Proof of the contribution reservists have made, and are still making, to the ADF is evident right here in this room tonight. The decorations many of you proudly wear on your chest signifies your commitment to your nation and your preparedness to undertake the often difficult tasks your country has asked of you. On behalf of the Government and people of Australia, I thank you most sincerely for your contribution. It is also fitting that, this year, the Reserve Forces Day Council has chosen to honour civilians who have served overseas in the interests of helping those in need. I thank you too for your commitment.

I commend the Reserve Forces Day Council for creating increased public awareness of the achievements of reservists. I wish you well for your activities in July and I now have great pleasure in officially launching *New South Wales Reserve Forces Day 2006*.

Thank you.