

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
OF DEFENCE PERSONNEL**

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 73

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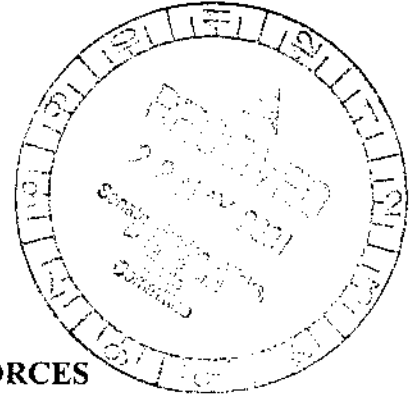
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Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
References Committee Enquiry into
Recruitment and Retention of ADF Personnel



Dear Senator Hogg

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE RESERVE FORCES

I read with interest the recent media releases concerning recruitment and retention in the ADF. Unfortunately, information concerning the Senate Enquiry does not seem to have been widely disseminated. No one that I have spoken to in the last two weeks has any knowledge of it. I strongly recommend more visible publicity so that you attract more submissions from people who are aware of the problems that exist and need rectifying.

I am currently a member of the Inactive Army Reserve, having previously completed two years in the Regular Army, followed by 28 years in the Army Reserve. I hold the rank of Major.

I now number among those who have withdrawn their services out of frustration. I believe I have some insight into the reasons behind poor retention and recruitment in the Reserves, and some of the matters I raise below may just as well be applicable to the Full-time Forces.

When I first transferred to the Reserves in 1973, it was difficult to get people to leave. Many reached retiring age, and applied for extensions of service. Serving members spoke fondly of their time and activities within the Reserves, and this encouraged their mates to join. Recruiting drives were not necessary ... word of mouth proved to be very effective. People often served for 30 years or more.

In the last ten years, this has not been the case. Word of mouth has it that service in the Reserves is not what it used to be. Serving members no longer encourage their mates. Numbers dwindle. Many resign as soon as they have completed their recruit training. Some resign before they have done so.

Recruiting campaigns or advertising have never been effective means of recruitment, and spending more money in this area is unlikely to reverse the trend.

Our leaders must ask the questions: "What causes serving members to resign?" and "What prevents serving members from encouraging their mates to enlist?". These issues must then be addressed in order to reverse the current trend.

I will recount some personal experiences, and, although most of these instances relate specifically to myself, I am aware of many other serving personnel (and former serving personnel) who found themselves in similar situations.

In general, Reserve personnel are badly treated. I don't mean bad treatment in the sense of physical abuse; I mean they are administratively mistreated. In my case, I was treated better as a Second Lieutenant in the Regular Army than I was as a Major in the Reserves.

Many decisions that are made at a high level do not have the desired effect when translated to soldier level. Indeed, they often have the opposite effect.

Some years ago, the "One Army" concept was introduced. Under this ideal, Full Time and Part Time soldiers were to be treated equally. A good concept, but how has it been applied at soldier level?

An example of how this hasn't worked is in the area of allowances (such as meal or travelling allowance). Given similar circumstances, Regular and Reserve soldiers in a unit should receive the same entitlement. The handbooks state that this is so. In practice, priority of entitlement is generally given to the Regular soldiers in preference to the Reserves. Often, Regular soldiers receive their full entitlement while Reservists receive nothing. When unit administrators are challenged concerning this, the Reservist is invariably told: "There is not enough money to go around", "You are a volunteer, you have no entitlements", or "Yes! The manual says you have an entitlement, but whether it is paid or not is at the discretion of your Commanding Officer".

In my experience, this problem did not exist in units manned entirely by Reservists, in which all members received equitable access to entitlements. The problem does exist in Reserve units that are administered by Regular Army staff, who are more inclined to look after their own interests rather than those of the unit personnel they serve. The "One Army" concept is not working at unit level.

I also noted that when entitlements were paid to Regular Army personnel, they were usually paid in advance, but on the odd occasions that Reservists actually received an entitlement, it was usually after much delay, and sometimes only after the soldier had submitted a formal complaint.

The next problem arises when a soldier has an issue with some item of unit administration. It may, for example, be a unit's refusal to pay an entitlement. It will often be the case that many members of the unit are affected. Soldiers in this position often have nowhere to go, and no one to talk to about matters of concern. Sure, they can use their chain of command. This is what the manual says they should do. But when it is the chain of command that created the problem in the first place, resolving an issue usually doesn't work out too well.

The soldier cannot go outside the chain of command without bringing further grief upon himself. Doing so generally results in unfavourable annual reports, and a halt to any career prospects.

Soldiers are badly in need of an advocate who is outside their chain of command, readily accessible, and who has the authority to investigate and follow through on legitimate concerns, and is able to do so expediently.

I have an interesting experience with chain of command myself.

I live in Swan Hill, and for many years, was a member of a unit based at Oakleigh (Melbourne) some 370km from home. The INDMAN (the Army's Industrial Relations Manual) stated that I had a right to receive travelling allowance for attendances at my unit, on account of the distance involved. Many members of my unit were in a similar situation. My many requests for transfer to a Swan Hill unit were refused, as my specialist abilities were required at Oakleigh, and I was promised that entitlements would be paid to compensate for the tyranny of distance.

Entitlements were not paid to any of the unit's Reservists. Interesting, however, that equivalent entitlements were always paid to the Regular Army personnel of the unit. Some of my soldiers were actually paying to attend Reserve training, as their travel expenses exceeded their military salary. Their situation was untenable.

During 1993 I tried to convince unit administrators to pay soldiers' entitlements. They refused to process claims, stating that Reservists had no entitlements and that the unit's allocation of travel and sustenance funds was for the use of the Regular Army personnel only. The Commanding Officer refused to intervene.

In 1994, I wrote to an Army department in Canberra seeking information that would help resolve the situation. I was reprimanded, and received an unfavourable annual report for going outside the chain of command.

In May of 1995, I submitted an application for redress of grievance to my Commanding Officer. I was using my own situation as a test case in the hope that the outcome would benefit all those soldiers who were being disadvantaged. A response was drafted by the Orderly Room Clerk, but never sent to me. I found it by accident in a unit file in August 1995. My claim was rejected on the presumption that the INDMAN did not state that I had an entitlement.

In August 1995, I forwarded my application to the CGS (Chief of the General Staff), as was my right. I did not receive a determination from the CGS until April 1997, and that was after two requests to the Ombudsman to investigate reasons for the delay.

The CGS's determination? He agreed that the INDMAN did state that I had an entitlement, and concluded that "the INDMAN was clearly wrong."

On to the next link in the chain, the CDF (Chief of the Defence Force). This was a little faster. I only had to wait until September 1998 for the CDF's determination. He agreed with the CGS that the INDMAN was wrong, but acknowledged that my case was reasonable, and that the situation warranted remediation. He promised that the matter would be attended to.

It is now May 2001. It is 8 years and 5 months since I started making serious efforts to have this issue addressed. It is 2 years and 9 months since the CDF promised to make changes. The changes have not yet eventuated. I sent a reminder to the CDF in January of this year, but have not received a response.

I have encountered many others who have had the same initial problem, and were similarly faced with indifference, delay, and less than equitable treatment. These people were not trouble-makers. They sought to address legitimate concerns, and found it impossible to do so.

I have gained the distinct impression that nobody really cares very much about the problems faced by Reservists, and have concluded that the chain of command is very long, and has many weak or broken links. It will have to be repaired before the Reserves can grow and prosper.

We in the Reserves are singularly unimpressed by political posturing and point scoring. Politicians and senior ADF commanders make statements promising improvements to the Reserves. At the soldier level, they never eventuate. Promises that are never fulfilled lead to a loss of faith and increased frustration. They reinforce the belief that no one really cares.

An example:

In 1990 the army embarked on a programme of civil accreditation for military courses and on-the-job training. This programme was recently promoted in press releases as a grand venture to assist Regular Army and Reservists alike.

I have been trying since 1995 to obtain civil accreditation for the courses I have completed within the Army. No one knew how to process or where to send my applications.

In 1998 I managed to track down an officer in Canberra who was involved in the civil accreditation programme. I was advised that no one had ever bothered considering accreditation for Reservists. It was considered to be a Regular Army domain.

The last time I enquired, in December 2000, there was still no procedure in place for receiving and processing applications from Reservists.

Another example:

In recent years there have been numerous media releases promising boosting of Reserve numbers. These have originated with politicians who once again are heard to be making statements that do not ring true.

Why? Because at the same time, at soldier level, we were seeing amalgamations and downsizing of Reserve units. There used to be 2½ regiments of Reserve Engineers in Melbourne. Now, we would be lucky to have 2 squadrons. The result has been a significant increase in the number of Reservists (mainly in the more senior ranks) who no longer have a meaningful posting. In a civilian organisation, or in the Regular Army, they would have been made redundant (another one of those things that are available to the Regular Army,

but not the Reserves). In the Reserves, they are just pushed from pillar to post in the hope that they will give up in frustration and move on.

We understand that in some cases downsizing and amalgamation may be necessary, but don't expect us to believe announcements that you are boosting the Reserves while this is going on.

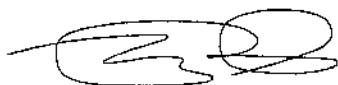
Posting Reservists to Regular Army units does not work as a long-term solution to employing surplus personnel. Reservists rely heavily on the good will of their spouses and their employers, and the traditional one night a week, one weekend a month, two weeks a year does not put too much strain on family or workplace relationships. It has stood the test of time.

Regular Army units work office hours. They do not work weeknights and weekends. In order for a Reservist to put in meaningful time in a Regular unit he/she will need to take considerable time off work, either by using up their annual leave entitlement, or by taking leave without pay. This is tolerable for a short term (perhaps one year), but to repeat this year after year puts too great a strain on family and workplace relationships.

My last unit, before transferring to the Inactive Reserve, was a Regular Army unit to which I had been posted indefinitely, as had many of my fellow Reserve officers. Three years there saw me reach the limits of my endurance, and on top of the other frustrations I had experienced, contributed to my decision to make the transfer.

I strongly recommend that action be taken to address issues that concern soldiers, and that such action be given priority over spending more money on recruitment and publicity campaigns. Soldiers, especially in the Reserves, need to be treated equitably, and need a way to have issues resolved, a way that actually works. Follow up is needed to ensure that initiatives such as civil accreditation actually get down to soldier level, and do not just remain an idea in some general's head. If these things can be done, then improved retention and enlistments will be the natural consequence.

Sincerely



Hans Proebsting