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CC Mr Julian Brazier TD MP
RFCA for Greater London

Future Reserves Study 2020 (FR20)
Submission by Serving and Retired TA Officers (listed below)

The attached submission sets out a number of matters and arguments which the authors hope will contribute to the considerations under way under FR20 and provide commentary on a number of issues that have already been aired formally or informally in the last few months. The authors are serving officers and retired officers all of whom began or furthered their TA careers with the Berkshire Yeomanry and are members of the Berkshire Yeomanry Regimental Association.

The views and comments in the submission are not intended to be controversial but do get to the heart of many issues facing the Reserves today. As is common amongst those serving today, and in the past, the authors' commitment to, and pride in the TA, combined with a well honed sense of public duty, compels them to speak out in support of an organisation with so many positive attributes for the community and for society as a whole that it should be greatly cherished.

Major (Ret'd) S H Frost TD
For and on behalf of those listed below

Serving Officers

Col H Robertson QVRM TD
Col R Wilkinson TD
Lt Col J Kendall
Lt Col SR Walker
Major V Connelly
Major A Hawes
Capt AG French (now unposted)

Current appointment

Deputy Commander, 43 (Wessex) Brigade
Commander, Specialist Group R SIGNALS
CO, 4th Division Regional Training Centre
CO, 31(City of London) Signal Regt (disbanded)
SO2, Manning Plans, DM(A)
OC, 94 (Berkshire Yeomanry) Signal Squadron
SO3, Brigade Reinforcement Team, 145 Brigade

Retired Officers

Brigadier AP Verey QVRM TD DL
Colonel PMB Sutcliffe CBE TD DL
Lt Col G S Hornsby TD
Lt Col B Sowerby TD
Major the Lord Glanusk TD
Major (Ret'd) WS Sampson TD
Major (Ret'd) SH Frost TD

Senior appointment held

Brigadier TA, HQ Land
Vice Chairman, Council of TAVRAS
SO1 TA, School of Signals
CO, LIAG
Chairman, BYRA
Second-in-command, 71 (Yeomanry) Signal Regt
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Future Reserves Study 2020 (FR20)
Submission by serving and retired officers of BYRA

Purpose

1. The purpose of this submission is to set out a number of matters and arguments which the authors hope will contribute to the considerations under way under FR20 and provide commentary on a number of issues that have already been aired formally or informally in the last few months.

Key Recommendations

2. The matters discussed below include the following key points:

- The TA should continue to augment the Regular Army on Operations whilst maintaining the role of the UK's trained strategic reserve for undefined future conflict;
- Recruiting, training and leadership are the underpinnings of retention and effectiveness, and need to be properly funded and structured;
- The TA must be located amongst the communities it draws from in order to recruit successfully and to foster community engagement;
- The TA is cost-effective, providing the ability to rapidly force generate all but point forces, at a fraction of the cost of the Regular Army.

Ethos, roles and adaptability

3. Ethos of the volunteer reservist is based on a number of elements, listed below, varying in weight for each volunteer:

- Training in a variety of skills;
- Comradeship and bonds of mateship;
- A sense of personal challenge and adventure, delivered by realistic and regular training;
- Encouragement to become fit;
- A sense of enjoyment;
- A sense of fulfilment through becoming part of a team;
- A sense of pride through making an evident contribution to country and community;
- Supporting Operations with opportunities to participate;
- Going on Operations.

4. The presence of these elements in the career of a reservist is important to the retention of the reservist. Less important is his specific military role (except in certain specialist units) and this makes the reservist very flexible and adaptable. Units within the TA have often been re-roled, largely as a result of economic pressure or the changing face of warfare, and in most instances the re-rolling has been successfully achieved within a relatively short space of time.

5. One essential aspect, often overlooked, of the ethos is volunteering itself. This is what makes the TA what it is. Currently there is continuous pressure to make the supply of TA soldiers for Operations more deterministic so as to provide a predictable flow using TACOS that includes contractual compunction. This concept has serious drawbacks. The 'high fliers' who currently join the TA, and who add so much to Defence capability, would be much less likely to do so if the consequence of compulsion resulted in them having to put their civilian careers on hold at times not of their own choosing. The TA's current 'casual labour' status is the cheapest possible arrangement and the TA, as it is now, has continued to deliver the numbers and quality of reservists demanded of it for Operations. If this is tampered with, then 'career' part time auxiliaries may be the consequence at a significantly greater cost.

Training

6. Training standards have improved immensely in recent years. Much training is now course-based and largely centralised leading to common standards, with comparability to the regulars, which are auditable. This approach is highly creditable and has improved the usability of the reservist on Operations but does give rise to drawbacks which need to be compensated for. Course-based training reduces considerably the amount of time the individual reservist trains with his comrades within his unit and this has a negative impact on the reservist, on his comrades and on the unit hierarchy. This negative impact is best overcome at unit level by sufficient collective training (eg weekend exercises). However, of necessity, this is the area that is first to suffer when funding for training is reduced.

7. Annual Camp for most units used to be a major focus of the training cycle and provided many opportunities for ethos-building. This is no longer the case since most capable NCOs must attend several courses, often limited to one per year because of employment leave restrictions, (eg recruit course, driver course, class 3 trade course, class 2 trade course and leadership course) if he is to gain the rank of corporal. So after 5 years in the TA a corporal may have never attended annual camp. Again this risks undermining the reservist ethos.

8. Nearly all soldiering is a collective activity. All soldiers therefore need to understand sub-units, units, and formations and how all these work. This can only be achieved through experiencing activities (ie training exercises) conducted within the framework of these structures. A further consequence of cutbacks in training is the reduced level of experience that reservists gain through interaction with other arms and corps. For all-arms warfare to be effective it is particularly important that a good understanding of the needs and ethos of other arms is widely understood. These needs can be met by proper training and should not be used as an argument for reducing the TA or criticising its effectiveness at times of training cutbacks.

9. The amount of training undertaken by a reservist is dictated by a permitted allowance of Man Training Days (MTDs). In recent years the allowance has been reduced. One course per year uses up 15 days; mid-week evening training uses up a further 12 days (1/4 day per evening) leaving only a few permitted days for weekend exercises per year. For reasons noted above this is insufficient to meet the ethos-related needs of the average reservist.

10. Training is the heart-beat of most TA units. Increased centralisation of Phase 1-3 training and other planned training is denting the importance of unit training and unit's own training capability. In addition there is increased pressure on TA units, in terms of reporting and management, to conform to regular unit administrative standards and outputs. Thus the administrative burden is growing whilst training outputs are falling, leading many reservists to feel undervalued and less in control.

11. There has been a tendency to seek to train the TA soldier up to the minimum level at minimum cost. While the need for cost restraint is accepted, TA training needs to be correctly funded to meet a well-defined and measurable output standard. TA training cannot be simply a replication of the training hours needed by Regular establishments. Instead a full training needs analysis is required so that TA trades achieve a proper balance, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, between those outputs achievable in steady state training and those which must be addressed by pre-deployment training within the constraints of RFA 96 and 12 months limit to mobilisation.

12. Training needs to be applied consistently across the whole of the Reserve. This avoids introducing the concept of a two-class organisation which seriously hampers recruiting and retention in the lower of the two classes. This point is valid whether the classes are determined, for instance, by state-of-readiness or by contribution to Operations. As yet there is no general policy across all arms as to what proportion of reservists should or can be deployed on Operations and therefore experiences vary wildly: AMS have contributed about 30% of strength to Ops, Infantry about 10% and R Signals about 1%. However these proportions are much

influenced by policy (and not the reluctance of the reservist to serve) and therefore any proposal to allocate resources based on this measure of output would be grossly unbalanced.

Recruiting

13. There are many examples of TA soldiers travelling great distances to continue to serve with their units. This often arises because the individual reservist has moved home for family or employment reasons and, of course, such efforts do demonstrate a great deal of dedication and unit loyalty. However it is not the norm, and is very rare for initial recruitment. In general TA Centres continue to recruit from their immediate locality and time of travel rather than distance is a determining factor quoted by reservists themselves.

14. This is not in any sense counter-intuitive. Many reservists are in full time employment and a lengthy travel time mitigates against attending training regularly. A typical and testing weekend exercise begins on a Friday night and ends on a Sunday afternoon, and therefore travel time is limited if work is to be resumed with sufficient rest on a Monday morning. In addition all employers are impacted by Government regulations and so necessarily have policies on sleep/driving patterns for driver-dependent employees which deters employed reservists from travelling long distances.

15. The concept of centralisation of TA Centres may have financial attractions. However the travel limitations noted above, the increased cost and time of travel, the cost of recruiting campaigns requiring an extended reach, and the absorption of MTDs in travel time, are likely to add considerable barriers to successful recruiting, retention and training.

16. Indeed the TA is constantly seeking to lower the barriers to recruiting, or overcome them wherever possible. However a number of recent initiatives and ideas are putting recruiting and retention even more at risk. Some of these have been highlighted elsewhere in this note but for convenience are listed below:

- The reduction in MTDs which severely hampers collective training;
- Centralisation of TA Centres and the consequence of increased travel time and cost;
- Potential reductions in travel allowances (which in conjunction with centralisation of TA Centres will impact recruiting hugely);
- Splitting the TA into two classes of soldier, one at high state of readiness and one not. No one likes to be seen as a second class citizen in any organisation and this seriously impinges on recruiting into that role;
- Inclusion of recruits in calculations of strength against liability and then imposing a cap on that strength;
- Lack of funding for recruiting of both soldiers and young officers;
- Increased administration at sub-unit level which damages morale.

17. Currently the TA is not well recruited. However recruitment levels have been heavily impacted by current policy:

- Unit strengths are currently capped at 85% of liability and, because the calculation of TA strength has to include untrained recruits (this should be contrasted with the Regular Army's reported strength which excludes untrained recruits), the effect of the cap is quite penal.
- TA recruiting is not funded at present
- The One-Army concept of recruiting has been less effective for the TA partly, and inevitably, because the main recruiting effort has to be focused on the Regular Army
- TA officer recruiting has been unfunded for the last 2 years and is having a noticeable effect at junior officer level.

Criticism of current recruited strength should therefore be tempered by an understanding of the impact of policy in this area.

Community Engagement

18. Apart from the presence and contact with the community provided by the TA footprint, the TA provides additional engagement with the community because of the presence of the individual reservist embedded in his community i.e. his workplace, his friends and his neighbours. This encourages debate and appreciation by the wider community of the defence issues of the day.

19. The TA recruits about 30% of its strength each year. A similar proportion leave the TA each year but this obviously means that a positive experience is given to in excess of 10,000 mainly young people each year. In turn these reservists, even those who have served for only a short time, provide a level of engagement with the community that should be highly valued particularly in this era of the Big Society.

20. Whilst it is welcome that a greater proportion of the Regular Army will become based in the UK in the coming years, regular garrisons tend to be sited away from population centres. In the 1980's the Regular Army strength in the UK was about 100,000 and at that time this was insufficient to allay concerns raised then about engagement with the community.

21. On the face of it, it is clearly less easy for the Regular soldier to have the same level of engagement within the community as has the reservist. He does not work within it and many of his friends are likely to be found from within the armed forces than from without. In addition the effect of (i) positive exclusion of the regular soldier from the community because of security measures i.e. located on military bases "behind the wire" and (ii) adverse real estate positioning in more affordable locations away from major conurbations, will need to be countered and this is likely to be costly. In this regard the cheapness and effectiveness of the TA contribution should not be underestimated.

22. Centralisation of TA Centres would inevitably remove most reservists from their immediate community. The "local" connection will be harmed or lost and the "territorial" nature of the TA will be gone. This concept risks extensive damage to recruitment capability and to engagement with the local community.

23. Many of the current strands that link the community with the TA are threatened if the TA footprint is reduced. These strands include the award to local units, and subsequent exercising by them, of the Freedom of local towns and boroughs; participation in local Remembrance Sunday parades; and participation in other local celebrations and high-profile events such as those for Royal Weddings, Jubilees and other anniversaries.

The Defence Estate

24. Because, historically, TA Centres were sited in locations central to their communities, many TA Centre sites are well situated with good potential for residential or commercial development. In more recent years new TA Centres have been built, for economic reasons, on land usually sited further from the centres of the population, often on industrial estates.

25. Where TA Centres are located on industrial sites or more remote locations, there are usually inadequate public transport links, particularly at relevant times for training, and car travel becomes the only reasonable method of access. This has adverse consequences for both recruiting and retention of the reservist, particularly for the target age group of 18-25 year olds, many of whom do not own a motor car. Indeed encouragement to use motor cars is counter to central government environmental policy.

26. Many TA Centres are also used to house army cadets. Cadets have extremely limited travel capability particularly if training centres are located away from town centres, which for financial reasons is becoming more prevalent. Busy modern parents have much call on their car ferrying services and must necessarily limit the range of travel from their home.

Usability

27. The Reserves should certainly continue to demonstrate usability in terms of reinforcement of Regular units deployed on Operations. It is now received wisdom that deployment as formed units is unlikely other than in exceptional circumstances and in general war. However it should be noted that Canadian forces routinely use formed reservist units in Afghanistan and of course the US deploys reservists at formation level. So this concept should not be entirely abandoned, particularly as it gives all levels of command valuable experience on operations.

28. In scenarios where MOD expects a long lead time it is certainly possible for the Reserves to provide heavy-end capability including armour and artillery. This is the case with a number of Reserve Forces in other countries. The Reserves have currently and previously demonstrated the ability to handle complex equipment and weapon systems including MBTs, MLRS, Rapier, Bowman radio, and even Gazelle. It is not suggested that the TA would become the only heavy manoeuvre capability held by the Army; rather, with proper resourcing, the TA could provide a usable reserve with readiness taken at risk.

29. However the Reserves also contribute significantly towards the true concept of a reserve force i.e. available to help counter instances of unforeseen threat. History shows that this is an important feature. By way of example, in 1938 the UK Government, having significantly reduced the level of Reserves in the preceding 10 years, was forced to double the strength of the TA from 205,000 to 410,000 virtually overnight. The capacity of the TA to form a basis for force generation is an essential ingredient in strategic defence capability.

30. It is essential that the TA in particular should fulfil the need for Reserve, Resilience and Regeneration, and to do so it is necessary that not all of the TA should be committed solely to fulfilling Operational need. In addition the contribution from specialist units and organisations needs to be recognised. AMS's, LIAG's, STRE's, Port and Maritime units and other specialist groups provide the Army with capability that the Regular Army could neither afford nor recruit.

Effective leadership

31. In order to deliver the elements of Ethos noted in paragraph 6 above it is necessary to have an effective organisation and effective leadership within the TA. It has been long accepted that the building block of the TA is the sub-unit with a strength of 100 or so soldiers, commanded by a reservist major (or equivalent). Because a TA soldier can "vote with his feet" the calibre of leadership at this level is under constant test and needs to be very high. Two prerequisites must exist if the required calibre of volunteer leader is to be maintained at this level: a constant source of new young officers gaining sufficient training and experience; and opportunities for advancement to avoid the consequences of a glass ceiling developing. The smaller the TA the less likely it is to have sustained and effective leadership.

32. There is a growing shortage of junior officers not least because of the lack of recruitment funding in this area over the last 2 years and this will in due course cause great harm. Indeed the pool of officers at captain level is already forecast to shrink dramatically in the next few years.

33. Currently the TA is 100% recruited at the rank of Major. At this level TA officers have positions of real responsibility and clear career paths, making for a well motivated, highly satisfied, highly valued, and experienced pool of individuals. However, scope for advancement is likely to become a concern. The Regular Army already fills a proportion of the TA unit command slots (rank of Lt Col) and if the TA is reduced in size this proportion may well become overwhelming, contributing to an unwelcome glass ceiling effect.

34. Without reservist Lt Cols with command experience it will become difficult to fill the more senior volunteer posts at Colonel, Brigadier and General level. The consequence of these factors would undoubtedly be that the TA would slowly wither on the vine because of a lack of officers.

Conclusion

35. To meet the needs of defence in the 21st century the UK needs a Reserve Force with the dual roles of (i) supporting the Regular Forces when deployed on Operations and (ii) providing a genuine trained reserve to meet unforeseen circumstances and to form a basis for regeneration and resilience.

36. The Reserves need to be well recruited, well trained, properly led, and allowed to develop their ethos through adequately funded measures such as collective training.

37. The Reserves need to be adequately accommodated within the communities from which they are drawn: to meet the need for community engagement and to avoid barriers to recruiting and retention.

38. The TA is not broken. It has delivered all that has been asked of it and far more than any had anticipated. It has turned itself from an Army-in-waiting for the Cold War to a source of high quality individual reservists. In these times of severe financial constraint it can form the basis of another Army-in-waiting for an undefined conflict and be cost effective by taking readiness at risk. It links the Armed Forces to society in a way that has taken hundreds of years to form; it provides exemplary role models for many of today's youth; and it provides opportunities, which are increasingly hard to find, for UK citizens of every background to experience selfless service to their community and to their country.

End