

Minutes of APPG Reserve Forces and Cadets Meeting held on 6 May 2014 in Committee Room 17

Guest Speakers Rear Admiral Chris Hockley (Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland (FOSNNI) and Flag Officer Reserves; Commodore Andrew Jameson (Commander Maritime Reserves)

In Attendance

Julian Brazier MP – Chair
Julian Lewis MP
Penny Mordaunt MP
James Arbuthnot MP
James Grey MP
Andrew Selous MP
Karl McCartney MP
Caroline Dinenage MP
Richard Drax MP
Dan Jarvis MP

Rear Admiral Hockley
Commodore Jameson RN
Commander Wayne Ubhi RN (MoD)
Commander Gareth Knock RN(NRC)
Lieutenant Peter Hessleton RN

Fleur Thomas – DRM
Felicity Cowell – RFCA
Emma Bass – RFCA
Kate Peyton – Secretary
Hugh Purcell – Honorary Clerk

The Chairman welcomed Rear Admiral Hockley (**CH**) and Commodore Jameson; the Rear Admiral had joined the Royal Navy in 1979 and was a Naval Engineer by background, the Commodore was a Naval Barrister.

CH was delighted to speak about something he had a real passion for and explained that as Flag Officer Reserve Forces and Regional Forces he had both the Reserves and Cadets under his remit. Reservists were extraordinary people, but as a Regular for 37 years he knew little about them until taking up his appointment 3 years ago. He was now deeply immersed and honoured to work with the Maritime Reserve, which was unique in so many ways: some were employed as one-to-one replacements for Regulars, but predominantly they had niche skills, were experts in their own right and there was no Regular to replace them. They were essential to operations and Libya could not have been done without them. He considered formed units impractical, with the exception of parts of the Royal Marines, due to the small numbers, geographical dispersion and the difficulty this posed to recruitment and retention. The Navy did not have the Army's challenge of integration with Regular Forces, an important factor that needed to be protected.

The FR20 Report had correctly noted a decline in the Reserve, which had not always been the Navy's priority but had now changed for the better. In reaction to FR20 they had produced a statement of requirement in 2012 for the Maritime Reserve which contained science to support what they wanted to do; the number identified to fulfil the political mandate was 3100 trained by 2018 and

4150 total by 2020. While not a huge figure, it was still a big percentage increase and had formed the basis of their bid for funding. They subsequently set up a Maritime Reserve Programme Board, on which he and other Naval Command Specialists sat, which reported to the Defence Programme Board.

CH handed over to Commodore Jameson (**AJ**) who spoke about **Capability, Recruitment, Retention** and **Training**. The Vision was about embracing the FR20 paper wholeheartedly and building up a Reserve Force that both the Regulars and Reservists would recognise as an essential part of Defence and which would make the relationship mutually binding.

The **Capability** review based on the White Paper was a reminder that although Reservists carried out specific roles in each of the three Services, they were used in different ways. The Navy generally provided individuals or small teams to fill specified roles, so it was important to establish precisely what they wanted their Reserves to do. With this clarity they would know what to aim for. During the review over the last 6 months it had been easy to get ideas and discussions going on what the Navy wanted and this had resulted in a detailed statement of the capability required and manpower figure of 3,100 needed to deliver it.

He gave a snapshot of the capabilities that only Reservists delivered; this included Afloat Force Protection; Surge Commando Capability; Amphibious Landing Co-ordinating Watch Keepers; Senior Naval Officers in commercially chartered shipping; Diving Support (The NATO Submarine Rescue System was a good example of high readiness reserves and was available at 7 days' notice); Water Space Management; Cyber Specialists; Media Officers; Augmentation to the Fleet Air Arm (a clever use of Reservists, as this branch recruited 99% from ex Regulars and deployed them to maintain aircraft that were going out of service); Reserves Engineering and Next of Kin informing (a branch of 35 Chaplains). The review had provided a solid basis for what the Navy wanted its reservists to do. A further change would be the grouping of these capabilities into 5 branches, including Warfare, Logistics, Medical and Engineering. The current 18 different specialisations were putting ex Regulars off joining the Reserve, but as they would recognise these branches it would make it easier for the ex-Regular to join.

All were aware of the **recruitment** targets for reservists: during 2013/14 they had recruited 506; the requirement for 2014/15 was 740, an increase of 50%. Reservists tended to join a local unit and the Navy should consider following the Army's approach to financial incentives and being more sophisticated and nuanced in the way it established relationships with universities for the recruitment of officers. While the Maritime Reserve was becoming increasingly sophisticated at engaging employers, it would need to do things differently to achieve the target.

17% of the Maritime Reserve had left in the last year, a **retention** figure that was too low, so he had set a target to reduce it to 12.5%, which meant a 25% reduction. His decision had been guided by the results of the April 2014 Reserves Survey that had shown the most common reasons for leaving. As these included wanting to join the Regulars, poor management and leadership, boredom, civilian work and employer pressures and too much administration, they would put measures in place to increase retention, improve leadership training, raise the age limit to 60 and introduce more air travel to reduce the substantial road travel a reservist had to do at the weekend. The reservists could now also participate in representative sport.

Improvements to the estate were going well. HMS Sherwood, a new unit recently opened in Nottingham was a terrific example of the future for the estate and this bright, new, fit-for-purpose facility had had a great effect on the team that had moved in. He had also had agreement of The Rear Admiral for Surface Ships to formally pair an RNR unit with a nominated ship. This would give

reservists more regular and assured access to seagoing opportunities and, equally important, it would expose reservists to the Regulars.

A Regular Royal Marines Commando **training** course took a full 32 weeks, but the Royal Marines Reserve now offered a training package comprised of 17 weekends and 2 fortnight periods that achieved precisely the same standard in 14 months. This required an extraordinary commitment by the reservist as the weekends were seriously tough. His intention was to deliver short modular focussed training for the RNR that would result in better retention, as it was frustrating for Reserves to be in training for up to four years. Now that the phase one package could be delivered in months they intended to do similar with specialist training.

The Chairman thanked them for their interesting and heartening talks and asked what the arrangements were for a Royal Marine Officer, how training was structured and how long it took. He also asked what lessons there were from the RNR Air Branch that had always been over recruited and never paid any financial incentives. **AJ** replied that the RMR had always been the easiest branch to recruit and many of its officers came directly from the Regulars which seemed to work. The RNR Air Branch was successful because the proposition was attractive and ex Regulars tended to settle in one of the two Air Station areas. This enabled those that had spent their career doing something that they loved to balance new civilian employment with their residual and on-going passion for the Royal Navy. **The Chairman**, in agreeing, thought another advantage was that it was Reservist led and that it began to attract people 12 to 18 months before their departure point.

Julian Lewis MP commented that 30 years ago being in the RNR was all about sea time, and asked how much sea time the new scheme would offer and whether some jollification could be added to the Reservist programme where there was a ship in the vicinity. **CH** replied that they had moved away from sea time, as it was not practical for a Reservist to undertake some full time jobs on, for example a Type 45 destroyer, because of its technical complexity. However, they continued to explore this area and there might be roles, for example, when a ship was returning from an operation at a lower state of readiness. He also believed that a pairing arrangement would help enormously. **AJ** added that the amount of sea time varied from branch to branch, as did deployments, and that they understood that this was an important attraction for joining.

Penny Mordant MP commented on the dramatic changes for the better over the last few years. Previously it had been difficult to get sea time during training and once got there had been criticism as to what had been offered on the ship. This had changed completely and people were now getting sea time in a timely way and the training programme was excellent with much increased flexibility.

Dan Jarvis MP asked if fatigue, pressures from families and a lack of jollification were connected to poor retention. When a Parachute Regiment Reservist he had got more jumps than the Regulars as it was thought that they had to be entertained to keep them. **CH** replied that they were looking into this, but the Navy was different to the Army because when a ship deployed the families stayed at home.

Penny Mordant MP thought that the Carriers would offer a massive opportunity to get the country engaged and listening to what the Navy did; it would make them proud and excited. **CH** said that they were plugged into a PR programme around the Carriers and were looking to exploit opportunities around the naming ceremonies and to making sure that the whole picture about the carrier was exciting. As the Armed Forces were as much involved in diplomacy as they were in war fighting this would be Carrier and Royal Marines space.

Julian Lewis MP noted the emphasis on the role of specialists in the Future Reserves and asked if there were to be a crisis and a commando carrier was needed, whether reserves would have a role or it would be down to the Regulars to reactivate the reserve vessels. **CH** thought that the move to recognise the branches of the Reserves was encouraging and would help more ex Regulars to join. The reservists could then be trained to do specific tasks which would allow the release of Regulars to other roles.

The Chairman thanked all for attending what had been a very interesting discussion and he congratulated both officers for having a clear and exciting vision for the Maritime Reserves. He then closed the meeting.