

**PAID VOLUNTEERS – INVESTIGATING RETENTION
OF ARMY RESERVISTS**

by

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JODIE LORDING

Abstract

The Australian Government is using many of its Department of Defence capabilities in operations abroad and at home. To achieve this, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has increasingly relied on the capability of the Reserve Forces; in particular the Army Reserve (ARes). While demand for Reservists has increased, the overall force numbers have been decreasing. This creates problems not only in Defence capability but also in the quality of training, morale and attendance. Defence has conducted many surveys of serving Reservists to understand their motivations from a qualitative standpoint. It is the aim of this descriptive empirical phenomenological research, through the lived experience of the participants, to complement that work by understanding the experiences and perspectives of those experiencing military service in two part-time army organisations (Australia and the United Kingdom's Territorial Army (TA)) in order to better inform Human Resource (HR) policy and practice within the Australian Army Reserve.

A descriptive empirical phenomenological study was undertaken to understand the lived experiences of Reservists and Territorial Army members. Nine participants reflected on their motivations to join, their experiences of recruitment, training, and promotion, and some of their most enjoyable and least enjoyable aspects of Reserve service. A human resources (HR) lens was used to focus the literature and research data approaches. The data was analysed using a descriptive empirical phenomenological method. As a result, both the participant and researcher voice is presented. This is then referenced against the data, models and theories presented in the literature to identify consistencies and points of difference between past research and this approach. This study suggests that the psyche of Reservist motivation is unique by being a combination of both volunteer and part-time employee motivation.

The conclusions drawn identify that most of the participant Reservists experienced service through both a volunteer perspective (value for time) and through an employee perspective (value for money); this in turn influences Reservists' retention. HR practice in the Army focuses on the employee motivation of Reservists. As a result, developing

HR policies and practices that considers the volunteer motivations of Reservists as well may enhance retention. The richness of the phenomenological results points to a worthwhile methodological strategy for future Reserve service research.

Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Dennis Allan Strong (1950–2010).

Dad, your drive, dedication to family and pursuit of perfection continue to live on through those who knew and loved you. As does ‘our’ personal father/daughter saying: ‘How hard could it be?’ ... some things are achievable!

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Many people have generously given their time to assist me in writing this work.

I am heartily thankful to my supervisor, Dr Tony Holland, whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to the final stages enabled me to develop my research abilities, question my questions and understand the topic. His interest, availability and friendly encouragement was vitally important to me in writing this thesis. Thank you for many insightful chats and coffees over many years.

I owe a debt to the participants of the study whose patience with a student researcher and willingness to wholly participate has provided the depth and breadth of data that one can only hope for on embarking on this form of research.

The eagle eye of my colleague and friend, Bill Cowham, has provided endless frustration for me in the proofreading phase of the project. This is only due to his boundless enthusiasm for perfection in written work. His eagerness to challenge me and test the meaning of my written word has ensured that the product matches my interest and passion for the subject. My thesis, due to his guidance and inquisitiveness, is all the better for his efforts and support.

My husband Rob has always been supporting in the background. His patience, guidance, love and support have no boundary and my thanks to him for the encouragement in undertaking this lengthy but enjoyable task cannot be expressed in words. Robyn Strong, my mother, has had many challenges of her own during this journey including losing her husband (my Dad) of 40 years, Dennis, to Motor Neuron Disease three years ago. Mum has always believed that this thesis would see fruition and encouraged me to keep going, even in the toughest hours.

Lastly, I offer my regards and blessings to the many others who have supported me in any respect during the completion of this project.

Many thanks!

Jodie Lording

Disclaimer

This research has captured the lived experiences and perceptions of Reservists at a particular point in time, against a backdrop of policy, process and procedure that has subsequently changed since data gathering. Whilst all efforts have been made to present the data against the backdrop of the policy at the time, the findings of the research may have become more or less relevant due to changes in the Department of Defence's thinking. In any case, this research gives the participating Reservists a voice. Their experience is likely to be different to other Reservists (including my own), Regular members and ex-serving members and other readers of this work.

My own view of Defence and Reserve service is generally positive. I have my own experiences as a Reservist that has resulted in a long, enjoyable and continuing Reserve career. I have served both as a Reservist with a civilian career and studies underway, and I have also served for five years of full-time Reserve service. I have been deployed on multiple occasions and had the honour of leading Australian men and women on operations and at home.

My greatest concern is that the reader will perceive that this research is an unnecessarily critical review of Defence approaches to Reservists and that this reflects my own opinion of Defence policy when viewed through the Human Resource lens. This is not the case. I am not personally disappointed with Defence's approach to Reserve policy and am, as a whole, satisfied with the direction in which the Defence Force is heading, and of which the Reserve is a part.

That aside, improvement also comes from deep reflection, and this thesis attempts to provide a mirror of reflection on areas for improvement in a part of the organisation that is not generally well understood. This thesis represents a small number of Reserve voices highlighting what is known to them, what has been experienced by them and what Reserve service means or meant to them.

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