

# Weekend warriors

Despite the cutbacks, the reviews and the role changes, the 'weekend warriors' are once again proving their worth in both their military and civilian roles in the turmoil that is Iraq.



by Christopher Dobson

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**One in every five of the British soldiers – men and women – deployed in Iraq either belongs to the Territorial Army or is a Reservist. These are civilian, part-time soldiers who used to be rather scornfully described as 'weekend warriors'.**

So what are they doing in that benighted country? The answer is simple: the modern Army could not operate without them. Afghanistan, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, the Falklands, Cyprus and penny packets of soldiers on UN and NATO duties eat up the Army's waning strength.

Over last Christmas a quarter of the Armed Forces were on operational duty away from home. The notorious 'overstretch' was revealed in all its danger. Our troops are splendid; there just aren't enough, which is why the

men and women of the TA and the Reserves along with their colleagues in the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force are so important.

They fill in the gaps as 'augmentees' in roles from rifleman to staff officer. They take with them not only their military knowledge acquired by previous full-time military experience and TA training but also invaluable civilian expertise.

## A double life

For example, Andrew Alderson is not only a major in the Queen's Own Yeomanry, he is also the director of a merchant bank and is running the economic planning and development of the four provinces of southern Iraq on behalf of the Coalition Provisional Authority. Captain 'H' Halawi, a Para TA officer of Lebanese origin, is a project manager and teacher of Arabic in civilian life and is using his Arabic to brief Arab journalists as spokesman for the Multinational Division. WO2 Jonathan Dyer, a former Regular, now a police officer, is applying his civilian and service experience as a Civil Affairs Officer with the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Captain Anna Presswell is broadcasting to local farmers, passing on advice about modern farming methods.

Among the most valued of the TA soldiers are the signalmen who are telecommunications engineers in civvie street. They lead a double life, running army communications and restoring the Iraqi telephone system.

The mixture of professions is most





**Left and above:** Reservists fill a variety of roles across the Armed Services. These images show Reservists in Iraq or training for Iraq

apparent among the TA squaddies. One patrol of the Royal Anglian Company, East of England Regiment, setting off on a night-time trawl through Basra was noted by a *Times* correspondent to consist of a lawyer, a cement manufacturer, a gumshield maker, an engineer, an IT consultant and a value analyst.

‘Whitaker, impeccably dressed in his navy-blue pinstripe suit, said, “To the War my Lord? Very good my Lord.”’

Among later reinforcements were 43 soldiers from the 51st Highland Regiment and 50 from 4 Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, who left for the Shaibah airbase in January after a stiff two-month training programme. They included a solicitor, a teacher, a fish farmer, a paramedic and a care assistant.

The one woman in the deployment was Private Jolene MacKay. ‘It would be,’ she said, ‘a big change from her normal job as a supermarket assistant!’

This wide range of jobs reflects another of the great strengths of Britain’s volunteer forces: the willingness of ordinary people to take up arms in defence of the Nation. There has been a succession of warlike, if not necessarily professional, bodies of troops dating from Saxon times. Levies, Militias, Yeomanry, and Volunteer Rifle Regiments all played their part and led to the eventual emergence of the TA.

### **Clubbable discipline**

In 1859 when the French were being difficult and the Regular Army was fully engaged in the Empire, Prime Minister Lord Palmerston called for volunteer units to be formed to guard the homeland. Queen Victoria approved, her husband was keen and it became fashionable for young men, often from the same profession, to form themselves into independent infantry companies.

Their discipline was clubbable, their uniforms occasionally ornate, but they were excellent marksmen with the rifle. Queen Victoria reviewed twenty thousand of them in Hyde Park in 1860 and by the following year they numbered some 150,000.

Among them were the Post Office Rifles, one of the few units recruited from artisans, and the fashionable Artists Rifles whose founding members included Lord Leighton, Holman Hunt, J E Millais and William Morris. The Artists adopted for their cap badge the heads of Mars and Minerva and at mess evenings the more ribald among them would proclaim: ‘Mars, he was the God of War, he didn’t stick at trifles. Minerva said she didn’t mind: hence the Artists Rifles.’

Somewhat surprisingly the Artists became expert in bayonet fencing but the Post Office stole a march on them by becoming the first volunteer unit to serve overseas when 100 men, under the command of Captain Sturgeon (later Postmaster of Norwich), took part in the Egyptian campaign of 1882. They served, however, not as riflemen but as the first