

Message from the Newly Appointed Chief of the South African Army

Lieutenant General Lindile Yam MMS, CLS, RCDS, ENSP

I welcome the opportunity to provide the message in this edition of the Reserve Force Volunteer. This publication is indeed an important mouthpiece, dedicated to a large and essential component of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). There is no doubt in my mind that the Reserves play a major and significant role in the SANDF and specifically in the SA Army by augmenting the Regulars and ensuring that we sustain the force levels for our ordered operational commitments.

This is my salute to our Reserves as we continue to celebrate their commitment to duty. From my previous experience as the General Officer Commanding of the SA Army Infantry Formation, no one needs to remind me of the continued sustained pressure that the Reserves endure during both internal and external operations. The fact that the Reserves have been able to absorb these pressures can be attributed to the high level of commitment shown by the Reserve Officers Commanding and their leader group to remain true to their cause. I am proud of the fact that the Reserves are standing shoulder to shoulder with the Regulars in the defence of our country.

It is true that even in high intensity military operations we have seen amazing leadership being exercised on the ground by some of our Reserve junior Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and troops through displays of exceptional loyalty, dedication and courage under very trying circumstances. Rifleman Francis Plaatjie from the SA Irish Regiment now has serious permanent injuries sustained in a heroic stand he made in a fight against rebel forces with his 7,62mm Light Machine Gun in Darfur, Sudan. We should always acknowledge heroes like these.

The SA Army acknowledges without any doubt that both the Regulars and Reserves will always form the One Force required for the defence of our country and that they are complementary



and essential partners in our defence capabilities. The Army Reserves have an important role to play and provide a cost-effective and efficient means of providing significant capacity to the capabilities of the SANDF. In the previous financial year, a total of 10 889 SA Army Reserves were utilised and amongst other assigned tasks also provided more than 50% of the Companies deployed for border safeguarding. This was achieved at a cost of only 7,4% of the total SA Army personnel budget.

I fully agree that the imperative remains for a viable Reserve within the One Force in order for the SANDF to fulfil its mandate. The rejuvenation and transformation plan for the Reserves that was instituted in 2003, has succeeded in the providing of deployable sub-units in the Infantry, resulting in significant contributions to deployments. I however remain concerned



about the Reserve component in the other formations. The implementation of the Defence Review provides a framework within which to develop the military capacity vested in the Reserves.

However, we have now come to a point where we need to re-asses ourselves, understand the future requirements and the roles we will be expected to fulfil on behalf of South Africa. To this end we will have to apply our minds to the best way in which we can organise and develop the Reserves for that future. As part of this we will have to address the ageing of the force and more specifically the renewal of the Reserves to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The rejuvenation of the Reserves is an imperative for them to be able to continue to supplement a Regular component beginning to show signs of battle fatigue.

I have therefore instructed that a new “Africanised” Reserve Service System must be conceptualised and developed so as to ensure an appropriate and viable Reserve for the future. It is clear that a classic western orientated Reserve Service System is not aligned to current socio-economic conditions in South Africa and does not capture the dynamics and aspirations of the youth of today. Unfortunately a reality in the Reserve component is that the vast majority of members are unemployed. This does however enable increased levels of utilisation and an on-going sustainable contribution by the Reserves to protracted operations. A clean slate analysis of this situation needs to be undertaken with a view to the development of management criteria and/or adjustment to the Reserve Service System as a whole. This new Reserve Service System must also be aligned with the new Military Strategy that will flow from the Defence Review 2015 implementation process.

The University Reserve Training Programme (URTP) remains an important objective of the SA Army and a tool for rejuvenating and developing its Reserve capability. Currently a significant number of URTP graduates are already participating as active Reserve Officers at unit level and are making significant contributions, not only to their units, but also to the SA Army as a whole.

However, I have instructed my staff to focus attention onto the SA Army URTP in the following three ways: to confirm that all Reserve URTP members complete their corps related training to ensure that they are fully deployable as junior officers within their functional environments and to also undergo further training if necessary; to investigate whether the current URTP programme of the SA Army remains relevant and current and if required, to design a new URTP approach with any adaptations that are deemed necessary and lastly; to offer selected URTP members the opportunity of entering the Core Service System (CSS) as Regulars. This will maximise the utilisation and exploitation of the professional, leadership and intellectual capabilities that these members can provide to enhancing my vision for the professional full time component of the SA Army.

The SA Army has also successfully finalised the Name Review Process for Army Reserve units. The aim of this exercise is to acquire a level of synergy amongst role players, with unit names and regiments reflecting cohesiveness and regimental pride amongst all Reserves. The process that was pursued made provision for accommodating the South African military history currently not reflected in the makeup of the force. The process also accommodated regional uniqueness as well as the acknowledgment of military heroes of the past and the contributions that they made to the South Africa of today.

In my view, South Africa possesses a rich and diverse military history that spans many centuries. This history reflects a variety of themes, cultures, traditions, organizational features, combat experiences as well as personal histories. In the spirit of building a common military culture as well as being relevant to the new South Africa there is enough scope for us to ensure that unit names are, in a balanced way, reflective of this rich and diverse military history and heritage. The results of this process will be released once the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans has approved the new names.

I have also made it clear in my Commander’s Brief that the Centre of Gravity for the SA Army over the medium term will be “dynamic leadership within a disciplined and well trained SA Army”. I have every confidence in the SA Army Reserves and its leadership and the support it will give me as we move into the future. 🌱

