

MEDIA RELEASE FOR RESERVE SITE AND LOCAL MEDIA

Westpac proves to be major supporter of Defence Reservists

By Julia Ravell

Major Graham Todkill is accustomed to fixing difficult situations.

As Westpac's Relationship Manager, his 'can do' common sense has helped numerous customers achieve their ambitions. Whether it entails extricating families from mountainous debt or rearranging complex business portfolios, long time reservist Major Todkill, brings pragmatism and energy to his work. He helps people identify their needs and achieve their goals.

Building infrastructure in Iraq is not as different from personal banking as you'd imagine.

Major Todkill deployed to Iraq for six months to work in the Civilian Military Cooperation (CIMIC) program, and saw remarkable similarities between Iraqi farmers and their Australian counterparts.

"I spent many years in country Queensland as a local bank manager and rural people seem to have similar concerns regardless of their cultural backgrounds," said Major Todkill, who is based at Headquarters 1st Division and Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera.

"Like the Australian outback, Iraq is large and sparsely populated. Farmers share a similar set of worries – gaining access to water, avoiding agricultural diseases, putting food on the family table..."

"One Sheikh had an extended family of more than 20,000 people, so it was important to build a good relationship with him and work with local authorities to identify what the community needed most."

Australia is working closely with Iraqi authorities and the Coalition to rebuild local infrastructure. Reservists attached to CIMIC play an important role in community consultation, researching, prioritising and managing projects that are bringing health services, education, roads, bridges, public transport, clean water and electricity to Iraq.

"It's all about building capacity and helping improve the lives of local people," said Major Todkill.

Travelling between desert villages in 60 degree heat was difficult but rewarding work.

"Air-conditioning in the cars and tents were of little effect when it reached 50 – sometime around mid morning. Nights were a balmy 37 degrees," he explained.

“We travelled between isolated villages, negotiating with government at all levels, researching new projects and managing them until they were finished.”

The skills the Reservists brought from their civilian jobs were indispensable. Warrant Officer Class Two Paul Petter’s experience at the Australian Tax Office and meticulous administration ensured that the money invested in this program was well accounted for while Captain Tony Smith’s engineering skills earned considerable respect from both provincial engineers and contractors. Major Todkill’s ability to negotiate and establish working relationships with a wide variety of people from different backgrounds was essential.

Major Todkill and his CIMIC colleagues completed a number of Australian projects that will vastly improve the lives of many local communities.

Westpac is a supportive employer for its many Reservists and the company has a strong tradition of community involvement. The company provided eight months leave for Major Todkill’s deployment, dividing his duties among temporary replacements and taking advantage of the Employer Support Payment Scheme.

“We believe investing in the community is not only part of our corporate responsibility, it is necessary for us to maintain a sustainable business,” said Westpac CEO David Morgan.