

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY AND THE VIETNAM WAR 1962-1972

BECOMING THE 3rd XV: THE CITIZEN MILITARY FORCES AND THE VIETNAM WAR Dayton McCarthy

The August 2002 edition of the *Army* newspaper announced that an infantry company, consisting entirely of Reservists from various units around Australia, had been raised for service in East Timor. Becoming Alpha Company, 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and leaving in November this year, this is the first time since the Second World War that a complete infantry sub-unit of citizen soldiers has been deployed overseas.¹

The new legislative and non legislative measures created in the last several years has allowed this unprecedented move whereby Reservists can not only go onto full time service, but can also serve overseas and have their civil employment protected in their absence. Although these Reservists volunteered for this deployment, the recent legislative changes have also widened the scope for the calling out, or mobilisation, of the Reserves. The ability to use the Reserves to complement Regular units now gives the Army the ability to meet a number of overseas commitments. From the perspective of the Army Reservist, such opportunities for overseas service provide a relevance and motivation that has been lacking previously. This shows how far the Army, and for that matter Government thinking, has come in relation to the role, relevance and importance of part-time soldiers in the greater scheme of the nation's defence since the 1960s.

What is the relevance of these developments to the Vietnam War? As we all know, the Army Reserve's predecessor, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), did not go to Vietnam. To be sure, the odd CMF soldier went on full-time duty, and some left the CMF and joined the Regular Army, while others saw Vietnam over a two-week period as CMF observers. But the CMF was not called out nor were any of its units or subunits sent to Vietnam. As a result, it struggled to define a role for itself both during, and after, the war. To make matters worse, not only was it relegated further down the military food chain, but the CMF was also plagued by accusations that it harboured so-called 'draft dodgers' who avoided operational service by joining the CMF. In other words, the CMF became a distant '3rd XV'; it was National Servicemen, not CMF soldiers, who bolstered the ranks of the Regular Army for service in Vietnam.

How and why did the CMF become this '3rd XV'? Why did it not see service in Vietnam? This essay examines the factors behind the CMF's exclusion from operational service and the concomitant introduction of the Selective Service Scheme, and suggests that it was a combination of legislative, political and social factors that precluded the CMF from serving in Vietnam. It also analyses the impact of the Selective Service scheme on the CMF 'at home', and assesses the state of the CMF at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Such a study of the CMF's experiences during the Vietnam War, while important in its own right, provides timely lessons for today's Australian Army, forced to be increasingly reliant on part-time soldiers.

In order to explain the CMF's non-involvement, some background on the immediate pre-Vietnam history of the CMF and the Army's development as a whole is required. The CMF was recovering from the trauma of the disastrous Pentropic experiment, which was only part of the seachange impacting upon it. The Pentropic Division was implemented after a landmark strategic reassessment that indicated Southeast Asia, and not the Middle East, would be the most likely theatre for future Australian involvement. Moreover, modern conflict would escalate quickly, requiring troops to be more readily available than in the past. This placed greater emphasis on the Regular Army, rather than the CMF. Prior to this, the CMF had been the numerically larger force, bolstered by the first National Service scheme for most of the 1950s. The strategic thinking at the time was centred around fighting a conventional war which would allow time for an expeditionary force based on the CMF to be raised and sent overseas. But by 1959 the strategic situation had evolved and the concomitant force structure requirements led to the famous statement from the DCGS at the time that 'in future, the CMF is to be in support of the Regular Army, and not vice versa'.²

With the Regular Army now assuming the pre-eminent role within military planning, the function of the CMF in the new defence environment was unclear. One thing was for certain; the growing instability in Southeast Asia indicated that this region would be the most likely one for Australian involvement. Moreover in 1964, important amendments to the Defence Act had been introduced, allowing, it seemed, CMF involvement in the low-level conflicts developing. Previously, the Act, which detailed the preconditions necessary for the Governor-General to call-out the CMF, had specified that the CMF could not be sent outside the Commonwealth, unless its members volunteered specifically to do so. Moreover, the Act specified that the CMF could only be called out in a major conventional war or when Australia was directly threatened. This meant that the whole defence planning of the 1950s, based around the CMF and National Service, was, in retrospect, severely undermined by the Defence Act.

But what had changed in 1964? The Minister for Defence, Senator SD Paltridge, proposed to Cabinet that it should amend the Defence Act to 'ensure that the CMF is available for overseas service and can be called up if a threat of war exists or a limited war breaks out'. Cabinet agreed that the Defence Act needed to be brought up to date: the nature of the low-level, Cold War conflicts would not allow governments the time for the traditional concept of 'calling out the reserves'.³ Soon thereafter, the Act was amended, empowering the Government 'to make a call-up, for military purposes, *when it was of the opinion* that the military situation required it'.⁴ In other words, the new changes gave the Government an unprecedented level of flexibility in relation to using the CMF in any future conflict. If this was the case, why was the CMF not called out for service in Vietnam and a compulsory service scheme implemented instead?

The genesis of the Selective Service scheme can be traced back to March 1963. With the worsening situation in Southeast Asia, Cabinet ordered the Chiefs of Staff Committee to conduct a defence review, to include an assessment of the possibility of compulsory service. Cabinet received the paper and immediately ordered that the target strengths of the Regular Army and the CMF be increased to 28,000 and 35,000 men respectively in the near future. The then Minister for Defence, AG Townley, believed that both these targets could be achieved by a combination of vigorous recruiting and improved conditions of service. However, the official historian of this period, Peter Edwards, wrote later that 'there was widespread scepticism that the Army could reach its targets by voluntary means' in a period of full employment.⁵

With preparations accelerated as a result of this Defence Review, the next development was the sudden death of Townley. His successor, PMC Hasluck, requested that the new Minister for the Army, Dr AJ Forbes, prepare a paper on selective compulsory service. This Army paper dealt with the international circumstances that would warrant such a scheme and importantly, the effect such a scheme would have on the CMF. In particular, it noted that:

if South East Asia were lost and a threat to Australian territory developed, a much larger army would be required and there would be different priorities for the use of the Regular Army. The emphasis would be on expanding the CMF and the introduction of a full-scale national service scheme to provide the trained manpower necessary to expand the army to the required size.

The paper argued that such a threat was not imminent, and therefore the need for a 'selective' service scheme was not apparent. The paper concluded that the Army did not have the manpower to administer and train such a scheme. If a threat developed, then a scheme involving two years' full-time service, bolstering the mobilised CMF, could be enacted. Until such a threat occurred, the report warned that a selective service scheme would have an adverse effect on the CMF. The report's assessment of such an effect is worth quoting in full:

The new field force based on selective service would be replacing CMF combat units, and the CMF would be relegated to the secondary role of providing Communications Zone troops and a 'basis for expansion' in Australia. There would be a feeling that the provision of volunteer manpower for Australia's defence has no longer any practical

significance and the incentive of serving in the CMF as a national duty would be lost. *The introduction of a selective service scheme would destroy the 'One Army' concept that has been fostered, and result in a serious drop in CMF morale and strength* (emphasis added).⁶

As Defence Minister, Hasluck was unhappy with the recommendations of the Army paper and referred it to the Chiefs of Staff Committee for reconsideration.⁷ The Committee examined the paper in April and agreed with its recommendations, advising Cabinet that 'the introduction of selective service is not required now. Selective Service will be required in time of war when the CMF has been mobilized'. Senator Paltridge, who had replaced Hasluck as Minister for Defence in late April, agreed with the Chiefs of Staff appraisal of the situation and advocated further recruiting drives to bring the Army up to strength.

What had occurred thus far? Besides an alarming turnover of ministers, two distinct views had emerged. The first was that put forward by Cabinet, which argued that a selective service scheme with full-time service and overseas obligations was necessary. The other was that put forward by the Army, which believed that voluntary measures could obtain the required numbers. The Army believed that the strategic situation at the time did not warrant such a scheme, and reiterated that the CMF, enjoying the new amendments to the Defence Act, could be called out first and then bolstered by a compulsory service scheme. The Army also made it quite clear that the CMF would be adversely affected by any such compulsory service scheme, which would relegate it to the lowest priority in the order of battle.

By August 1964, events in Indonesia and Vietnam spurred Cabinet to consider such implications on Australian defence preparations. Cabinet's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee met in early September and ordered the Army to conduct a manpower review dealing with voluntary recruiting measures, the ability of the Army to manage a compulsory service scheme and the 'capacity of Australia to sustain an infantry effort over a period of time'.⁸ The Army responded, noting that its manpower targets for the Regular Army would not be reached without compulsory service; a later submission conceded that it was unlikely the CMF would meet its 1968 target of 35,000, despite the changed conditions of service.⁹

Why had the Army changed its stance on compulsory service vis-a-vis the CMF? As late as August, Minister Forbes was still receiving professional military advice against compulsory service. Indeed, that same month, the CGS, Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton, spoke of the new changes to the Defence Act and how it would allow mobilisation of the CMF when the military situation required it. Ian McNeill has written that the Army's 'reluctant conversion' to compulsory service, brought about by poor recruitment forecasts, was not made known to Forbes until late October 1964.¹⁰ The Army's submission to Cabinet calculated that if a selective service scheme was begun in June 1965, the Army could achieve a strength of 28,000 men by June 1967 and by December 1969, it could realise its long-term objective strength of 33,000 men.¹¹ The Defence Minister, Paltridge, was unaware of the Army's new stance on compulsory service, but came to the same conclusion. In November, he provided Cabinet with a manpower review that advocated recruiting and condition of service changes for a last-ditch drive to reach targets. Nonetheless, his report also stated that preparations for a compulsory service should be put in place in case such targets were not met.

Obviously, Cabinet now considered compulsory service a real possibility. On the morning of 4 November Wilton, the CGS, was told that he must provide a brief to Cabinet that day on how the Army could reach a strength of 33,000 men by the end of 1966. Cabinet considered his amended brief that night. He advised that:

... the strength of 33,000 should be therefore reached as soon as possible ... [The] Army therefore proposed a graduated compulsory service scheme to build up the strength of the Army as soon as practicable without substantially reducing existing operational capacity.¹²

That night Cabinet decided to introduce a selective service scheme with intakes to commence in June 1965. These National Servicemen would serve two years full-time with the Regular Army, with obligations to serve overseas if required, then followed by three years in an inactive reserve. Soon thereafter, the Government announced that men called up could have the 'option' to serve a longer period of time with the CMF, instead of with the Regular Army.

In the larger picture, however, the die had been cast: the CMF had been removed from the possibility of operational service, and thereby its fortunes in the 1960s and 1970s were altered for the worse. The question posed then is why, when the strategic situation deteriorated, a separate selective service scheme was instituted instead of the CMF being called out. The answer is not simply that both the Regular Army and the CMF could not meet their recruiting targets. This was true, of course, but what the selective service scheme provided was a graduated infusion of manpower for the Regular Army. Thus although the CMF was under-strength in relation to its targets and would have had difficulty mobilising its own divisions to fight as a complete entity, it could have provided this infusion of manpower to complement the Regular Army.

The reasons behind the decision to implement a separate scheme can be divided into four areas: economic factors, military requirements, the ambiguity of the Defence Act, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, political considerations. It is well known that in the period we are considering, employment was high and both the Regular Army and the CMF had trouble attracting recruits via voluntary means. So military service, even that of a part-time nature, was unattractive and although the media informed daily of the troubles in Indonesia and Vietnam, the threat did not seem real or urgent enough to trigger a rush to the colours. A selective service scheme, on the other hand, would provide certainty in numbers, and would draw from all sections of society ensuring high quality men but without significantly affecting the productivity of the workforce. A scaled-down version of National Service could provide the short-term solutions to its manpower problems. However until its eleventh-hour conversion to the idea of compulsory service, the Army had held that the CMF could be called out first then compulsory service would be introduced to realise this expansion of the Army.

The CMF's historical impediment, the Defence Act, and all the political baggage involved in mobilising citizen soldiers, helped to preclude the CMF from operational service in Vietnam. This was *despite* the new amendments which allowed the CMF to be called out in a defence emergency, and the new enlistment provisions that ensured that all members of the CMF were able to serve overseas. The Defence Act defined 'Time of Defence Emergency' as 'the period between the publication of a proclamation declaring that a state of defence emergency exists in relation to Australia and the publication of a proclamation that that state of defence emergency no longer exists'.

What is to be made of this particularly cumbersome definition? The defence analyst TB Millar wrote that new amendments enabled the CMF 'to deal with situations short of war and not a direct threat to Australia but which, *if unchecked, could gravely threaten Australia's security*' (emphasis added).¹³ His definition of 'defence emergency' was applicable to the situation facing Australia in 1964. Australia was not directly threatened by invasion; however the threat of Communist aggression in Vietnam, and even closer to Australia's shores, the sabre rattling of Indonesia, *were threats that if left unchecked*, could deteriorate and place Australia in a poor strategic position. In the era of the domino theory, the CMF could have been called out under the provisions of the Defence Act to deploy either to Vietnam or to the Indonesian border to help counter against the possible spread of communism, which would have endangered Australia indirectly and in the long term.

Support for this premise was provided by Forbes' speech to the House of Representatives. He stated that:

The CMF will be ready to move by the time it is required by the exigencies of the military situation. The CMF is thus an integral part of our response to a limited war situation. In considering our response to a limited war situation, it is quite wrong just to concentrate attention on the regular element of our 'One Army' concept.¹⁴

Although delivered before the Army converted to the idea of selective service, the speech was interesting for two reasons. First, Forbes clarified his belief that the CMF was an instrument that could be used in a limited war conflict. Second, and perhaps more important, he dismissed the notion that certainly would have been held in some Army circles—that the concept of fighting the 'limited war' was the sole preserve of the Regular Army. Indeed he emphasised that the new Defence Act provisions offered a greater potential scope for CMF deployment.

Ian McNeill disagrees with this. He notes certain prerequisites for the CMF to be called out that were *not* met. He argued that the CMF could not be called out:

until limited war seemed imminent. Confrontation with Indonesia did not reach that stage. In Vietnam, actual overt aggression, a prerequisite in the definition of limited war, was replaced by infiltration: the conditions of limited war were created in all but name. Consequently a 'time of defence emergency' was never proclaimed.¹⁵

This was true, but it was the 'devil in the detail' of the definitions used that pose the problems in this analysis. First, nowhere in the Defence Act does it stipulate that all the 'conditions of limited war' had to be met before the CMF could be called out. Indeed the Defence Act itself did not clearly define a 'defence emergency' and was intentionally ambiguous to provide latitude in defence options. Nevertheless the Government's objective was clear. When considering the mooted changes to the Act, it indicated that it 'would wish the Bill to mean that *the Government would be in a position to make a call-up for military purposes, when it was of the opinion that the military situation required it*' (emphasis added).¹⁶ It is fair to assume, then, that the meeting of strict criteria as to whether a situation could be defined a 'limited war' or not, was *not* the Government's intention when it amended the Defence Act. In other words, both the situation in Vietnam, be it 'infiltration' or whatever, and the 'Confrontation' with Indonesia, could have been justification enough for the Government to call out the CMF under the new provisions in the Defence Act. If a 'limited war was not imminent' as McNeill has suggested, why then did the Government deem it necessary to introduce the selective service scheme to strengthen the Regular Army? The limitations and legalese of the Defence Act were not the sole reasons behind the decision not to call out the CMF, because clearly the contemporary events in Southeast Asia constituted a 'time of defence emergency'. Indeed Major General NA Vickery, the CMF Member of the Military Board from 1966 to 1970, argued later that:

If we were right in committing troops to Vietnam War on the scale we have, the foreseeable effects upon the Army were such that *a defence emergency in fact existed* [emphasis added] ... one lesson arising from the Vietnam War is that a defence emergency must be recognized for what it is in relation to the capacity of the Regular Army to meet it, and action taken before the regular force is wrung out and the CMF adversely affected by having to sit in the wings watching it happening.¹⁷

Ironically, the new latitude provided by the 1964 amendments to the Act, which offered the CMF greater opportunities for operational service, also provided the pretext for the Government not to call out the CMF. Governments, even those facing external threats, must consider the domestic ramifications of any decisions made and herein lay the answer to this problem. In short, political considerations stopped the CMF from being used in Vietnam. Although the Government wanted to create a greater public awareness of the Southeast Asian situation, it did not want the economy adversely affected or the nation geared to a 'total war' philosophy. The economy, experiencing growth and full employment, was too inelastic to support a serious diversion of resources, both human and otherwise, for mobilisation purposes. The 'selective' nature of the new compulsory service scheme was small enough not to disrupt the economic and daily life of the nation. The battle against Communism was to be conducted off-shore so that Australia would not have to switch from civil economy to war economy to fight an invading foe; a 'business as usual' sentiment was engendered by the Government for this reason.

Selective Service Scheme (1965-1972): Reasons for the CMF's Role

Although the Government widened the CMF's potential role it had to consider the psychological impact on the wider community if it decided to call out the CMF. Unlike the small regular army that was confined to various garrison-like localities, the citizen soldier was, for most of his life, part of the community, there would have been a psychological ripple sent through the community when its members were withdrawn into full-time military service. What, then, was the difference between this and conscripting men into the selective service scheme? There was a tangible difference between what at the outset, at least, was a low-key, limited call-up of young men for the Regular Army and mobilising the CMF. To inform the public that the CMF was required was admitting, at least in the public's perception, that the situation had deteriorated to the extent that the last line of defence, the CMF, was required. Regardless of the fact that the CMF was no longer a solely home defence organisation, historically it was perceived to be by the wider community, and the Government did not want the calling-out of the CMF to be interpreted as a last-ditch measure. In addition to this, to call out 25,000 to 30,000 CMF men would have placed a strain on the tightly-stretched economy and the Government sought to avoid this although a partial mobilisation of the CMF was possible. Despite the Government enjoying widespread public support for its stance over Vietnam, it also sought to minimise the war's impact on Australian daily life to ensure such support was maintained. To lend support to the country's allies in halting Communism in Southeast Asia and to be perceived to be involved in a major war would have had two, distinct and different effects on the political climate. Part of the Government's strategy in this regard was demonstrated in that it did not actually declare war and treated the intervention in Vietnam as a police action.

There was, in other words, no military or legal reason for the introduction of the Selective Service scheme and the failure to call out the CMF. The CMF had the numbers of men required to complement the Regular Army as the Selective Service scheme did, but it was the conscripted men in the Selective Service scheme who replaced the CMF soldiers as the back-up force to the Regular Army. How did the Selective Service scheme itself, specifically the 'option', impact on the CMF?

The scheme required young men to serve two years full time in the Regular Army, followed by three years in an inactive reserve. The National Service Act was amended in 1965 to allow these men to serve overseas. All twenty-year old men were required to register with the Department of Labour and National Service; there were two registration periods, determined by which half-year the man's birthday fell into. Dates, corresponding to a registrant's birthday, were used as the means of drawing the ballot. There would be a call-up of 2100 men in mid-1965 and then another call-up of 2100 men in September. In 1966, there would be four call-ups of 1725 men.

The question of deferments was raised soon thereafter, and among the possible classes were those registrants already in the CMF and those registrants who joined the CMF immediately before the ballot. In the first two registrations, that is January and July 1965, all CMF members *regardless of length of service* could have their full-time obligation deferred indefinitely if 'balloted in', that is if their 'number' came up. Alternatively, if their 'number' did not come up during the ballot, that is if they were 'balloted out', they had no further National Service liability and could leave the CMF if they desired. It was noted that there were 2500 CMF men in the 19-20 year bracket who, if called up and removed from the CMF, would harm the CMF's viability. Commencing with the January 1966 registration, those registrants already in the CMF with not less than one year's efficient service at the date of commencement of registration of their age group could undertake, before the ballot, to render a total of five years' efficient service with the CMF. If they gave this undertaking and were subsequently 'balloted in', they would be granted indefinite deferment provided they served effectively for the five years. If 'balloted out' (ie if they were not called up), these men would no longer be liable for National Service and could seek release from the CMF 'subject to the normal conditions for members of the Service concerned'. Under the existing arrangements then, those men who did *not* give this undertaking and were 'balloted in' would be called up and thus discharged from the CMF; however if not called up, they could leave the CMF with no further liability for call-up.

The other category, that of registrants joining the CMF prior to a ballot, or with less than twelve months' effective service with the CMF at the time of their age group registration, could defer their call-up if they undertook the option to provide six years' efficient service with the CMF. If the men in the latter category gave the undertaking, but became inefficient or did not complete the six years, they would still be liable for call-up, regardless of the result of the original ballot applicable to them. If these men did not sign the undertaking, they would be called-up if 'balloted in', but would not be liable for further call-up if 'balloted out'. In the case of the registrant joining the CMF, he had to apply to the CMF before signing the undertaking and was dependent on the receiving CMF unit accepting him; and he would have to qualify for whatever selection criteria that unit had. Once again, if he gave the undertaking, he had the same liability and deferment criteria applied to him as those with less than one year's service with the CMF. All these proposals were 'designed to provide an incentive for Citizen Force enlistments'.¹⁸ Forbes later told Parliament that any man who chose this option met his legal obligation under the National Service Act. It should be noted that the undertaking was only binding on those men who chose the CMF 'option' with less than twelve months' service. If a man had more than twelve months' CMF service and made this undertaking, he was 'protected' if 'balloted in' but if he was 'balloted out' he could leave the CMF at his own accord.

This would be identified as a loophole in due course, but it was not until the early 1970s that moves were made to remove it. In the first year, however, it remained to be seen how many young registrants would realise that this loophole existed and be prepared to serve for at least twelve months in the CMF rather than take their very good chances with the normal ballot. At any rate, as early as September 1965, the House of Representatives heard allegations that the CMF had increased its strength substantially due to registrants 'draft-dodging'.¹⁹

Such allegations aside, the 'option' for National Servicemen to see out their obligations *did* bolster the CMF's strength. By July 1966 the CMF's strength had soared to 32,187 men, which was nearing its target of 33,750 men for that year. In 1965, 4629 registrants opted to serve in the CMF, while in 1966 a further 6664 chose to do so.²⁰ But this came at a cost. Malcolm Fraser, the Minister of the Army, argued that the role of the CMF was two-fold: they were to provide back-up forces in a situation of defence emergency to support the Regular Army and National Servicemen and then to provide for the expansion of the army in a major war. He explained that 'the present situation in Vietnam does not require the CMF in fulfilment of its stated role'.²¹ This was a crushing demotion for the CMF: its role was now to support the Regular Army and a conscript force, which would probably be increased in time of further defence crisis in preference to the mobilisation of the CMF. The CMF had well and truly become the distant 3rd XV, with little chance of performing its nominal role of serving in a defence emergency.

The CMF had been reduced to an organisation where young men could opt to carry out their obligation as an alternative to full-time service or as a potential pool of individual replacements for the Regular Army. A number of CMF officers and NCOs joined the Regular Army or volunteered for full-time duty with it, thereby further depriving the CMF of some of its most valuable members. These CMF men either filled Regular Army positions or volunteered for service in Vietnam themselves. In 1966, 32 CMF men were accepted for service in Vietnam, but over 300 were on CMF full-time duty with the Regular Army. The difference between a CMF soldier who went on full-time duty and one who joined the ARA for a short-term period of service was that the former was still a member of the CMF and could revert to part-time service whenever he chose to do so. Whether or not a CMF man went on full-time duty or joined the ARA, his civil employment, unlike that of National Servicemen, was *not* protected by the Repatriation (Special Overseas Service) Act and the Defence (Re-Establishment) Act. In other words, it was assumed that civil re-employment prospects were taken into account before the man volunteered for a period of full-time service.²²

Smarting from the slight of having conscripts sent into operations in preference to CMF volunteers, the CMF Member of the Military Board, Major General RA Cullen, lobbied the Military Board to allow a composite CMF infantry battalion to serve in Vietnam. According to Cullen, he 'pushed and pushed' for this proposal, but the Military Board was not interested and informed him that at any rate it would not get ministerial approval. Instead, a deal was

made which in return for him dropping the CMF battalion proposal, the Board would allow selected CMF officers to go to Vietnam on attachment for two to three weeks. Cullen agreed to do this. He later wondered whether he 'was right or wrong to have given up at that stage' and felt that his failure to get a CMF battalion to Vietnam his 'big failure'. However, if he considered this a 'failure', his compromise, the CMF observation tours, must be considered a signal success.²³ Commencing in January 1967 and continuing throughout the course of the Australia's involvement in Vietnam, the CMF Observer program allowed approximately 600 CMF officers to visit operational areas in that country.²⁴

The scheme, which soon became highly sought after, allowed six officers or senior NCOs to depart each fortnight and be attached to an Australian unit for a period of fourteen days. Generally the tour was structured around one week with a line unit (determined by the Corps of the CMF Observer) followed by a week visiting the headquarters in Nui Dat and Vung Tau. The nature of the activities undertaken depended on the relationship the CMF observer had with the posted unit and his own wishes.²⁵ There were some CMF observers who created a bad impression by their sloth, but invariably most endeavoured to participate as much as possible and in doing so both experience an operational environment and prove themselves equal to their Regular counterparts. In most cases the term 'CMF Observer' was a misnomer—they could participate to the extent they desired including going on combat operations. To be sure, they were closely supervised but most found that after initial familiarisation they could fit in quite easily. This was assisted by the fact that the Army at that stage was a 'small world' and as a result they often met former cadre staff or CMF men on full time duty whom they knew.

The impressions they took home were invariably the same: the professionalism of the Australian soldier and the inability to tell the difference between National Serviceman and Regular. But by witnessing the easy assimilation of the National Servicemen into the Regular units, they questioned why the CMF was not allowed to serve in Vietnam. The CMF observers felt that had they individually, or their CMF unit collectively, been given the opportunity for some concentrated training, the same high standards could have been achieved with the same level of integration within Regular units. After all, they asked, why call up National Servicemen, who required a period of training anyway, when the CMF was already there? That question plagued many in the CMF then and continues to rankle to this day.

Instead a widespread malaise spread through the CMF as the war progressed. With no role to play, the CMF started to spiral into decline as training resources and cadre staffs were diverted elsewhere and its own soldiers pondered their military future. Turnover rates increased and to make matters worse, its image was tarnished by allegations that it was a haven for draft dodgers. The strength of the CMF by November 1969 was down to just 33,983,²⁶ evidence that the National Service scheme, while providing a reasonable trickle of optees, had the adverse effect of turning away *bona fide* volunteers. The CMF entered the 1970s under a cloud of uncertainty. By July 1970, the strength of the CMF had dropped to 31,372 soldiers.²⁷ In December 1970, an Army Headquarters paper highlighted the deep state of malaise in the CMF. The CMF's operational capability was marred by its declining strength and high turnover, which hampered the completion of the three-year CMF training cycle. The report concluded that it was:

clear that from the training and manpower aspects, there is no prospect of the CMF under present conditions approaching an acceptable unit standard of operational readiness ... No real solution is possible while the two factors of time available and turnover rates pertain.

At any rate the report condemned the CMF over 'the uncertainty of its availability' and concluded that the CMF was required 'primarily for the defence of Australia in the long term' since the possibility of it being required to augment regular troops in Southeast Asia was 'unlikely'. The report concluded that the:

[I]mportations inherent in a part-time force make it imperative that such a force concentrate its efforts on the most likely situation ... [which would be] a significant ground threat to Australia and her territories, and the CMF ... should be organized, trained and equipped primarily against that situation.²⁸

This was a further downgrading in the CMF's role as even the token possibility of it being sent overseas (except to the very near north) was repudiated and instead it was made clear that home defence was its sole purpose. Yet the report was accurate in its assessment of the CMF in 1970: it was in a poor state and was a far cry from the CMF in 1965-1966, which could have mustered (at least) a composite battalion for Vietnam. The situation was indicative of what could be called the 'allocated role/training priority spiral' which dogged the CMF and later the Army Reserve (ARES) from the 1960s through to recent times. The spiral functions when the CMF has its operational role downgraded, which means its priority in training and resource allocation is also downgraded.

This self-fulfilling prophecy was exemplified by the decay in the CMF in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was made clear to the CMF that it should prepare only for the distant possibility of mainland invasion and that the equipment and training priority would be commensurate with that objective. Indeed, an Army Headquarters report from mid-1971 concluded damningly that 'CMF training should be directed towards the defence of Australia. There is no apparent justification in training the present CMF for overseas operations. They can be rapidly converted to overseas type operations as a threat develops'.²⁹ The lack of a clearly defined role was one of many factors which harmed the development of the CMF. Other factors included the growth of the affluent, permissive society, the public perception that the Australian Regular Army could handle most situations short of general mobilisation (thereby negating the need for the CMF) and that the existence of National Service was believed to cancel out the need for volunteers.

In June 1972 there were 26,588 soldiers in the CMF of whom 6935 were National Service optees. When the Whitlam Government was elected, it suspended the National Service Act and announced that all CMF optees would have their service obligations waived. The CMF suffered the inevitable exodus of optees and disaffected volunteers and by June 1973 the strength of the CMF had dropped to 22,592 soldiers.³⁰ As one CMF soldier put it, when the Selective Service scheme was cancelled, 'most of the National Service people still in the system simply walked off'.³¹

Although the second National Service scheme provided a steady injection of manpower, the manifold effects of the Selective Service scheme left the CMF in a poorer state. Besides these effects, the introduction of conscription spelled the end of the CMF's pretensions that it was an immediate back-up force to the Regular Army. It was no longer a true reserve 2nd XV, but a distant 3rd XV which trained for the remote possibility of defending Australia against invasion. Even this lacklustre task was threatened when military planning pointed towards the Regular Army assuming this role. Yet realistically, by 1972 what role could the CMF have undertaken? The malaise was well entrenched, compounded by the tangible effects of being on the lower end of training priorities for years. Many senior CMF officers at the time identified the source of the CMF's woes as its lack of operational service since 1945 and more specifically the failure to call it out for service in Vietnam. Whatever the reason may have been for the CMF not being called out, the CMF's political, social and military position suffered incalculably because it did not see active service in Vietnam. Indeed, the CMF was one of the greatest casualties of the Vietnam War.

Thirty years after the conclusion of Australian involvement in Vietnam, are there any lessons to be learned? Recent events have demonstrated quite clearly that the Army and the Government have learned from previous errors and have put in place legislative and non-legislative measures that enable Reservists to play a greater part in defence. The need for citizen soldiers to be used in future operations has been clearly noted in recent Defence White Papers. So, while a CMF battalion was not raised for service in Vietnam, an infantry company of Reservists *will* deploy to East Timor. In terms of lessons learned, surely this is 'proof of the pudding'. Some may suggest that this is not much, but it is a start. In 1971 Major General Cullen wrote of the ability of Reservists to contribute actively to the nation's military operations:

It is well to remember that the efficiency of a Citizen Force *reacts proportionally to the task given to it by the Government* (emphasis added) ... The capacity of the CMF to do the job is undoubted—provided it has the manpower and the equipment. It is now up to the Government to define more exactly the role and possible tasks of the CMF and give it the tools to do the job.³²

That comment is more topical than ever.

Endnotes

1. Captain Ian Toohill, 'Ready for East Timor', *Army*, No 1056, 1 August 2002.
2. CRS A6922/1. 1/4, Minute C1055, DCGS to all Commands, 'The Reorganisation of the AMF 1959/60-1961/62. General Staff Instruction Number 1', 22 December 1959, National Archives of Australia, Canberra. All CRS records subsequently cited are held at the NAA Office, Canberra.
3. CRS A5827/1, vol 7, Submission 215, 'Citizen and Reserve Forces-Availability in War', May 1964.
4. CRS A5827/1, vol 7, Decision 251, 'Citizen and Reserve Forces-Availability in Limited War', 28 May 1964.
5. Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in South East Asian Conflicts, 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992), 271.
6. CRS A6840/2, Item 3, Paper, 'Selective Service', 19 March 1964.
7. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1993), 24.
8. CRS A5827/1, vol 12, Eighth Menzies Ministry, FAD Committee Decision No 451, 3 September 1964.
9. CRS A5827/1, vol 16, Eighth Menzies Ministry, Submission No 521, 'Services Manpower Review', 3 November 1964.
10. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 25.
11. AWM 101, Item 3, 'Background'.
12. CRS A4940/1, C 162, Part 2, letter from Sir John Wilton to Sir John Bunting, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 'Notes on Professional Military Advice', 6 November 1964. This was a copy of the advice Wilton prepared for Cabinet on 4 November 1964.
13. TB Millar, *Australia's Defence* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 125.
14. *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives (hereinafter PD (HR)), vol 43, 19 August 1964, 438.
15. McNeill, *To Long Tan*, 26.
16. CRS A5827/1, vol 7, Eighth Menzies Ministry, Cabinet Decision 251, 'Citizen and Reserve Forces—Availability in Limited War', 28 May 1964.
17. CRS A6829/1, M/C/3, Minute CMFM 1698, 'CMF and Reserves', Major General NA Vickery to Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCGS), 2 October 1970.
18. CRS A1946/15, 67/824, SC 65/90, letter, HA Bland, Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service, to Hicks, Secretary, Department of Defence, 2 December 1965; and CRS A4940/1, C162 Part 2, 'National Service Policy', Department of Labour and National Service to Minister, 9 November 1964.
19. PD (HR), vol 47, 23 September 1965, 1188.
20. Ibid, vol 73, 18 August 1971, 279.
21. Ibid, vol 53, 27 September 1966, 1328.
22. Ibid, vol 54, 4 April 1967, 892. Major General KG Cooke noted that his unit, 1st Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment, lost 32 officers and NCOs to a single Regular Army unit in Vietnam: letter, Cooke to author, 12 July 1997.
23. I am greatly indebted to Barrie M Newman, a South Australian CMF Observer, for assisting me in this section, most of which is taken from his book: *Vietnam Remembered: Notes by South Australian CMF Observers* (Kent Town, SA, CMF Observer Group Vietnam, 2001).
24. PD (HR), vol 77, 28 March 1972, The Minister for the Army, JM Fraser, foreshadowed the introduction of this scheme in Parliament in October 1966.
25. See CRS A3688/25, 174/R1/62, and interview, Major General WE Glenny, 2 December 1996.
26. CRS A6837/1, Item 9, DCGS; Minutes 1970, CMF and Reserves—Paper', 25 March 1970. Included in the figure of volunteers were 6670 soldiers under the age of twenty 'whose intentions on National Service registration were unknown'.
27. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, 'Review of CMF and Reserves', Office of DCGS, December 1970.
28. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, Review of the CMF and Reserves', Office of the DCGS, December 1970.
29. CRS A3688/26, 174/R1/98, Minute AD 30/71, 'CMF and Reserves Study Progress Report', DAD to DCGS, 14 July 1971.
30. *Commonwealth Year Book* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1974), 97.
31. Letter, Jim Shannon to author, 22 September 2001.
32. Major General PA Cullen, 'The role of our citizen soldiers', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July, 1970.