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LOCAL

Reservists good to go

By JIM KELLY

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It's understandable that Capt. James Meredith's wife is concerned about his well being. The Lake Superior Scottish Regiment reservist will be leaving at the end of March with a United Nations force going to Sudan.

As a military observer, Meredith's role will be similar to peacekeeping. He served a seven-month stint in Afghanistan, from December 2005 to July 2006.

He is part of a contingent of 13 local reservists, 12 of whom are heading for a six-month tour of volatile southern Afghanistan later this winter. Three of the 12 have served previous stints in the war-torn country.

Another 15 local reservists may be going to Afghanistan next year.

Meredith will be in Sudan for a little more than six months.

"We're there to make sure, as a neutral party, that both belligerent parties are abiding by the peace agreement," he said from his home in Thunder Bay.

A 2005 peace deal ended Africa's longest-running civil war. An estimated two million people were killed and another six million displaced in the two-decade conflict.

Meredith said the UN force in southern Sudan shouldn't be confused with the Darfur mission in the northern part of the country.

The reservists are trained and ready for deployment overseas, but for now they're just enjoying some time off.

"They're out and about having a little bit of fun before they have to go back to work," Meredith said.

Back to work means going to one of the world's hot zones.

"They're skiing or visiting with their families or whatever they feel like doing," he said.

Meredith said 12 of the reservists, including himself, are with the LSSR while one is with the 18 Thunder Bay Service Battalion.

All but Meredith have received training since April either at Canadian Forces Base Edmonton or CFB Shilo, about 35 kilometres east of Brandon.

Meredith got his training at the Peace Support Training Centre at CFB Kingston, where all soldiers slated for a UN mission receive their training.

Cpl. David Carr, a member of the LSSR since 2001 who is to return to CFB Shilo on Saturday for more training, said he's anxious to head overseas.

"It's pretty exciting," he said.

"It's kind of like being at the starting line of a race. It's the excitement, the anticipation. We're just looking forward to get out there running," he said.

Carr graduated from Lakehead University last spring with an honours degree in biology. He plans to pursue a masters degree when his tour in Afghanistan is over. And his long-term plans could include medical school or a career in the military.

"I've left a lot of options open to myself," he said. "A military career is a possibility, but I haven't made up my mind yet."

In about two weeks, Carr said, the reservists will return to their training posts prior to heading overseas. The majority will leave from CFB Shilo.

Twelve other members of the LSSR have seen duty in Afghanistan since 2002, including Cpl. Anthony Boneca who was killed in July 2006. Lakeheaders Pte. Josh Klukie and Pte. Robert Costall also died in Afghanistan in 2006, but both were with the regular forces. Klukie was with the Royal Canadian Regiment while Costall was with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Once the reservists complete their tour, they return to Canada for "some re-integration time to get themselves back into the normal swing of things with their families," Meredith said.

Some, like Carr, will return to their studies while others will resume their civilian jobs.

Some may decide to do another tour of Afghanistan.

"It's really up to them," Meredith said. "They can look to a tour later on."



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