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## Armed Forces information

**We understand that many people are unfamiliar with the day to day details of military life, such as the roles of the single Services. To enhance your understanding of the Armed Forces, we have highlighted some key points that may be of interest to you as you develop your Corporate Covenant.**

The purpose of the Ministry of Defence and our Armed Forces is to defend the United Kingdom, and Overseas Territories, our people and interests; and act as a force for good by strengthening international peace and security.

### The Naval Service

- ⇒ The Naval Service consists of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines.
- ⇒ There are currently 30,200 serving members of the Naval Service and also 2,600 serving members of the Maritime Reserves (Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Marines Reserve).
- ⇒ The Naval Service has five components: Surface Ships; the Submarine Service; the Fleet Air Arm; the Royal Marines; and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.
- ⇒ 45% of the Naval Service is actively deployed globally at any time. It protects the flow of international trade on which our nation depends (95% of UK economic activity relies on secure oceans). Roles include: preventing conflict, counter-piracy, counter-drugs, humanitarian missions, stabilising hot-spots and building international partnerships.
- ⇒ The Naval Service is the most separated of the three Armed

Forces. Personnel can expect to be away from home for 660 days over a three-year period.

- ⇒ Communication can be challenging. For example, the families of submariners are only allowed to send one 60-word message, twice a week, to their serving family member when they are deployed. The Serviceperson is not able to make contact with them.

⇒ Only 5,000 families live in Service Family Accommodation (SFA). The majority of Naval Service families live in their own homes, in civilian communities, around the UK.

- ⇒ There are Naval families living in nearly every county in the UK – they are not just on the south coast of England or the west coast of Scotland! The Naval Families Federation supports all members of the Serviceperson's family.



# The role of the Armed Forces: delivering for Britain at home and abroad

**The role of the Armed Forces is set out by the Government and it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence to deliver. This is done through seven overarching jobs that we call Military Tasks. Many of them overlap and are done at the same time but to understand our place in the nation's life it is important to know each separately.**

## Military tasks

**1.** The first of these is to provide strategic intelligence. Whether it is a ship or a submarine off an enemy coast listening to their communications, or an aircraft scanning the ground for activity and movement, or a soldier studying terrorist groups; providing that understanding of what is going on in the world is vital if our government is going to react appropriately. Alongside other parts of government we provide the nation's window on the world.

**2.** Our second task is the nuclear deterrent. We list that separately because it is our ultimate response and the final guarantee that Britain will never be an easy target. It takes huge effort to be ready every minute of every day but because we can never provide a guaranteed picture of the future, we must be constantly prepared to act.

**3.** The third is the most well-known task, what is sometimes called defence of the realm. It is the essential purpose of our Armed Forces to make sure the British people can live in peace.

**4.** This ties into our fourth task – because we are also here to help in times of national emergency. The police, ambulance and fire service cannot be prepared for everything on their own so, when needed, we help. That may include supporting the police if there is a terrorist situation, such as the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980, or helping ministries with national issues such as the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 or the floods earlier this year.

**5.** Overseas our role is diverse too because we are not simply able to fight wars but also to build alliances. Our fifth role is to do just that.

To support British influence we carry out many different activities: from sending defence attachés around the world, to training foreign forces both abroad and in the UK. We also have many Service personnel demonstrating their skills with groups like the Red

Arrows or our Military Bands. They too play their part in promoting the UK.

**6.** Perhaps the most sought after role from our friends – friends in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union or groups of like-minded countries – is our sixth task: to provide expeditionary capability. Recently we have sent aircraft to the Baltic and a battle group to Poland to play their part in NATO exercises to reassure our eastern European friends that we will stand with them. In 2000 we sent a task force to Sierra Leone to drive back the rebel army and allow the Government to re-establish control. But this wasn't enough without our final task...

**7.** ...Providing security for stabilisation. Today's Armed Forces work very closely with many parts of government and none more so than, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. Together we help countries rebuild after war or disaster. Sometimes we lend skills, such as our Royal Engineers; sometimes we lend strength to ensure those doing the hard work are protected. We did both in West Africa.

Together, these military tasks are why we have the Armed Forces. Everything we do is decided upon by Parliament and changes when required to meet the needs of the British people. For us, the most important thing is to be prepared to react to whatever is needed; wherever that may be.

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# Before you sign up

## How dangerous is being a soldier?

This is the most commonly asked question at BeforeYouSignUp.info

### A word about risk

The risk of being a soldier can't be known exactly because:

- ⇒ soldiers are posted to different places in the world where the risks are different
- ⇒ not all army jobs carry the same level of risk
- ⇒ it is impossible to predict risk in the future – for example, the Falklands War in 1982 took everyone by surprise and large numbers of soldiers were sent unexpectedly to fight in a short war that killed 255 people on the British side.

Every job in the army carries some level of risk. The most dangerous job in the army in Afghanistan was infantry rifleman, because the infantry were on the front line. A few other jobs were very dangerous in Afghanistan – for example, searching for and dismantling explosive devices. It is possible to join jobs in the army that carry less risk, but no job is without some risk.

### Most common combat risks in Iraq and Afghanistan

Researchers asked armed forces personnel who had been deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan which threats they most commonly faced. This is what they found:

- ⇒ About half had seen someone wounded and killed (about a third had experienced this more than once)
- ⇒ About 15% had seen a comrade shot or hit who had been near them at the time
- ⇒ About a quarter had experienced an IED (roadside bomb)
- ⇒ About half had come under small arms fire
- ⇒ About three quarters had come under rocket/mortar/artillery attack.

For those in front-line roles like the infantry these experiences would be more common; in support roles like logistics, less common.

### Risk of death

In 2009 there were 106,380 personnel in the army; 98 died as a result of their posting to Afghanistan. 71 of these deaths were from one part of the army – the infantry.

Over the course of the war in Afghanistan, the risk of death in the infantry was six times that in the rest of the army and seven times that in the rest of the armed forces. This is because the infantry were more likely to be involved in close combat and be nearer to enemy forces in general.

On the other hand, apart from the infantry, the mortality rate in the armed forces is similar to that in the population as a whole. This is because the armed forces are fitter than the general population and less likely to die from disease.

### Risk of serious injury

The risk of being wounded in the battlefield in Afghanistan (for the British armed forces as a whole) has been about five times higher than the risk of death. This 5:1 ratio has been fairly constant, even as the fatality rate has fluctuated. For example, in 2009, 508 armed forces personnel were wounded in action in Afghanistan, of whom 158 were seriously or very seriously injured.

Again, the risk of injury in the infantry is much higher than in the rest of the army.

Of course, there is risk of serious injury in some civilian careers as well.

### Risk of psychological harm

The risk of psychological harm in the army is higher than the risk of physical injury or death. A report in 2006 showed that about 4% of armed forces personnel showed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The rate was higher among troops with combat duties (6%) than those without (3%). There are several other psychological problems that are linked to exposure to warfare; these include depression,

drug-dependence, alcoholism and relationship problems.

### Summary

Most soldiers do not experience serious physical or mental harm as a result of their work but for those that do, life may never be the same again. These are risks that you need to consider before enlisting.

## The pros and cons

There are pros and cons of joining the armed forces, here are some of the main ones.

### The main 'pros'

Recruits say that some of the main benefits of life in the forces are:

- ⇒ New challenges
- ⇒ Global travel
- ⇒ Active lifestyle, including sports and adventurous training
- ⇒ Personal development and the chance to rise through the ranks
- ⇒ Physical fitness
- ⇒ Help with basic English and Maths skills
- ⇒ Secure job (for most)
- ⇒ Friendship and teamwork.

### The main 'cons'

But there are down-sides of joining the armed forces as well. Recruits say that some of the problems of military life are:

- ⇒ Having much less choice in general than civilians, including little choice over when they can return to civilian life
- ⇒ Spending a long time away from home
- ⇒ The risks of mental harm or physical injury from warfare
- ⇒ Bullying and harassment for some
- ⇒ Sometimes disagreeing with the wars they are ordered to fight or with the way the wars are fought
- ⇒ Sometimes having to do long and boring jobs