



Shedding the green skin

Advice when engaging former Army personnel for civilian security positions
by Matthew Carr

This *National Security Practice Note* explains what factors need to be considered when engaging former Army personnel for civilian security positions.

The September 11, 2001, attacks, the Bali bombing and the Madrid and London rail attacks have created a massive demand for security professionals in the past 5 years. At the same time, legislative changes to security licensing and rising employer expectations have meant that these professionals must be better skilled.

While former Army personnel have many of the essential security skills required by the commercial security industry, this does not mean that they will automatically succeed in the private sector.

This *National Security Practice Note* examines the benefits that Army personnel can offer for business security and highlights the areas where military culture can cause difficulties for both employers and ex-armed forces personnel.

Every year about 1000 Permanent officers and 4500 enlisted personnel separate from the Australian Defence Force.¹ The majority are from the Army and many will have had experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor and other overseas areas of operations. In general, the average age of these departing personnel is getting younger, due to changes in pension entitlements. In 1986, the military ceased providing a pension to service personnel after 20 years of service. Consequently, there is no longer the incentive to remain. Instead, after return-of-service obligations are fulfilled, people are leaving the ADF as young as 30 years of age.

For some, their first private sector job is working as a private security contractor in the Middle East and Africa. There they could typically earn from US\$400 to \$1000 per day. However many soldiers do not want to be separated from their families for long periods, to work in a dangerous environment or work long hours.

Others are looking to Australia's private security market. This appears logical as they have skills of relevance, such as:

- asset protection
- close personal protection
- crisis management
- facility hardening
- intelligence planning, provision and analysis
- kidnap, ransom and extortion response
- personnel screening
- physical security reviews
- red teaming
- scenario planning
- security assessments
- security risk management
- security training and education
- surveillance and counter-surveillance
- technical surveillance counter measures
- threat analysis

Besides these technical skills, military personnel often have other attributes which make them attractive to employers.

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These include quick decision-making and the military appreciation of processes. Leadership and team-building skills are also common in the military which are essential to creating excellent supervisors and managers. Other common abilities are knowledge of technology and the rapid adoption of new technology.

An additional valuable attribute of an ex-military person is their discipline and work ethos. Reliability and attention to detail are both qualities that are essential for security work.

A final set of attributes, often developed during operations, are problem-solving skills, ability to work in high-pressure environments, and cross-cultural skills.

While the above attributes are attractive to employers, there are a number of potential issues that employers need to be aware of which could derail a productive employee-employer relationship. These are discussed below. They are generalisations and obviously do not

apply to every former military person. Their inclusion is not intended to criticise military personnel but aims to provide employers with an appreciation of the range of issues of which they need to be cognisant.

Firstly, Defence Force personnel are trained to operate in environments of escalated threat, with an emphasis on war fighting. Consequently, it can be difficult for the ex-military to downgrade their perception of threats and their response to it.

Secondly, the over-riding concern for military operations is the security of personnel. For business, security is just one issue and has to be balanced against other commercial drivers. It can be difficult for the ex-military to appreciate the need for balance.

Thirdly, members of the military are used to being led strongly and often operate best in a clearly defined command structure. Some former military personnel may find it challenging to operate in a business environment where leadership, structures and systems are more fluid and less well defined.

Fourthly, the military environment is dominated by well defined doctrine and standard operating procedures. Working in a business environment where these can be unstated or ill-defined can lead to frustration for those who expect the military environment to be the norm. In addition, in the commercial world knowing when to move away from standard operating procedure is as important a skill as knowing when to follow it.

Fifthly, the military culture demands that decisions are implemented rapidly. In the private sector, managers require a range of tools to ensure decisions are implemented including stakeholder buy-in, negotiation and persuasion. This can be frustrating for some military personnel who expect compliance with orders.

Sixthly, military qualifications may not be recognised in the private sector. This may require military personnel to undertake courses to gain security licenses. It may also mean that the former soldier may wish to undertake considerable training and expect that this will be met solely by the employer as is the practice in the military.

Seventhly, the military system provides many support services which are not common in the private sector.



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Consequently, some military personnel may need assistance in moving into an environment where workers compensation, personal indemnity, health insurance, quotas and even leasing housing are all new.

So what does this mean for employers?

Principally, when an employer considers engaging a person who has recently left the armed forces, they need to recognise that a long-term harmonious employer-employee relationship depends on two factors – individual competence and cultural fit. Typically, employers look only at a prospective employee's skill levels and ability to do the job in a technical sense. They ignore how that person would fit into the workplace culture and how they would interact with colleagues, superiors and subordinates.

Over the next few years, many thousands of younger military personnel with counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and security skills will be entering the private sector workforce. This is a valuable pool of security skill from which employers can draw. However, the take-up of ex-military will depend heavily on employers selecting the right person, based on the prospective employee's ability to adapt to the new work environment, including which elements of the military culture they need to abandon.

Footnotes

1 Defence Annual Report 2004-05, Table 3.19, p103.

Profile of a former Army Officer who has made the transition recently

Matthew Carr joined the Army in 1996 and commenced officer training at the Australian Defence Force Academy. In 1999, he graduated from Royal Military College and became a Cavalry Officer in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment. He worked in a variety of positions and in the past three years, served as a Staff Officer in the Joint Operations Support Section. This involved working with Government agencies, emergency services and industry in the execution of military exercises, and supporting the civil community in times of need.

“After nearly a decade in the Army I reached a crossroads and needed to make a decision as to where my career and life were heading. I decided to take the risk and make the transition across to the civilian sector,” said Carr. “Having been in a combat arms corps, I had a Bachelor of Arts and little experience in anything but security-related operations, corporate liaison and security/risk assessment (all military qualifications).

“Opening my own security consultancy company has exposed me to all the issues possible in the ‘outside world’, from contract bidding and revenue generation, insurance and licensing to the expenses incurred in setting up a new business, such as having business cards produced and a website designed. The biggest transition was probably having to go from the security of fortnightly pay and paid holidays to “no work – no money”.

“The decision to leave the military was harder than the decision to join up. However, with the private and corporate security industry growing as it is, and a global terrorist threat that shows no sign of abating, an increasing number of military personnel like myself will look to this sector as their transition out of the services.”