

Dominic Gething - Paramedic, North West Ambulance Service

My name's Dominic Gething, I'm a paramedic with the paramedic emergency services for the North West Ambulance Service. I respond on emergency ambulances and the fast response cars going to all the 999 calls that the public generate and I get allocated those by the emergency control centre.

In the reserve forces, my rank is that of a lieutenant and my role is a medical support officer with the Royal Army Medical Core. I'm based with 201 Field Hospital over in the North East. I've been a reservist now for about four years, the reason I decided to join was I just wanted to do something a little bit extra with my spare time. It was an opportunity to serve, to go to Afghanistan and just to get involved and do something a little bit outside of the normal.

As a medical support officer, that job is different to my role as a paramedic, so I've learnt management skills. In the NHS, I just have to look after myself, my patients, whereas in the army reserve I've been responsible for a group of quite senior soldiers and managing them on operations in Afghanistan has been quite a challenge, but I learnt a lot about myself and about them.

The skills that I've picked up in the reserves have helped my NHS career by making me more aware of my potential. As a result I'm putting myself forward for more senior leadership roles within the North West Ambulance Service. The training opportunities that I've had with the army reserve have been quite extensive. Over in York, the army medical services have a custom built mock-up of the hospital in Bastion and we've been involved quite heavily in exercises in that hospital and it's designed to make it as realistic as possible so that when you go to Afghanistan you're not taken aback by anything, you see what goes on.

My NHS employer has supported my role within the army reserve forces by giving me additional leave, to allow me to go away and do the things that I'm required to do by the army reserve. And they've also been really great, when I was away on operations they stayed in touch with my wife and when I got back just little things like a bunch of flowers really sort of made the difference.

The best thing about being a reservist, it's quite difficult to nail down. I think for me it's the chance to travel, the chance to do something different, it's a great privilege for what it is we do and I think that for me, is one of the highlight of being a reservist. You make some really good friends and I know it is a cliché but you really do.

So, if anybody's thinking of volunteering for the reserve forces I'd say make sure you do your research, talk to your friends and family, make sure that they're happy and that you're happy and know what you're committing to, it's not too much commitment, but you do need to make sure you can manage it and once you've done that, go for it. There will be times when it's tough, but in general, it's an outstanding experience.