

FIGHTING BACK: CHRIS MADDEN

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Herbert Smith Freehills have a number of armed forces reservists in the firm who have been put on notice, or called up, to support with national crises in Australia and the UK.

In London, Corporate associate Chris Madden was called up with the Royal Air Force (RAF) to help in the fight against Covid-19. We caught up with Chris to hear more about his deployment.

When were you called up?

I was called up in the middle of April when it was clear that more members of the Armed Forces were going to be required to support the national effort to tackle Covid-19. The legal basis for the support is known as MACA - Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities. This allows the UK Government, the devolved administrations, and local councils to request military assistance in an emergency, such as during floods or other disasters.

The timing worked quite well as I was supposed to be on qualification leave but was unable to travel anywhere! The firm kindly allowed me to extend my qualification leave to mobilise with the RAF. I was on standby to move for the first month of the mobilisation and then at the end of May I was given 48 hours' notice to report for duty in Rutland near Leicestershire.

Tell us about your deployment.

I was assigned to a Royal Logistics Corps Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) at Kendrew Barracks. The MTUs are the backbone of the military Covid-19 effort. They are comprised of a 12-person team which can go and set up a testing site anywhere in the country. The sites can be established in under 10 minutes and so they can be used as a rapid response to any uptick in Covid-19 cases in a given area.

As I am in the RAF, I was slightly apprehensive about being a solo airman in an army unit! However, the team were fantastic. It was made up of both regular soldiers and reservists and so was a prime example of the 'Whole Force' concept whereby regulars and reservists work together seamlessly on operations. We spent the first few days training on how to set up the MTUs, how to wear the PPE, and also how to ensure the tests were administered correctly by members of the public.

After that, we were sent straight out to operate MTUs in various locations in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. We typically left around 8am from the barracks to drive to the location, set up the MTU, and then the first members of the public drove through around 10am. The sites were open for about 5-6 hours before we dismantled them, disinfected all the equipment (and ourselves) and then returned to barracks. After the first couple of days it became like second nature.

Tell us why this work is so important.

The sites are crucial to the UK effort because it means members of the public can be tested and receive their results within 24-48 hours. This means that, if they do test positive, the relevant authorities can quickly begin tracing the person's contacts and ensure they self-isolate to stop transmission of the infection in its tracks.

How did you find the experience?

It was overall an enjoyable experience. Military life doesn't necessarily have as much choice as civilian life in terms of where you need to be and when and your day is very much scripted, but that's a necessary part of it. It was great after a couple of months of lockdown to be able to work together with other people and have a bit of banter during the day. Army humour is never dull!

It was also a real pleasure interacting with members of the public. They were very grateful for the work we were doing and it was a privilege being able to assist them when many of them were presenting with Covid symptoms and so feeling pretty unwell.

Overall, I was just really impressed with the other people in my unit. Whether regular or reserve, they had made a decision to join the Armed Forces and to take part in the national efforts to help tackle the virus. It was a huge privilege to work alongside them and contribute in some small way.

There are around 200 MTUs in the country staffed by 2,700 soldiers, sailors and airman and they have carried out over 700,000 tests in the past couple of months.

I am very proud of my service with the RAF and I was glad that, in part due to the firm's support, I was able to put that service to some use in support of the British public. The whole point of the reserves is that they can be called upon to assist the country in times of national emergency. The Reserve Forces met that obligation during the past few months and have demonstrated the important role they play in national defence.

The next few months leading into winter could be quite challenging, but if necessary, the Armed Forces, both regular and reserve, stand ready to assist if called upon.

**The firm is committed to proactively ensuring colleagues across the business are educated about issues facing defence personnel and their families and to supporting those who are deployed.*

We are pleased to have recently received one of the top honours from the British Ministry of Defence, the [Silver Award](#), as recognition of this commitment to the Armed Forces.