

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the inaugural and historic passing out parade for the Cayman Islands Regiment. This is a significant moment for the Cayman Islands and I am pleased to see so many of you here today to mark this auspicious occasion.

What is even more significant, and laudable, is that this event is able to take place at all in 2020. It is an amazing feat that the regiment has been established and reached this point in the very trying environment of a global pandemic. I feel confident in saying that no other country in military history has ever established a Regiment so quickly during a global pandemic!

You will recall it was at the end of last summer that the concept of a Regiment was first mooted primarily to support our disaster management response.

I know it has long been something that the Premier wanted to see created. So when Mark Lancaster, then UK Minister for Armed Forces, and himself a part-time reservist in the UK Armed Forces, raised the idea with me, I quickly spoke to the Premier who highly supportive of the proposal, as was Cabinet and the Leader of the Opposition. I particularly want to thank the Premier for his steadfast support to get to where we are today. When Mark Lancaster visited Cayman last October we decided to move ahead as quickly as

possible. It was the enthusiasm and passion of the people the Minister met during that visit that encouraged him to offer the full support of the Ministry of Defence to ensure the realisation of Cayman's plan.

We can see the tangible results of that support in front of us today – all the uniforms the reserves are wearing, the training team on parade and the confidence and professionalism being demonstrated by our 5 junior officers – a result of their recent training at the world's leading military academy at Sandhurst - are all thanks to the MOD.

But it is unequivocally thanks to Team Cayman that we have before us the first 51 reserves of the Cayman Islands Regiment.

I want to say a very BIG thank you to EVERYONE involved in that process. Maj McDougall and the excellent team from the UK, the Commander of the Regiment, Lt Col Watson and his senior team, Chief Officer Wes Howell and my own staff, particularly Matthew Forbes and Lisa Carroll.

We have turned our ambition into reality despite the pandemic. This is a landmark day for us but most of all it's a landmark day for all of you.

Competition to join the Regiment was tough – six people applied for every place and I know the recruitment process was rigorous to ensure we signed up the very best candidates.

The Cayman Regiment is developing into a diverse organisation with members of all ages and from all sorts of backgrounds - private sector companies, public service and students. Some of you have cadet corps experience but some of you have no background in the military or indeed uniform services. You will find strength in this diversity and will be a valuable asset that the Cayman Island can be proud of.

So, very many congratulations on passing your training course – I know it's been challenging – I too tasted the British Army ration packs when you were on the exercise last week!

But I also know that you have learnt lots of new skills and probably learnt a lot about yourselves. The training will have undoubtedly put you outside your usual comfort zone but I know that everything you have learnt will be hugely valuable to our wonderful islands should we need them. Everything from first aid, to surviving in the bush, to map-reading and using emergency radios. In fact the five junior officers have already proved their worth supporting us in the early

days of Covid 19 by helping to set up the travel line and isolation facilities.

And your training will continue – over the coming weeks, months even years you will have lots of opportunities to enhance and expand your skills in lots of different directions

For those of you who didn't make it into the team this time round – there will be new opportunities soon when we look to recruit the next troop of reserves. If you're interested details on how to apply are on the back of today's programme.

This is Cayman's Regiment. It is up to the Premier and Cabinet members, and the people of the Cayman Islands, how it develops from here. I can assure you that the UK will be by your side in a capacity building role.

And let me repeat once more, since sadly some refuse to accept it, the UK's sole objective in supporting a regiment is to provide Cayman and the region with added resilience in responding to humanitarian and disaster relief. The UK will continue to provide capacity building support.

So here we are at the peak time for hurricane season with a troop of men and women with the initial skills to add that extra resilience to our disaster management response.

To the troops I say please wear your badge with pride. And to the people of Cayman I hope that over time you will come to be very proud of the contribution the regiment makes.

I commend them to you. God Bless the Cayman Regiment and God Bless the Cayman Islands.