

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE – ADF RESISTANCE TO INTERROGATION TRAINING
(5 pages in total)

Background – my service and exposure to R2I

[REDACTED] As part of the SAS selection course, I was a participant in a 72-hour Resistance to Interrogation (R2I) exercise. Whilst I volunteered for the SAS selection course, I did not enter into the R2I exercise with informed consent. I knew generally that there would be an R2I exercise but had I known what it entailed (ie the extent of the psychologically damaging and criminal behaviour), I would never have consented to such an *activity*.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

For context, it is important to note that the R2I commenced immediately after 18 days of SAS selection course, in which I (and all SAS candidates) were in a condition of extreme physical and mental exhaustion, sleep and food deprivation. We were already in a very fragile and vulnerable state physically and psychologically at the commencement of the R2I process. Personally, I had lost 14 kg (from a start point of 82 kg) in the preceding 18 days. I had slept barely 10 hours in the preceding week and had only a few handfuls of food in the same time.

For clarity, I consider all of the activities during this 18 days of SAS selection to be legitimate. The relevance here is the failure (on the part of people conducting the exercise) to recognise the risk of submitting people in an already fragile condition after SAS selection, to a highly dangerous activity such as R2I.

I submit that the activities I experienced during the R2I process would be stressful to the point of being psychologically dangerous and damaging for anyone under any circumstances. Add to that, the state of physical and emotional fragility that we were in after 18 days of food and sleep deprivation and mental exhaustion, and I consider that the R2I process I experienced was an act of gross negligence, possibly criminal negligence.

To back up this assertion, I cite the fact that the UK Ministry of Defence later banned R2I longer than 48 hours in the British Army and Intelligence services, because clinical studies had shown that R2I

processes exceeding 48 hours (whether real or simulated) could induce psychosis. This was reported in the Guardian newspaper in the early 2000s but appears to have been later withdrawn or redacted.

To expand on why I believe there was a complete abrogation of the employer's Duty of Care under the Commonwealth OHS Act 1991, which was in force at the time:

- There was no debrief after the 'Resistance to Interrogation' exercise
- There was no counselling or psychological support provided
- There was no medical health check or psychological health assessment conducted
- There was nothing to help us "de-role" after this extreme activity
- There was no follow-up health check in the ensuing weeks or months

Ethical Considerations

Apart from the obvious physical abuse and psychological risk associated with this exercise, there is a parallel ethical issue: This was not a training exercise for SAS applicants. It was part of a selection process, which subjected people to a dangerous level of psychological stress, and put them into a 'zone' where their safety could not be guaranteed, all without their direct and informed consent.

Furthermore, this exercise also doubled as a training exercise for army interrogators, using SAS applicants as targets, again without informed consent. It placed SAS participants in a position where they were part of abusive, unethical and illegal behaviour, which, once it started, they had no capacity to stop or extricate themselves from. I personally have complete moral and ethical objection to the Australian Army practicing or training [REDACTED] interrogation techniques [REDACTED] under any circumstances, and yet I became an unwilling participant in such an exercise.

What I know of anecdotally about other R2I practices

Apart from the 72-hour R2I that I experienced as part of SAS selection, I am also aware that shorter exercises (of 24-48 hours) were conducted as part of the Infantry ROBC (Regimental Officers' Basic Course) and the Intelligence Corps ROBC. In addition, I am aware that on occasion, officers serving in a combat arms unit, such as the infantry battalions [REDACTED], were sometimes 'taken' without notice by army interrogators for a 'snap' 24 hour R2I process. Anecdotally, it was widely known that this was done with the knowledge and consent of the unit's Commanding Officer, but a complete surprise to the officer who was essentially abducted for the process. This process, [REDACTED] occurred on at least one occasion that I know of, without the subject officer being able to advise his partner or family that he would be absent for the following 24 hours. Naturally, this caused distress to partners or family of officers who underwent this process for their partner to disappear without contact.

As I describe below, this was essentially using people without consent to be training targets for Army interrogators to practice on.

At the time of my service, there was indisputably, within the Army Intelligence Corps a culture of abuse, and a culture of entitlement to inflict abusive, criminal behaviour as part of these R2I exercises. This culture was discussed openly, and they would commonly joke about *'going in the bag'* and *'getting the rubber glove'*.

[REDACTED]

I submit that many of the R2I exercises conducted were never for the benefit of the subject of the interrogation. The Army has a very well documented and disciplined process for all its training, which all soldiers, NCOs and officers are familiar with. It always commences with the objectives of the training, with safety precautions, careful and deliberate stages to take people through a process at a pace that is within safe bounds, and a careful debrief and developmental coaching at the end. None of these components were present during the R2I exercises as practiced in the Australian Army at the time of my service. Rather than being 'training' for the subject to learn how to resist interrogation, the evidence points more clearly to the Army Intelligence Corps using R2I exercises as a means to procure subjects on which to practice interrogation techniques.

There was a failure by leaders in the Army Intelligence Corps, and successive Commanding Officers of the SAS Regiment to recognise that this type of activity was abusive, unethical and illegal.

There was also complicity in the tacit approval from Commanding Officers in wider army units who allowed their junior officers to be essentially abducted (or 'kidnapped' under the Criminal Code) to be used as subjects to train army interrogators.

How I am impacted

As a result of the R2I activity that I experienced, I have been diagnosed with PTSD and co-morbid depression by three separate and independent psychiatrists. Dealing with the PTSD and depression over 20 years since this R2I activity has seriously damaged my marriage, family life, career, earning capacity and general health and well-being. It has resulted in periods of hospitalisation and a need for ongoing counselling and psychiatric support. It has cost me many life and career opportunities, enormous medical expenses and significant loss of income.

Conclusions

[REDACTED]

Notwithstanding the above, what remains unclear is whether any of the officers who presided over the R2I activities that I experienced have ever been pursued legally or held to account.

[REDACTED] I and others who experienced it will never know who the direct perpetrators were. But it would be very easy to identify the senior officers in the Army Intelligence Corps at the time, who presided over, allowed and tacitly endorsed this culture, as well as the relevant Commanding Officers of units where it took place. These are the officers who have escaped with impunity any responsibility or accountability for the harm that was done.

Just as other institutions are being scrutinised for the systemic failure of senior leaders to act, so the Australian Army needs to fully account for its past, and investigate not just direct perpetrators, but identify and hold to account senior leaders who allowed abuse and criminal behaviour to happen on their watch.