



Submission: Inquiry into suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel

From: John & Karen Bird - Parents of recently deceased Veteran Jesse S. Bird 1 RAR 8527349 (1984-2017)

For Your Belated Attention: Senators of the Australian Parliament - August 14th 2017

It is with a heavy heart that John and I write to you this evening - the final night for lodgement of Submissions to this Senate Inquiry. Our beloved son, Jesse Stephen Bird committed suicide on June 27th 2017 using his army issued ropes and tackle. Jesse wore his favourite 1 RAR Alpha Company Spartacus jumper and prominently displayed his medals and service records for those who found him, to see. Poignantly, Jesse had surrounded himself with the rejection letters he had received from the Department of Veteran Affairs on May 8th 2017. These letters rejected Jesse's claim for assistance because his DVA accepted conditions (PTSD, Major Depressive Illness and Alcohol Abuse) were not deemed "permanent and stable" at that time. Well, luckily for the bureaucrats at the Department of Veteran Affairs and the Doctors and Psychologists who had profited from their so-called professional treatment of our son - Jesse's conditions finally became permanent on June 27th 2017 when he ended his life. We draw to your urgent attention that Jesse had pleaded for financial assistance on June 22nd, five days prior to his suicide - "I need real help" and "I have done my time and I need your help please". Jesse also stated that "if I didn't have the support of the RSL and my friends I would and have come close to becoming another suicide statistic". He had \$5.20 left in his bank account when he communicated with a faceless DVA staff member that day. Jesse believed he had received an unsympathetic hearing and lodged a complaint the same day which we believe was not actioned for seven days; two days after his death.

John and I believe that maladministration by incompetent and adversarial DVA staff contributed directly to the suicide death of our beloved Jesse. We also draw to your attention that the sum of \$4551.00 was transferred by DVA into Jesse's bank account 10 days after his death and that DVA staff were supposedly communicating posthumously with him by phone on June 29th and July 19th 2017!

Jesse died on June 27th 2017 after his legitimate claims for financial help had been stonewalled for more than two years. A trail of excessive and repetitive paperwork and doctor's and psychologist's appointments lead Jesse nowhere but to frustration and resignation to the hopelessness of his situation.

While current claims by government and departmental officials suggest that much is being done for our Veterans, we question the legitimacy of these claims because so far this year, some 56 Veterans have been driven to suicide. Jesse had been a highly skilled front line soldier who had experienced severe trauma during his service in Afghanistan in 2009/2010. For our son to receive such appalling deadly treatment at the hands of a government department charged with the duty of providing him with care and support is inexcusable. Common sense should dictate that current departmental leadership and their policies have driven the DVA to this low ebb and are not capable of overseeing the necessary total overhaul which is undoubtedly required.

Your Sincerely

Karen, John, Brendan and Kate Bird

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