

I was an Infantry soldier in the Australian Army from 1999 until my discharge in 2006. In the year 2000 I was posted to 4RAR A Company at Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney.

After the Sydney Olympics my unit started pre deployment training for a rotation to East Timor on Operation Tanager. Part of this training was conducted at Shoal Water Bay in early 2001. It was here as a company we were first briefed on the antimalarial drug Mefloquine and the trial we were being asked to participate in.

We were told that it was a much better drug than Doxycycline as we would only have to take Mefloquine once a week compared to a daily tablet. The medic giving the brief said a side effect of the drug may be vivid dreams. He stated that there were no other known side effects and that the trial was completely voluntary. It was at this point the battalion CO got up and informed us that if we did not participate in the trial we would not deploy. He then repeated the order making himself very clear that if we did not participate we would not deploy. As a young soldier keen to deploy on operations this did not seem like an unreasonable request. Also coming from the CO I took it as an order not knowing it was an unlawful order.

Two weeks before we deployed we began taking Mefloquine at a higher dose of one tablet a day for two weeks which then changed to one tablet a week once we deployed. Almost immediately I started having vivid nightmares not dreams. Some soldiers I knew were complaining about having hallucinations and not being able to sleep. I personally suffered from horrific nightmares and debilitating headaches. I recall everybody being amped up, on edge and arguments and physical fights were occurring regularly. Upon deploying to East Timor my headaches subsided as did the nightmares as we were only taking the drug weekly now. Wednesday was Mefloquine day or as the troops called it trippy dream day. Our pills would be delivered to us in the original boxes however the literature inside the box had always been removed. Every Wednesday night the guys in my platoon would scream out and even sleep walk after taking the drug. On one occasion a soldier in my section screamed out "contact" (meaning contact had been made with the enemy) in his sleep which sent everybody into a panic. I would always suffer from an extremely bad headache the next day. Later in our deployment one of the soldiers in my platoon found the literature in his drug box which had not been removed. We all had a holy shit moment as it was passed around and read. It became very clear that there were indeed serious side effects related to this drug. We were all amazed that the company itself recommended that Mefloquine should only be used for short periods and definitely no longer than two weeks.

Upon returning to Australia we again took what was called a cleansing dose of Mefloquine which consisted of taking a pill a day for two weeks. Once again the nightmares and headaches returned, although my headaches had become much worse and were more consistent with migraines which I have suffered from ever since. After some time the nightmares ceased.

After transferring to a new unit in 2002 I began noticing that I was becoming withdrawn and when I did socialise with work mates it always involved heavy drinking. I was aware that some soldiers were using marijuana on a regular basis. I firmly believe that soldiers were self medicating for a condition they didn't understand with alcohol and illegal drugs. My migraines had gotten much worse and were affecting my health on a weekly basis. At its peak I could experience 1 to 3 migraines a week which would leave me completely debilitated and unable to perform my duties as a soldier. In late 2002 I had what could only be called a psychotic event while asleep with my girlfriend at the time. I

was completely unaware that it had even happened. My girlfriend informed me that during the night I had woken up screaming that we were surrounded and that enemy fire was incoming. I then proceeded to smother her with a pillow. She believed I was trying to protect her. This event ultimately led to the breakdown of the relationship. I believe she was scared it could happen again.

Almost twenty years later I still suffer from migraines although much rarer now. I have trouble remembering specific things and people from 2001 until 2003. I believe my long term and short term memory function has been effected from taking Mefloquine. I have also suffered from depression while I was serving and after discharging from the military.

I hope my submission is helpful and sheds some light on the effects of this drug. I have many friends who have been affected much more severely from this horrible drug. The organisation I put so much trust into should be ashamed of how they treated soldiers who wanted nothing more than to serve their country.