
Submission to the Senate Committee on Australian Defence Force (ADF) Resistance to Interrogation Training

1. I [REDACTED] wish to keep my identity confidential. I [REDACTED] have served [REDACTED] in the Australian Regular Army and was a member of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) [REDACTED]. I continued to serve in Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) [REDACTED]. In my time in SASR I served from the rank of Trooper through to Sergeant, deployed on Active and Operational Service as well as exercises around the world and in all the roles normally associated with the career path of an SAS soldier - including being exposed to Resistance To Interrogation training: RTI.

2. I attended selection for the SAS [REDACTED] and completed my RTI some 18 months later [REDACTED], immediately following my SAS Combat Survival (COMSURV) course. When I was on selection my fellow course members and I were expecting to be exposed to RTI as part of the selection course and for it to be used as a final 'selection tool' for the assessors as to whether or not we would be selected. This may or may not have been the aim but we believed it to be so and RTI had certainly been conducted at the end of selection courses in the years before ours. What I know now is that elements of the selection course are modified every year in order to keep candidates guessing as to the content and make it harder to train and mentally prepare for. There are also scheduling and prioritising of ADF units and assets that mean that instructors and support for RTI may not be available at the time of SAS selection and have to be requested at a later date. Additionally, RTI was not conducted for some years for whatever reason and those not so trained would be brought together in one group to complete this training in later years. I know of at least one long-serving officer who, after more than 15 years in the SASR and for whatever reason, had not been exposed to RTI.

3. I do not wish to describe my complete RTI experience as I believe that it has followed a similar structure to others across the 20 or so years between now and when I first had exposure to it. My assessment of this is either from my course, by 'comparing notes' (first hand) with new SAS recruits or talking in a professional capacity to Australian Army Intelligence Corps (AUSTINT) personnel whose duties involved conducting the RTI training. I believe that the fine detail of RTI in general will be better described in other submissions as mine was standard and unremarkable for the purposes of the committee's investigation. What I wish to cover in my submission is the perception of my RTI and that of first-hand accounts from my immediate comrades at the time and over the years.

4. This forms the detail of: (A) what worth or need we thought or actually got from the training, (B) how I thought it was run or otherwise conducted and (C) my opinions to if it should continue in its current form or something similar into the future.

A. My perception or understanding as to the need of RTI as an SAS soldier.

i. Before, during and after my RTI I had no doubt as to the main purpose of the training: it was to prepare SAS soldiers, and other ADF "*personnel prone to capture*" as to what to expect if they were to fall into the hands of the enemy.

ii. Our roles and tasks within the SAS left us all in no doubt that we were likely to be exposed to a risk of capture that perhaps was not expected of other ADF personnel. I knew at

the time that Army and RAAF aircrew, Army Special Forces (SF) and Royal Australian Navy Clearance Divers were all exposed to RTI in different guises and levels, but not the fine detail. This was not available in 'open source' or general information but from our own experiences and speaking to more senior members of the SASR. The conduct of RTI and the techniques of AUSTINT personnel was not discussed openly outside of the group of us who and been exposed to RFI or outside of the SF or military intelligence environment.

iii. I saw the broad topic of RTI as a requirement for a duty of care from the ADF to its personnel and a service to its members - to let them know 'what to expect' and also to let yourself, deep down inside, understand what you could handle if exposed to pain, privations, dirty tricks and isolation from the support of your mates and nation.

iv. We never saw RTI as anything more than something we had to face, something we had to overcome and prevail over and something that everyone else [not everyone as it turns out, as per my comment in para 2.] had done before us – a badge of honour.

B. My perception and recollection of how the training was conducted, both during my RTI and from other first hand accounts.

i. At all times - and all things considered - I thought that my RTI was conducted professionally, with a purpose and with due care and concern for the soldiers being trained.

ii. We were told on several occasions that RTI was voluntary and that we could 'opt out' at any time. In my case we were told to say "I want out" in a clear, loud voice to any personnel conducting the RTI training and we would be removed and immediately counselled.

iii. Before the training was conducted we were give a series of lectures, [REDACTED] known collectively as the "Conduct After Capture" (CAC) brief. Our names were recorded to show that we had completed the training and this was put on our record. We were told that the training was current for one year and that if we were not 'put into the bag' (as was the colloquial term for RTI) within that year that we would have to have the CAC brief again. The CAC brief consisted of a series of presentations, short videos and discussions given by a member of AUSTINT who was sent from [REDACTED] It went for about four hours. It was presented to a very professional and high standard and the presenter, an AUSTINT Major who had worked his way up the ranks from Private to Warrant Officer Class One and then commissioned as an officer. He [REDACTED] was clearly an expert in his field with some 30 years experience. We had a guest speaker who had been a member of a charity and had been taken prisoner [REDACTED] and interrogated quite harshly. He spoke in detail of his experiences and took questions from the audience for about an hour. He was candid and honest about things like being beaten, confessing to things he did not do or say and believed at several points that he would be killed. (Note: In later years, I would attend other presentations and lectures from other guest speakers as part of SASR professional development [REDACTED])

[REDACTED] Overall, I considered the preparation for if we were to be captured in the course of our duties to be thorough, detailed and designed to prepare us for the coming RTI training.

iv. I completed my SAS Combat Survival course [REDACTED] It was strongly hinted at the time that RTI would be conducted either immediately after or during the COMSURV but this was never confirmed to us until the last moment.

v. We were put into a scenario that we were to insert our patrol for an SAS task via a helicopter that, in the case of this particular exercise, was simulated by a truck. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

vi. Immediately after capture we were put into a minibus [REDACTED] where an officer identified himself as an exercise controller and gave us a brief indicating that we were about to undergo RTI. He gave us a safety brief and told us we could opt out at any time. It was clear to all of us (and had been the topic of some discussion) that to 'opt out' or otherwise withdraw from RTI would be detrimental to our career in the SAS.

[REDACTED]

viii. We were interviewed by a psychologist after RTI and were debriefed on our performance and given feedback to our actions. We were treated medically if required for cuts, scratches, back & knee pain and other ailments – many of which were pre-existing or resulting from the preceding COMSURV course where we lost a lot of weight due to eating only what we could acquire from the local area. We were asked if we wished for the video taping of our interrogation to be destroyed or retained for training purposes, I believe for a ten year period. I

agreed to allow this and I remember signing a consent form. I have no ongoing psychological concerns as a result of RTI.

ix. I know that a doctor was present at all times during the training as I knew the man as the Regimental Medical Officer of the SASR and could occasionally hear him talking to other trainees.

x. I suffered [REDACTED] after RTI and for years after this to this day I have similar but acute and frequently reoccurring [REDACTED] pain that I believe is as a direct result of the [REDACTED] positions I was exposed to. I consider [REDACTED] those things demanded or directed by the conducting staff of the RTI to be 'mild to moderate' on the scale of torture, atrocities or humiliation that could be inflicted on a fellow human being.

xi. During my RTI, I could sometimes see [REDACTED] others getting minor medical treatment, [REDACTED] and I saw others being removed for counselling and later returned to the prison environment.

C. My opinions as to how the training should be conducted into the future for the ADF.

i. I believe that the RTI training that I was put through [REDACTED] was conducted in a professional, diligent and thorough manner. It was supervised at the appropriate level, had oversight and was conducted with clear aims and objectives for the 'detainees' - these that I am familiar with - and also for the interrogators, but I am unaware of the fine detail of this due to me being 'on the other end' of the RTI and not part of the interrogation team or their chain-of-command.

ii. I cannot fathom that in the time since I conducted my RTI [REDACTED] that the process, check & balances and safety as part of the training have gone backwards in terms of protecting the ADF personnel exposed to it. If anything, I can imagine that personnel conducting this training have now more onerous requirements, oversight and red-tape interference and protections than ever before. I believe that RTI training is most likely less effective and harder to organise and conduct that it was [REDACTED]. I believe this is not because of any restrictions imposed on the personnel being interrogated but imposts placed on the those planning, conducting and assessing the RTI itself - because of the perception that we are training 'torturers' under the meaning of torture that has fallen out of such things as Camp Delta, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the exposure of the atrocities committed by US soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

iii. I will not attempt to dictate to the Senate Committee in their conclusions as to a meaning or definition of torture, but I do offer these comments: the Australian public narrative on this topic is largely driven by politicians, advocates, interest groups, civil libertarians and lawmakers, both internal and external to Australia, such as in the US and EU Court of Human Rights, that basically assess any action by a detaining power that restricts or impinges on what could be normal behaviours, freedoms and entitlements to detainees in reasonable circumstances (and are outlined in the Geneva and Hague Conventions) is that of torture. Sleep, food and deprivation of comforts associated 'with a normal life' are thus constituted as torture. I believe that interrogation is done so for a purpose and to exceed that purpose then

means it becomes torture. Torture is poor treatment without a purpose; for the torture's pleasure or for punitive reasons and not to illicit information or some other lawful reason from the person being targeted. The purpose of RTI, in this context, is to prepare members of the ADF to understand, endure and resist this treatment – and the only way to do so this is to be exposed to it in all its harsh realities. It would be very hard to train to resist torture in the true sense of the meaning as this would just be “Resistance to Pain”. The RTI that I was exposed to was interrogation in the extreme and always was an attempt to elicit information from me and not something that, for example, civilian police would be allowed to inflict on detainees in the course of police questioning.

iv. Most of the pain, injury and ongoing medical issues that I suffered at the time and am suffering now as a result of RTI could be put down to my own decision to 'not give in' or otherwise 'opt out' of the RTI process. I stuck with it and most of my motivation for that was not to be found wanting as a member of the SAS and RTU'd – ‘Returned To Unit’, or, in other words, kicked out.

v. I believe now that opting out of part or an aspect of RTI may not have had an adverse effect on my career; but the inability for me to handle what was in effect a safe, Western version of the horrors that some other individuals, countries and organisations do to their fellow human beings would have left me in doubt that to continue my service with the SAS would be untenable. I would have asked to leave at my own request.

5 Conclusion.

i. I believe that RTI is a necessary and essential aspect of training for personnel who are in roles that place them as ‘*personnel prone to capture*’ and provides the individual with important exposure to what they could expect if they were captured by a force that largely conforms to the rules of war. This training needs to continue in the ADF. [REDACTED], aspects of the CAC brief and RTI are now presented to all members of the army (and I suggest to the other services too but cannot confirm this from my experience) before they deploy to overseas operations in the Middle East and some other theatre of operations. There is no way that we can fully train our ADF members for all possible actions of some individuals and organisation of the current non-state threats: true torture leading to permanent disfigurement, ongoing mental illness or death at the time of the torturing.

ii Overall, it was then and is to this day, the worst three days of my life and one that I pledge never to repeat under any circumstances. This includes to the final measure that I will consider taking my own life in a combat situation if I think there is a likelihood of the enemy torturing or otherwise mistreating me if I have information that would be of use to the enemy and that needs to be protected. We are, after all, only human. RTI showed me just how human I really am.

ii. A quote from a legend of the Australian Army, ‘Warrie’ George Mansford, to conclude:

“The oath to serve your country as a soldier did not include a contract for the normal luxuries and comforts enjoyed within our society. On the contrary it implied hardship, loyalty and devotion to duty regardless of rank.”

- Brigadier George Mansford, AM (Rtd)