

**Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
References Committee**

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Inquiry Title: Effectiveness of Australia's Military Justice System

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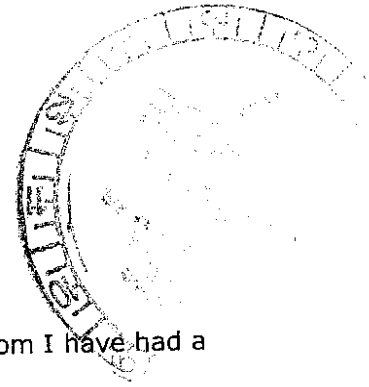
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The Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
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Friday, 13 February 2004

Dear Sir,

I prepare this submission in support of The Williams family with whom I have had a close friendship and affinity for thirty-three (33) years.

Background

I joined the Women's Royal Australian Navy with Jan Williams (nee Dorsett) in February 1971 and on reflection, we began to form a bond of friendship from our first encounter. Through the years our families became close and our connection evolved into that of a single unit, each of its members recognising the other as family not friend.

At Jan and Charles wedding I was the matron of honour; on the birth of their first child, I was privileged to be asked to be Ruth's Godmother; their second child bore the name of my father and when Jeremy was born I was at hand to care for Ruth and Daniel. I am now Fleet Manager for Toll Fast Brisbane and offer this information to provide evidence of my current employment status and my relationship to Jeremy Paul Williams who I considered to be not just the youngest son of my dearest friend, but my youngest nephew who called me Aunty Jan.

Jeremy was raised as a practising Catholic not only with sincerity and compassion but also with tutelage to provide him with independence to enable him to care for himself to prepare him for his future and to take pride in his achievements, for they were his own. His academic skills were adequate and as a teenager, he was enthusiastic about joining the Navy to follow in his parents' footsteps. Sadly on more than one occasion he was denied entry into the Navy and although he continued to pursue admission with passion, all his efforts were in vain and his disappointment increased. He secured a labourer's job but his heart was still set on a military career so he applied to the Army and in due course was accepted. He took much comfort in gaining entry and considered this acceptance a new beginning. He took to the Army with intensity and fervour, taking such pride in his uniform and revelling in the camaraderie and no one was more overwhelmed with delight at pictures of Jeremy in his uniform than I.

Jeremy had found his niche in life and as a family unit we were all exceedingly happy for him, for the happiness he felt, for his personal achievement and for the future we were confident he would generate for himself. How very wrong we were to have faith in the services to vigilantly mould this young man into a soldier; to care for him and offer him guidance and support. How devastated we still are after 12 months has elapsed in which time we should have celebrated his 21st birthday. How certain am I that had someone in a divisional role taken the time to recognise the turmoil inside Jeremy and counselled him rather than condemn him, he would still be with us today.

a. Allegation - Inadequate Briefing and Care

The conclusion indicated that Jeremy "received a comprehensive briefing on his injury by an MO and an appropriately reassuring briefing by XX", yet Jeremy's strength of mind continued to decline, so I question the reassuring and comprehensive result of Jeremy's briefing. As a recruit with very little physical conditioning, Jeremy was compelled to bear a 35kg pack on route marches while carrying a rifle and boxes of ammunition and provisions. Little to no preliminary physical training is conducted to prepare these young soldiers for such exertion and their ill-equipped muscles, bones

and spirit struggles under such enormous pressure to the point where fractures and various other damage results. Statistics relating to injuries within this initial training period are surely an indication of the untrained nature and lack of physical conditioning of these recruits and this combined with no counselling were major contributing factors to Jeremy's spirit being broken.

g. Allegation - Culture of Harassment and Denigration at SQI

As a recruit in The Navy in 1971 I never experienced and was never aware of such verbal abuse and denigration as suffered by those recruits in Singleton. Jeremy was disturbed and distressed with the notion of being transferred to R & D as he, along with many other recruits, considered they were being banished and outcast, labelled ineffective soldiers to be ridiculed and demoralised. Jeremy reflected on his first days at Kapooka when he feared transfer to R & D for as raw recruits they were told of the weak, ineffectual and unproductive "scum" in R & D and they were warned not be "gutless" but to "shut up" and endure the pain of recruit school. This engendered a fear of reporting physical complaints and trepidation in Jeremy and others and to be instructed to treat these injured people as inferior by ranking soldiers is deplorable.

Lack of medical attention, lack of counselling and compassion, lack of administrative control to suppress harassment, lack of personal discipline by ranking officials are all contributing factors leading to Jeremys soul being so tormented it bought about his tragic demise. Had administrators made time for these young Australians, rather than be too busy to oversee their training and induction, then the fate of some 5 youngsters over the past few years surely would have been positive and productive, not wasted and heartbreaking.

I consider the internal investigation demonstrates prejudice and lack of impartiality and believe judgement surely cannot be considered objective when such bias exists. The gathering of information and ensuing assessment by one Brigadier obviously provides the perceptions and conclusions of one person only, one person who is a member of the Force under investigation. How can we as civilians expect this person to pass critical judgement on his team members without his consideration for their guilt and subsequent punishment?

Why has the Williams family and friends endured even more hardship in their struggle for justice? Someone needs to admit culpability for cutting short the life of a promising young soldier and someone should be held accountable for the death of my nephew.

Yours faithfully

Jan Allen