

I am compelled to express my deep frustration and disappointment with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) honours and awards system, particularly in relation to senior officers and officers in general, based on my 28 years of service.

I began my military career in May 1994 in the Army Reserve, transitioning to the Regular Army in 1995. I served eight years with the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), including two deployments to East Timor. In 2004, I joined 11/28RWAR as a training CPL before successfully completing SASR Selection later that year. I served with SASR until my medical discharge in 2021, with numerous deployments including seven to Afghanistan as part of SOTG rotations and various Personal Security Detachments (PSD) across the MEAO. Additionally, I served in Sinai with the MFO in 2015 and in PNG for APEC in 2018.

a) Experiences with the ADF Honours and Awards System:

In my experience, many soldiers are unaware of their nominations for honours or awards until they receive them, which often comes as a surprise. Personally, I received a ... without prior knowledge of being nominated. Also being told "They have downgraded it, that's BS" from senior sergeant. Not knowing I had been nominated for anything I was happy to be recognised for my work, yet curious for what I was nominated for.

b) Impact of Awards on ADF Morale:

One of the most significant issues is the morale impact, especially among Other Ranks (ORs), who frequently express frustration and disbelief over the seemingly automatic accolades awarded to officers, particularly within SOCOM and higher echelons during the Afghanistan conflict. This disparity has deeply undermined morale, feeling like a betrayal while soldiers were on the front lines risking life and limb, receiving little recognition in comparison.

c) Integrity of Awards to Senior Officers in Afghanistan:

It's bewildering how every commander of JTF 633 could meet the criteria for a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) even before operations were reclassified as warlike. This raises serious doubts about the integrity of these awards, especially since no JTF 633 Commander recipients were not actively commanding troops in action.

d) Changes in Criteria for Honours and Awards:

The shift from 'in action' to 'in warlike operations' criteria underscores the manipulative nature of senior officers during the Afghanistan conflict. This change appears tailored to justify undeserved awards while denying true acts of bravery and service among soldiers.

When a review was conducted to consider establishing a distinct medal category for distinguished service outside of direct combat, it was ultimately rejected in favour of retaining the prestigious Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). Simplifying the criteria has diminished the honour of those awarded the highest recognition for commanding soldiers in combat, disrespecting those who earned the medal through their distinguished service in actual combat rather than service in non-combat roles abroad.

e) Operation of Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal:

While I have limited direct experience with the tribunal, it is crucial that it operates independently of ADF command influence. Transparency is paramount to ensure fair and unbiased review of awards, especially in cases where conflicts of interest may arise.

f) Related Matters:

I must highlight my profound disappointment with the handling of TPR B's awarding of the Medal for Gallantry was nominated for the Star of Gallantry yet was downgraded by the ADF and left on a senior officer's desk for years before finally being awarded. This utter disgraceful neglect underscores a broader issue of disregard for the sacrifices and contributions made by soldiers on the ground.

During the Breton Inquiry, the senior leadership of SOCOM's failure to counter false accusations against units, despite assurances otherwise, further illustrates their disregard for soldiers' integrity and service. Especially when told at the completion of the inquiry that the command would counter stories that had nothing to do with allegations of war crimes yet painted veterans as racists and other slurs. Yet nothing has ever been done for the many veterans that have been slurred by the media over the last few years.

In conclusion, despite my enduring love for my country and respect for my fellow soldiers, my sentiment towards senior officers in the ADF is one of profound disillusionment and contempt.