

Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

for the “Inquiry into the Use of the Quinoline anti-malarial drugs Mefloquine and Tafenoquine in the Australian Defence Force”

The most pressing issue to be dealt with in relation to the concerns about quinoline anti-malarial drugs taken by members of the ADF, particularly mefloquine and tafenoquine, is that there are servicemen and women and veterans who are suffering as a consequence. No matter who is to blame, or who is right or wrong, these soldiers need to be treated as best we are able given our current knowledge and that treatment needs to commence immediately.

Two actions are necessary now:

- Reach out and identify those who believe they are affected, to ensure they receive timely and effective treatment, and to reassure them that they will be looked after; and
- Immediately commence research to better understand what treatment is necessary, especially if that treatment may not be the same as for psychological disorders.

I was Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) Group that deployed to East Timor as Australia’s contribution to the United Nations Transition Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) in October 2000. About 60% of the contingent of 1100 soldiers who deployed as the 1RAR Group volunteered in good faith to participate in the Australian Army Malaria Institute (AAMI) conducted double-blind trial of mefloquine and tafenoquine.

Mefloquine was the control drug which was prescribed to 162 members of the Group, including me. The effectiveness of an emerging drug called tafenoquine was tested against the control. Tafenoquine was prescribed to 492 of my soldiers.

The Inspector General ADF “Inquiry Report into Issues Concerning Anti-Malarial Trials of the Drug Mefloquine Between 2000 and 2002 Involving ADF Members Deploying to East Timor” has some useful information relating to this Inquiry.

John Caligari, AO, DSC Lieutenant General (Retired)		Original Signed 31 Jul 2018
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