

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

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Inquiry Title: Effectiveness of Australia's Military Justice System

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SENATE COMMITTEE: EFFECTIVENESS OF AUSTRALIA'S MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM - TERM OF REFERENCE: (1)(B)(ii)

As a result of a second suicide attempt by my son, I would like to make the following points as a follow-up to my submission to the Senate Inquiry.

- My son was discharged from the army on 9 January 2004, and his pay ceased as from this date.
- The army also stopped paying his medical expenses at this time, pending a decision from Veterans' Affairs about liability.
- The army-appointed psychologist which he was seeing recommended that he should not seek employment for six months.
- Centrelink declined to pay him as he had saved his pay whilst in the army and his savings disqualified him from any benefits.
- Since he had to keep seeing the psychiatrist he has incurred a substantial cost for these visits. He has been unable to recover this from his private insurer pending the outcome from Veterans' Affairs.
- He has been reliant on his savings for all rent and living expenses since 9 January. These were savings which he had been making to buy a property.
- He was required to attend a 40mn interview with a Dr Proud, a psychiatrist appointed by Veterans' Affairs to determine if his illness (depression) was a result of his work in the army. Scott had never met Dr Proud before. The 40mn session consisted of a literal barrage of questions, with no time allowed for thought. Any attempt to think before answering was met with intense pressure and more questions. Scott was reduced to tears during the interview, and was in a state of distress for about four hours afterwards.
- On Monday 22 March he received two letters: the first was from the army, returning his Will.
- The second letter was the Veterans' Affairs decision – which was supposed to be sent directly to his psychiatrist, not to him, so that it could be explained in a secure setting. This of course did not happen.
- The decision – that the army was not responsible for his depression – brought back all the feelings of despair which Scott had previously felt. In desperation, he made a second, more serious suicide attempt. He took his car to Kings Park at night and concealed it, connected the exhaust to the inside of the car, left the engine running, and took a massive overdose of prescription tablets.

- I contacted the police at around midnight on Monday, and their patrol cars were asked to keep a look-out for him. He was found about half an hour later. Scott was already in a coma.

He remained in a coma on life support systems, unable to breathe independently for about 24 hours. His family stayed at his bedside in the intensive care ward of Royal Perth Hospital. The prognosis from the attending doctor was that IF he came round from the coma, he may be permanently brain damaged from the effects of the carbon monoxide.

Fortunately (for everyone) he came out the coma and does not appear to have any lasting effects.

For the second time in less than a year, our family has had to deal with the devastating after effects of army culture.

What is so frustrating to me is that Scott should never have been put in the position described above. While I was in Albury during his last hospitalisation I was given very clear assurances by all the army personnel I dealt with, including Major Daron White, Captain Dave Hill and Captain Drew Horsell. I was told that the army looked after its families and personnel and that all his medical expenses (related to his injury/illness) would be covered for life. The reality is that they were only covered to the day he was discharged. I asked for all the assurances to be put in writing, but this was, of course never forthcoming.

From the time of his discharge, he has very much been in a catch-22 position. The army appointed psychiatrist he has been consulting suggested he should not work for six months. However, there is no financial safety net for him to follow this advice. Because he was sensible enough to save his wages whilst employed he has made himself ineligible for and Centrelink assistance.

Veterans' Affairs appointed an independent psychiatrist to adjudicate on his case, but did not advise him that he could have a support person in attendance, and did not conduct his interview in a professional or courteous manner.

My son and I are prepared to give evidence to the Senate Committee in the hope that it may lead to changes which save other families from enduring the same outcome.

I attach a transcript of my son's suicide note to me which, as you will see, lays the blame for his depression squarely with the army.

Avril Andrew