

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

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Inquiry Title: Effectiveness of Australia's Military Justice System

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THE SECRETARY
SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE & TRADE REFERENCE COMMITTEE

THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM LEAVES A LOT TO BE DESIRED. AFTER THE DISASTER ABOARD H.M.A.S. WESTRALIA ON TUESDAY 5TH OF MAY 1998 WHERE FOUR OF OUR LOVED ONES LOST THEIR LIVES, A PANEL OF FIVE WAS HURRIDLY BROUGHT TOGETHER TO HOLD AN ENQUIRY INTO THE EVENTS OF THE DAY.

THREE OUT OF THE FIVE WERE NAVAL PERSONAL SO THE RESULTS THEY WOULD COME UP WITH WOULD SHOW THE NAVY TO BE ALMOST BLAMELESS.

THE BOARD OF ENQUIRY COMMENCED SIX DAYS AFTER THE DISASTER WHILE THE FOUR FAMILIES WERE STILL MAKING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS.

HOW COULD ANY OF THE CREW BE IN THE PROPER STATE OF MIND TO GIVE EVIDENCE WHILE THEY WERE SUFFERING MENTALITY AND PHYSICALY.

AS FAR AS THE CAUSE OF THE ACCIDENT GOES IT WAS :

- [1] CAUSED BY NAVY PERSONAL AND THE CONTRACTORS ADI USING THE WRONG TYPE OF HOSES AS TO THE TYPE THAT WAS RECOMMENDED.
- [2] USING THE WRONG DOCUMENTATION SO AS TO GET THE APPROVAL FOR THE REPAIRS FAST TRACKED AND SAVE TIME.
- [3] NO PERSON WAS FAMILIAR WITH LLOYDS REGULATIONS INTO A CONFIGUREATION CHANGE.

HEADS SHOULD HAVE ROLLED AND CRIMINAL CHARGES LAID AGAINST THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISASTER, BUT NO, THE OPPOSITE HAPPENED AND ANYBODY IN THE VISINITY OF THE SHIP GOT A BRAVERY AWARD.

WARRANT OFFICER COLIN BOTTOMLEY RECEIVED THE CONSPICUOUS SERVICE CROSS AND HE NEVER MOVED OUT OF THE MAIN CONTROL ROOM.

COMMANDER ALAN JOHNSTON CO OF H.M.A.S. STIRLING ALSO RECEIVED THE SAME AWARD AND ALL HEW DID WAS CONTROL TRAFFIC FROM ON SHORE.

WHEN THE FIRE ERUPTED IN THE ENGINE ROOM AND THE CREW WERE FIGHTING A LOSSING BATTLE, MY SON LEADING SEAMAN BRADLEY JOHN MEEK TOOK CONTROL OF THE EVACUATION OF THE CREW BECAUSE THE SENIOR CREW MEMBERS HAD PANICKED AND RAN FOR THE EXITS TO SAFETY.

MY SON STOOD AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PORT LADDER ON THE MIDDLE PLATES AND PUSHED A LEADING SEAMAN AND AT LEAST TWO PETTY OFFICERS UP THE LADDER TO SAFETY. WHEN MY SON ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE HE WAS OVERCOME BY SMOKE AND DIED AT THE TOP OF THE LADDER FROM SMOKE INHALATION.

FOR HIS HEROIC ACTIONS HE ONLY RECEIVED A GROUP CITATION ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE IN THE ENGINE ROOM AND THREE HOSE TEAMS.

HE SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED THE GEORGE CROSS FOR HIS BRAVERY BUT THE BRAVERY COMMISION SAID THAT THE AWARING OF THE GROUP CITATION FOR BRAVERY WAS APPROPRIATE GIVEN THE EVIDENCE BEFORE IT AND IT GIVES PARTICULAR RECOGNITION TO THE JOINT ACTIVITY OF THOSE INVOLVED AND FOR THIS REASON IS NOT REGARDED AS BEING OF A SPECIFIC LEVEL.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE BOARD OF ENQUIRY:PAGE 91 SECTION 5.37.

LEADING SEAMAN BRADLEY JOHN MEEK HAD MADE HIS WAY TO THE BOTTOM OF THE PORT LADDER TO THE TOP PLATES AND STOOD THERE ASSISTING LSMT SMITH AND PETTY OFFICERS FRANCIS AND HOLLIS TO MAKE THEIR WAY UP THE LADDER. AT SOME TIME AFTER THE LAST OF THOSE THREE EXITED, HE ALSO ATTEMPTED TO MAKE HIS WAY UP THE LADDER, PROBABLY AFTER REALISING HE WAS BECOMING INCAPACITATED, BUT BECAME OVERCOME BY SMOKE FUMES WHERE HE COLLAPSED AND DIED.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JONATHAN "BUCK" ROGERS WAS POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED THE "GEORGE CROSS" FOR ORGANISING A FEW TO ESCAPE FROM THE H.M.A.S. VOYAGER WHEN IT WAS CUT IN HALF BY THE H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE IN 1964.

I BELIEVE MY SON'S HEROISM WAS EXCEPTIONAL AND FOR SAVING SOME OF HIS FELLOW CREW MATES BEFORE THINKING OF HIS OWN SAFETY HE SHOULD BE POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED THE GEORGE CROSS.

YOURS SINCERLY



VICTOR J MEEK