

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

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Inquiry Title: Effectiveness of Australia's Military Justice System

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Date Authorised:

My name is Lloyd Richards. I am currently 39 years old and live in Queensland. In 1988, I enlisted in the Australian Army through the recruitment office in Townsville in the hope of establishing a rewarding career and also to follow in the footsteps of a number of respected family members.

Below is an account of some of my experience during my time as a recruit in basic training at Kapooka. I have chosen a few incidents to detail by experience during training, however this only reflects a small part of the treatment I endured while enlisted with Australian Army.

1. The first incident I can recall relating to racist treatment I experienced, was when a corporal told me to act out the role of a "silhouette" (a black figure). He told me to walk to the top of a hill, and stand in line with the cut out silhouettes as I would be easy to pick out as a target on the rifle range.

Not sure what to do, I stood my ground and stared at the corporal, I was extremely angered by his remark. Another corporal came face to face with me and whispered "I hate black cunts" and then asked if I was trying to outstare him. I replied "No Sir" He became extremely agitated and irate and said "I work hard for MY money, I'm a corporal, not some fucking stiff desk jockey." This statement was in reference to my calling him "sir". He was then called to step aside by a higher ranking N.C.O..

2. We were engaged in training on an obstacle course. We were put in three groups or teams. We were to be timed to run the obstacle course , similar to a race. I was having trouble jumping onto a high wall, which was about 7 feet high. This involved taking a run up and jumping high to reach the top with your fingertips, then using your feet to walk up the wall to be able to get over it. After about three attempts, I made it over, but two other recruits who were taller than me were in front. After the wall, I was able to master the remaining obstacles and on the run to the end, I eventually beat the other recruits. As I passed the finish line, I heard the Bombadier yelling in a loud voice, "Don't let him win, how the fuck could you let some darkie beat you, you fellas should be ashamed of yourselves" I stated that my aboriginality was perhaps the reason I had won.

Before this exercise was over, I was called up to the platoon quarters to see my sergeant. Whilst standing at ease waiting to be called in, I was questioned by two corporals from our platoon. At first they asked general questions about my aboriginal background, so I answered in a polite and casual manner. The Corporal then made the statement "We wiped out all you niggers in Tasmania, Richards. What do you think about that?" This made me uncomfortable, but due to my position as a recruit and the required respect I was to display, I replied carefully "It took almost 200 years to do that though, Corporal. But it wasn't a warlike situation, it was murder". He then jumped at me and yelled loudly, the other corporal with him followed suit and the both started berating me and intimidating me. Both of the corporals smelt strongly of alcohol.

3. Sometimes during my training I felt comfortable and at ease. A number of fellow recruits were aware of the racist and discriminatory treatment I was subjected to and some offered support. Racist jokes and statements were heard at nights by the corporals, both drunk and sober. I would mostly just laugh to fit in and try not to react and make the situation worse for myself.

At the time of my training, Australia was beaten by the West Indies in cricket. One night I was woken and ordered out of bed by two corporals who had been drinking. They ordered me to march up and down the hallway, in full webbing gear, calling out the score in the cricket match. The reason for this was because my last name is "Richards" and the West Indies captain was Viv Richards and they again used racist slurs against my skin colour.

4. The last incident I recall and which was the event that prompted my absence without leave, was my required training with the Military Police Unit. We were to act in roles of M.P recruits. We would man fences and check buildings and such. On the second day we were shown the cells and holding yards in the M.P. Unit. We also had to act as prisoners to learn the

procedures of handling inmates when being locked up.

We were locked in a cell and told that when the alarm went off we must stand by our door and wait until it opened. Then quickly step out into the yard before the door closed. After the first attempts, I was told to go into the cell by myself. As I stepped in, they told me that this time, I was to stand back from the door when they opened it. A rope was thrown into the cell. The door was closed and locked. The rope had been tied into a noose. When I realised what was happening, I became extremely frightened and unsure of what was going to happen next. I started yelling out and swearing at them to let me out of the cell. After around 5 minutes or so they opened the door and I immediately left the cell. I was still swearing at them and extremely agitated. The only explanation for their action was that it was a procedure they carried out for certain "ethnic" groups.

5. After the incident in the M.P. training, I was unable to cope emotionally with the ongoing harrassment and unfair treatment I had endured during my time as a recruit. After this incident I was unsure of what would happen next and really became concerned for my safety. As a recruit, it was difficult to find support within the training and recruitment ranks. I had joined the Army having great respect for the institution, having uncles, and close relatives fight in the wars. My experience while enlisted was nothing short of appalling and my decision to go A.W.O.L seemed to be my only choice at the time. Another 4 recruits left with me at the same time. My experience as a recruit in the Army was degrading, humiliating and a violation of human rights. I have been subjected to racism and discrimination my entire life as an aboriginal australain, but never to the extent that I experienced within the Australian Army.

These events are only an example of what happened in my time as a recruit. There are many other accounts that I can put forward if required. To date, I have not gone any further with seeking justice regarding the blatant racist and discriminatory behaviors displayed to me during my time as a recruit. The main reason for this is that the time of my arrest after being absent without leave, the military police threatened my safety and stated "You could just end up hanging in one of these cells Richards, you black cunt, we don't like niggers in the Army, only for target practice."

I will also mention here that my wife was 3 months pregnant at the time of my enlistment. Soon after going AWOL I phoned to explain my actions to her and let her know what had happened in case something happened to me. Shortly after my arrest and subsequent discharge our baby was born almost 14 weeks prematurely. She died from complications at 2 months old. The gynaecologist suggested that the reason for the complications during the pregnancy was a direct result of the stress and concern my wife experienced during this time worrying about my wellbeing and safety while in recruitment. We have access to medical records that will verify this.

I can be contacted for further comment in regards to this statement. Urgent action is required to implement and enforce policies that prevent racist and discriminatory practices within the Australian Armed Force which often result in tragedy.

Sincerely,

LLOYD HOWARD RICHARDS.