

Mum wants Defence Force to answer question about son

By GABRIEL WINGATE-PEARSE

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Gregory Metcalf

HE wrote letters home, begging for his mother to get him out of HMAS Leeuwin naval base, and now she suspects she knows why.

Gregory Metcalf became a cadet at the Perth base aged just 16 but not long after arriving, in 1964, he wrote that “he could not go on living”.

He ran away, across the Nullarbor, only to be caught and returned to the base and dishonourably discharged.

He died aged 44, without ever disclosing to his mother Claire Devlyn, of Mayfield, what happened to him.

Graphic details of the physical and sexual abuse of teenaged boys at the base between 1960 to 1984 are contained in the HMAS Leeuwin report released by the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce last month.

Ms Devlyn is now urging the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to take up the issue and reveal the full extent of the horrors, and refer any relevant matters for prosecution.



REMORSEFUL: Claire Devlyn suspects her son was abused. Picture: Peter Stoop

“I wonder what happened to him. The main thing I feel is that I let him down. I have a little sketch of him and every morning I say to him, I am sorry my darling,” Ms Devlyn said.

“I suppose some of the men who perpetrated these things, they would be my age, and they have got away with it all this time, all that hurt.”

Gregory set off to become a cadet at the base in Perth to escape an unhappy family life.

Ms Devlyn was thrilled that he’d found a way out where she’d found none.

But not long after arriving, in 1964, he wrote to her saying he was desperately unhappy and “could not go on living” and needed her help to get out.

She pleaded his case to officials but the response she received was that it was “normal” for cadets to react that way at first, which left her feeling she had nowhere to turn.

“In those days I had nowhere to go,” Ms Devlyn said. “You didn’t have a voice.”

After realising his mother couldn’t help him, Gregory ran away from the base, hitching his way across the Nullarbor, but was pursued.

Two military police officers arrived at the family home unannounced shortly afterwards, Ms Devlyn said, and marched her son out, arm in arm.

He was returned to the base where he was dishonourably discharged.

The taskforce's report into HMAS Leeuwin is based on the personal accounts of 238 complainants, most aged between 15 and 17 and most of which the taskforce found were plausible.

The painful and humiliating hazing, or initiation practices, they suffered included being stripped and scrubbed with hard brushes, being held down while boot polish was smeared onto their genitals or having objects forced into their anuses.

The abuse was sometimes perpetrated by staff members, particularly in the 1960s, and much of it went unreported or unpunished.

The report finds that the pattern of abuse at HMAS Leeuwin was such that Defence knew or ought to have known that abuse was occurring, yet failed to take appropriate action to stop it. Ms Devlyn hopes the royal commission will take up the issue, and conduct public hearings to which she would contribute for the sake of her son.

A spokesman said the royal commission would review the report on allegations of abuse at HMAS Leeuwin, as is required under its terms of reference, and consider holding public hearings, which would be announced four weeks before they start.

Three alleged abusers are still serving in Defence and the taskforce is considering whether to make a recommendation for action by Defence against them.

Two cases have been referred on to police and another two are being considered for referral to police.

The story [Mum wants Defence Force to answer question about son](#) first appeared on [Newcastle Herald](#)

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