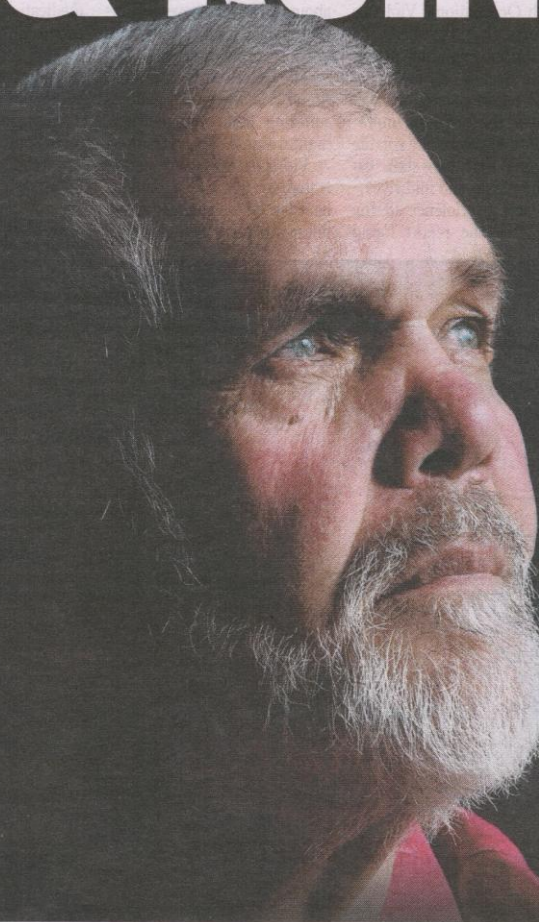


Abuse survivor tells of torture at navy base

WRECK & RUIN



SCARRED FOR LIFE: Ernie Norley is haunted by his ordeal as a 15-year-old recruit at HMAS Leeuwin (insets).



EXCLUSIVE RHIAN DEUTROM

A SUNSHINE Coast man still lives with the scars of his tormented past after he was exposed to "gross mistreatment" during 12 months as a recruit at the Australian naval base HMAS Leeuwin.

Ernie Norley, 66, originally from Perth, joined the navy in 1965 and was posted to the base.

There he endured months of unrelenting physical and sexual abuse and crippling fear that have marked him to this day.

"Fifteen-year-old kids

signed up for the navy. What they got was a war zone," Mr Norley said.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded its inquiry into the Australian Defence Force last month and heard from more than 50 survivors of horrific abuse – including Mr Norley – on the base.

HMAS Leeuwin was a training facility in Fremantle, in Western Australia, and tutored more than 13,000 boys as young as 10 between 1960 and 1984.

The royal commission's public hearing concluded

last week. The commission is now in its submissions phase, with a final report due in September next year.

Mr Norley has told *The Sunday Mail* he was regularly beaten and, at one point, was subjected to an abuse act known as "scrubbing", which involved pulling a recruit's pants down and applying engine oil or Dencorub to the testicles by force.

The recruit was usually required to "scrub" the lotion into their skin with yard brooms or toothbrushes.

"Senior recruits would wait for junior recruits to be on their own or go to the

bathroom or the showers before attacking them," Mr Norley said. "We were grossly mistreated. HMAS Leeuwin was a place of total disrespect and violence."

Mr Norley also recalled a time two senior recruits held him down while a third bashed him mercilessly.

"I was punched in the face and had my head repeatedly smashed," he said.

"The fear that I was going to die the day I was beaten by three people ... It's the one thing I relive and think about each day."

Mr Norley has started an online support page for sur-

vivors from the base and hopes to encourage others to speak out.

Shine Lawyers national survivor litigation partner Lisa Flynn said the firm was representing 50 clients in the royal commission, who were exposed to a "culture of vulture-picking on the newest and youngest of our serving defence personnel".

"The price of those failings has resulted in clients like Ernie and almost 50 other recruits facing a lifetime of recovery and a history of pain," Ms Flynn said.

The final report from the commission is due next year.



Ernie Norley said senior recruits would wait for junior recruits to be alone or go to the bathroom before attacking them. Pic: Darren England

Abuse survivor tells of torture at navy base

RHIAN DEUTROM, The Courier-Mail

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