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RMC Duntroon officer training perpetuates a dangerous bullying culture

Wed, 2012-03-07 21:08 — Tigerquoll

In 1987, I attended Duntroon as an Australian Army Officer Cadet.



Despite being a career goal, the experience quickly proved to be a total let down - expectations, standards, training, trust, propriety. I resigned in disgust five months in after being betrayed by my assigned mentor, a serving Captain, for some off the cuff criticism I had made.

After the five months I was more qualified to starch and iron greens and to polish boots than to fire a bloody SLR. I could iron a shirt faster than my mum - enemy look out!

I questioned field tactical decisions in training led by another captain in charge - (who was Duntroon qualified plus with a few years Infantry Corps experience - so he should have been a shining example). I recall after a training 'engagement' personally walking up to the mock enemy 'Majura Force' and asking their opinion of the engagement. They told me that their machine gunners would have easily mown most of us down even as soon as the captain's tactics had commenced. Great! School cadets had been more co-ordinated than this.

I recall a simulated combat wound training where we were demonstrated CPR. The Army trainers were crap. I had previously completed 8 years in Surf Life Saving to Advanced Resuscitation certification and had to show the trainers how CPR was done. Class theory training was rushed and superficial and many cadets fell asleep because they were only

getting 5 hours sleep a night due to ironing and polishing their kit ready to shine for next morning parade. But ask most of them about the effective range of an SLR - no friggen idea!

What was the bloody point? I felt that if I had continued I would be eventually be a dead duck in combat. I resigned in disgust. I dismissed it as a 5 month camp and moved on. That was twenty five years ago.

I had an aviation cadetship on entry to Duntroon so I was in a rare training stream of 1 in 300 of the intake of January 1987 to enter the Army's Aviation Corp and to fly Blackhawks. I did not think this was special since I had previously invested \$30,000 on helicopter training, so obviously my so-called 'aptitude' for flying was going to be half reasonable. If others had done similar, then they would have been too. But the crap at Duntroon was not worth it. I lost respect for the training, the NCO's, the officers, the commanders, the Army.

It was not the noble army that my father had served in as a NASHO.

One of the cadets in Kakoda Company that was assigned to my section was Julian Knight.

While I was slightly older (23) than the mean age and so slightly more mature, Julian was slightly younger (18) than the mean age and so slightly less mature, naturally. We were assigned into the same section - luck of the draw. There were just three of us in the section. I don't recall the third cadet's name (Chris?) but he was slightly older than me and married. Julian and I shared bush navigation exercises and on one particular field exercise the two of us shared a 'hoochie' (Army issue tent fly). As a team we were becoming quite proficient on exercise in our First Term. On 'Move Out', he would pack our sleeping bags, while I packed the hoochie and from being asleep to being mobile took us under 2 minutes. Julian was an excellent shot on the rifle range. I think I was barely adequate. In fact I recall two illegal discharges one involving a blank, and another when I fired a last round on the target range after not hearing the 'cease firing' command.

Back at Duntroon, we respectively had a score of boots and greens presentation 'show parade' penalties stacked against us - basically as punishment for not being up to scratch on substandard uniform presentation - for unrelated reasons. At the time I left, he and I shared the highest number of these 'show parades' for all Duntroon - I recall I had 21, he had amassed 26. It seemed par for the course.

Julian was a keen soldier, coming in with a background in the Reserves as a trooper. He displayed no fear when an assault was on. He was up the front. Perhaps he was an Albert Jacka VC in the making. Albert Jacka VC became a legend from Gallipoli and the Somme with a record of killing over 200 enemy - doing what he was trained for. [Read about [Albert Jacka](#)]

But Julian was abused from his early training. I believe because his immaturity and them misreading his keenness made him a target of the bullying culture at Duntroon. More than most cadets, he was ridiculed, harassed, persecuted, tormented and ostracised by the more senior cadets, and especially by the big and bulky Kakoda Company head cadet sergeant. This man took a personal dislike to Julian. One 2am occasion Julian had his room burst into and hosed down completely with a fire hose, then was inspected at 5am as part of drill. Kakoda Company had a reputation then as particularly more parochial and uncouth. It was ignored as being part of the training 'in this man's army'. Julian Knight probably copped more

abuse than anyone else in that intake. In my book he was a victim of Defence Force abuse and bastardisation.

After I left in May 1987 and ultimately resigned from the Army in disgust in July 1987, I recall the next month in the national newspapers, Julian Knight was on the front page. He had become the Hoddle Street mass murderer. The shootings resulted in the deaths of seven people, and serious injury to 19 others.

What had happened in the months May, June, July 1987 had obviously got worse for Julian, but I was not there. In some ways I had been his only true support but I should have done more. I had once spoken up in front of the entire complement of Kakoda Company after the CO had tokenly asked if any staff cadet had any concerns. It was dead silent, with everyone playing the obedient wall flower. But I spoke up. I complained to the CO in front of them all that in daytime theory classes many cadets were falling asleep because of the late night spit polishing and I asked what is the point? I got ostracised after that one. But it was the sought of standing up against the bastards that Julian and I celebrated.

Media reports tell of how he was expelled after a bar brawl in which he stabbed his key tormentor - the third term head cadet sergeant of Kakoda Company.

At the time I expected the media to be pursuing me for a story, since I automatically connected the massacre with his Duntroon persecution. But no-one ever contacted me. No-one ever connected his actions with his Duntroon torment.

It has taken me 25 years to be public about this.

I make no judgment about Julian. Each of us is capable of killing, killing animals, killing another human being. Rifles are very efficient at killing, that is what they are made for, to make the task easy. Armies exist to train those interested to kill. Duntroon is one such training establishment. The psychological tests to gain entry ask if one is prepared to kill and if one says no, then one is rejected as unsuitable. Controlled, just killing is sanctioned by governments in their armies and governments represent the will of their societies. What happens when a keen, capable soldier is abused by the Army, when this abuse involves repeatedly consistent ridicule, torment, intimidation and psychological torture? Well, like the reinforced intense training of a soldier to kill makes for a good soldier, the reinforced intense abuse of a soldier to kill makes for a bad soldier. When frustration boils over into extreme anger mixed with depression and presented with an opportunity to get pay back (easy access to weapons), do you get 9th August 1987?

I do make a judgment about Duntroon. Incessant bullying of Julian was a key contributing factor that led to the Hoddle Street massacre.

I regret not having come forward before. What happened on Hoddle Street in August 1987 could have been avoided if Duntroon had not been a cultural incubator of bully boys in its officer training. I hold Duntroon culpable for the psychological state that it created in Julian. I only know Julian from my time with him doing basic training. He was someone you could trust in battle when the shit hit the fan. That attribute was never respected by the Duntroon establishment. They just kept picking on him and putting him down.

The place is a depraved throw back to the 19th Century. Duntroon breeds old school bully boys not deserving of officer status. It would be an excellent outsourced training ground for the Syrian Army. Is that what standard Australians expect of its Army leadership?

I read about ADFA today and I see that Australian Defence Force training culture has not changed.

Pity anyone not a bully boy enrolling, women especially.

Defence Minister Stephen Smith was right to take a moral stance against the injustice of the Army establishment, and haven't the old boys come out in closed ranks fighting!





Useful Reading:

[Hoddle Street Massacre, 9th August 1987](#)

[ABC Radio National - Life Matters Programme: 'Lethality in Combat'](#) aired 5th March 2012.

['Lethality in Combat'](#) by Military historian and formal naval officer Tom Lewis.

Attachment Size

Attachment	Size
 873660-julian-knight.jpg	27.41 KB
 Royal Military College Duntroon - parade ground.jpg	20.11 KB

Topic:

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Comments

Fri, 2012-03-09 23:27 — Sheila Newman

[Duntroon culture and Hoddle St murderer](#)

God, Tigerquoll,
This article packs no mean punch, but the title gives little clue to what's in it.
Well done. Good on you for speaking up.

Sat, 2012-03-10 08:49 — Tigerquoll

[Defence Enquiry won't change Army culture](#)

Thanks Sheila,

The article is about the bullying Army culture for those interested. It is not intended to attract readers to Julian, so the title is deliberate.

I contacted the legal firm assigned to the current Defence Enquiry investigation but it is convoluted and designed to prosecute individuals, which is not appropriate.

The process won't change the Army culture.

The legal firm is DLA Piper Australia. When one contacts them all one gets is an automated email response...

"You have reached an email address for the Review of Allegations of Sexual and Other Abuse in Defence. This email account is monitored on a regular basis and your email will be read by a member of the Review team."

This is an automated response. You may not receive an individual response to your email.

Counselling is available

If you are distressed and need to speak with someone urgently, please contact the following support lines:

For currently serving ADF members:

The All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service to assist ADF members and their families with accessing mental health services, such as psychology, medical, social work, and chaplain services.

The ASL number is 1800 628 036.

For Defence public service (APS) employees:

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential and free service. It is provided by professional counsellors who will provide practical assistance to APS employees, and their immediate family members, who may require counselling services.

Appointments can be made via the EAP hotline on 1300 366 789.

For former ADF members and former Defence public service employees and their immediate families:

Special arrangements have been made to extend the EAP service for immediate, initial counselling to former ADF members and former Defence public service employees and their immediate families who raise or have raised allegations affecting them with the external review team and who require counselling assistance. The EAP is a confidential and free service provided by professional counsellors.

This service can be accessed via the EAP hotline on 1800 451 138 and selecting Option 1 - Crisis Intervention.

Delivery of the Report prepared by the Review

The Minister for Defence and Secretary of the Department of Defence received Volume 1 of the Report (covering general findings and recommendations) and the first part of Volume 2 of the Report (covering individual allegations) on 11 October. The final Volume 2 will be provided to the Minister and Secretary in March 2012.

Raising new matters with the Review

The Review cannot take action to investigate, assess or make recommendations to the Minister or Secretary in relation to any new matters. If you wish to raise a new matter, you can do so and we will acknowledge receipt of your matter. However, we will not be able to take any action in respect of your matter unless and until the Minister and Secretary decide we may do so after they have considered our Report.

If you have a new matter to raise, we suggest you consider raising the matter directly with an entity which can take action or help you now. The appropriate entity might be one or more of Defence, the Defence Force Ombudsman, the Inspector General Australian Defence Force, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Australian Public Service Commission, Comcare, the police, a counselling service or another entity.

Status of matters already raised with the Review

In Volume 2, we are making an initial assessment of each allegation within scope that has been raised with us, making a recommendation as to whether further action should be taken and advising on the appropriate mechanism for such further action as may be warranted.

We have been dealing with over a thousand separate matters. They all require very careful consideration and it is taking us some time to work through them all.

We are not commenting about the matters that we are reviewing or have reviewed. We are not discussing with individuals whether their matter has been reviewed, nor what recommendation has been or will be made.

It is for the Minister to decide, after he has received the full Report, whether he will release the assessment and recommendation in respect of each matter to the person who raised the matter with the Review. We cannot release that information to you."

...blah blah blah.

So what is the point? The Defence Enquiry like most government enquiries, is a token investigation designed by the Australian Government to sunset clause its accountability. The most significant revelations will be kept 'Classified' at ASIO headquarters in perpetuity. The true accounts will be kept from the public, so what will change?

Well, hopefully this account may help future soldiers get a better deal. I take my hat off to anyone prepared to serve their country.

Tigerquoll
Suggan Buggan
Snowy River Region
Victoria 3885
Australia

Sat, 2013-02-16 22:56 — [DefenseAU \(not verified\)](#)

[I'm connected to a circle of retired Service Personnel](#)

Contact me. My twitter page is www.twitter.com/defenseau. As was looking for you ...so I'm glad you came forward. I'm behind the advocacy over the past 14 years for this Royal Commission and I do know what happened to Julian too. The truth is the truth, and MPs do know about 1987. I need to talk to you about the adfa Navy cadets culture as well, if you came across it.

Tue, 2012-03-20 13:17 — Meggyn McNeill (not verified)

[A sad indictment of an outmoded military training culture](#)

This is a thoughtful, sad indictment of an outmoded military training culture with tragic consequences for all involved.

Tigerquoll has identified various factors needing to be examined in establishing a causal explanation for Julian Knight's behaviour at least, and - by extension - the behaviour of all other rogue soldiers (Linda English, Nidal Malik Hasan, and Robert Bales being three in the US that instantly come to mind) spawned or aggravated by a military training culture badly in need of overhaul.

Tigerquoll seems to be accurately identifying (from his own experience) the potentiating of psychotic acting-out by the effects of institutionalised sadistic abuse. I would add that an individual who takes into military service the emotional damage resulting from a pre-existing emotional history of physical/sexual abuse (e.g. perpetrated within family, extended family or school settings) is inevitably vulnerable to the repetition and revitalising of these experiences (with all the old feelings and ruminations attached to them) in any sadistically abusive training setting that rationalises barbaric practices as par for the course in "making a good soldier".

Surely there is a line to be drawn between soldier training and gratuitous, sadistic abuse - which in my view extends to the practice of multiple tours of duty. As a trauma psychologist (retired) I have treated many vets and have consistently identified positive correlations

between preexisting psychological factors and chronic - even occasionally psychotic - levels of post-traumatic stress that can totally unhinge an individual, most especially one prematurely returned to duty. There are endless stories depicting variations on these themes, for example this sorry tale, selected more or less at random: [*Prosecutors: Army Lt. Col. Robert Underwood tried to hire hitman to kill wife, superior officer*](#) of 13 March.

Another astute observation made by tigerquoll concerns the nature of the recruitment process, of which one of the battery of tests apparently explores a recruit's capacity to kill. No doubt this is linked to "in service to king and country" or "to protect home and family" (I am not privy to recruitment procedures), but irrespective of questionnaire details the question is still begged as to why the recruitment process (with its battery of psychological tests) should not be similarly capable of weeding out socially marginalised or psychotically disturbed individuals who may be opportunistically (albeit unconsciously) seeking affiliation or retribution via a career in the military. More crucially, perhaps, we should be asking whether there exists a tacit agenda in the defence forces to embrace the disturbed and the deviant (e.g. because they are likely to make efficient killing machines), given that war and career soldiering are no longer fashionable in affluent contemporary western cultures.

The principle of "overdetermination" is clearly at play here, where no single factor is capable of precipitating psychopathic behaviour, which requires a series of determining factors or variables to reach critical mass. Nonetheless, given that it is the poor and marginalised who, at least in the US, seem most vulnerable to the jingoistic anthems of recruitment drives, with economic downturns traditionally seeing a boost in numbers ([*Defence force recruitment on the ropes*](#) of 11 May 2009 by Greg Callaghan), it stands to reason that (at the risk of depopulating the forces!) at least some mitigation of a broad range of potentially deviant (if not homicidal) behaviours among defence personnel may be achieved by incorporating more sensitive psychological testing into recruitment procedures in the first instance.

Robert Bales' "murderous rampage" has set back ten years of international diplomacy, soured already poor relations between the US and Afghanistan, and has increased instability in the region - responsibility for which can be placed squarely upon the American military establishment for returning a psychotically traumatised Bales to his fourth tour of duty.

The defence department should start listening before history repeats itself here in Australia.

Thank you, tigerquoll - this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Sun, 2013-02-17 12:17 — [maryannmartinek... \(not verified\)](#)

[**Tip of the 'Defence Secrets' Iceberg - so true**](#)

Please read and consider contacting me. ABC Interview in 2004 <http://maryannmartinek.wordpress.com/2004-abc-radio-interview/> and 9 Sunday Programme in 2000 <https://maryannmartinek.wordpress.com/2000-cover-story-9-sunday-program/>
regards, MM

Mon, 2013-03-04 19:10 — Tigerquoll

[**Royal Commission into Defence**](#)

The Royal Commission into Defence shows no evidence of transparency, justice for victims or public outcome.

It is a stain into perpetuity just like Breaker Morant.

Thu, 2013-03-07 20:00 — Tigerquoll

[DLA Piper Useless](#)

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Morgan, The Australian Regular Army's leading psychologist and policy officer, is morally right to whistleblow publicly tonight (ABC 730 TV programme of 7th March 2013) on senior Army officers' intractable culture to ignore, brush aside, cover up widespread institutional abuse from basic training in the past and current, throughout the organisation.

DLA Piper's investigation is/was useless. Their bill should not be paid due to incompetence and substandard delivery of key outcomes.

Watch programme:

'Breaking Ranks' Thursday 7th Feb 2013.

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/iview/?series=2186770#/abc1>

Thu, 2012-10-11 10:22 — Anonymous (not verified)

[RMC Bullying Culture](#)

Thankyou for sharing this, Im female and attended RMC in early 00's and experienced and witnessed a similar culture of bullying from Directing Staff and some other cadets which I formally complained about 2 occasions however they were dismissed. After I left it took me a long time to move forward and im still working on that. It appears the culture hasnt changed over time and isnt going to anytime soon.

Tue, 2012-11-27 13:25 — Anonymous (not verified)

[RMC Bullying Culture](#)

Grow Up people!! Get a can of harden up spray!! I joined the Army in 1975 and beleive me "Barstardization" was rife. I was never physically hurt as the "treatment" was more mental not so much pysical.

I beleive I am a better person today because of it. Then again disipline throughout society at that time was much harsher than it is today. The culture has changed.....we are much softer and more PC.... and don't get me wrong...it is for the better, however, do not fall into the habit of comparing today's society and values with that of yesteryearthey are as different as chalk and cheese.

Fri, 2014-06-20 18:29 — Been there done that (not verified)

Duntroon doesn't teach useful military skills

Subject was: "stop talking crap".

I was at Duntroon during the early 80s when it was still a four year course.

Just because you've been in the army doesn't mean you know a thing about Duntroon. It is nothing like the regular army - it is essentially a boarding school run by the cadets. The NCOs and officers have very little contact with cadets outside the classroom.

The ONLY skills RMC teaches you are - polishing your boots, marching, licking the arses of those above you and pissing on those below you. Actually military skills such as shooting, leadership, bushcraft and fitness are considered unimportant. I would consider most of the cadets would have been in the bottom half of the students any of the top Australian universities with regards to intellect, maturity and sporting ability. [eg EVERY Human Movement (exercise science) student at the university of Queensland had a higher HSC score and better sporting ability than 95% of Duntroon cadets.]

Thu, 2014-07-10 18:45 — Chico (not verified)

Sounds like RMC was a place

Sounds like RMC was a place full of plenty of scumbags especially in early 80's. I know a guy who went there then and the amount of thieving and other misbehaviour was out of control and senior military turned a blind eye!

Mon, 2013-02-11 21:54 — 1987 Staff cadet (not verified)

Duntroon intake of 1987

I was in the same intake as Knights and resigned from Duntroon at around the same time as the author. Duntroon for me was 'Lord of the Flies'. It is what happens when a bunch of 18 year old are given institutional power over others. I'm not sure why Knights did what he did, but I am certain that Duntroon's treatment of him is partly responsible for those deaths on Hoddle Street.

Sat, 2013-02-16 22:44 — [DefenseAU \(not verified\)](#)

1987 era at Duntroon

You can find my tweets about Defence culture at www.twitter.com/defenseau .

I would like the retired Duntroon cadet to make contact.

I've been advocating a Royal Commission into Defence abuse for 14 years and I am wanting to assist the truth to reach the inquiry. I was interviewed by ABC in 2004 and I predicted thousands of victims. We now have about 2000 victims and amongst that number are the children who were targeted by 60 years of a military paedophile network.

Regards, M2

Source: <https://candobetter.net/node/2813>