

Soldier 'abused and humiliated' at barracks

Nick McKenzie

A SOLDIER with post-traumatic stress disorder was hospitalised after his superior officers allegedly abused and humiliated him, threatened him with jail and "treated him like a dog".

The alleged abuse - detailed in incident statements obtained by *The Age* - happened when Private Ted Tiessem was ordered to attend Lavarack Barracks in Townsville on July 8 to receive a revised medical assessment.

His post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the result of a truck accident in Malaysia in 1993, which left five of his colleagues dead and Private Tiessem with severe head injuries.

Private Tiessem, who has 17 years' service, was commended by the army for his actions after the accident. His injuries have meant he has remained a private since the accident. His PTSD has been recognised by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is well known to his unit, 2 RAR.

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His treatment involves counselling, medication and not attending Lavarack Barracks unless necessary.

Private Tiessem's statement about what happened a fortnight ago when he was ordered to meet his commanding officer to be briefed about his medical status has been leaked to *The Age* by another defence official.

According to the statement, Private Tiessem was approaching his commander's office with his civilian case manager when the battalion adjutant "yelled out: 'Private Tiessem, get your f---ing arse up here now'".

Private Tiessem says that when he asked not to be abused, he was told: "I don't care what you f---ing want; get your f---ing arse up here now." He says the abuse made him feel anxious and distressed, and he asked to return home.

"I felt deeply embarrassed that such offensive behaviour was being displayed in front of my case manager and wanted to protect her from such ... behaviour," the statement reads.

In a further statement obtained by *The Age*, an army captain and friend of Private Tiessem recorded his subsequent conversation with his case manager. He says the case manager told him she had seen Private Tiessem being yelled at in an intimidating manner.

Rather than allow Private Tiessem to return home, the adjutant ordered a regimental police sergeant to escort him to his commanding officer's room. There, he was told by the regimental sergeant major that he was to be briefed about his medical assessment.

According to his statement, Private Tiessem was then marched before his commanding officer and given a choice: "The hard way or the easy way". The hard way meant a trip to the army's holding cells.

"I thought to myself, 'If I could go to the cells, at least this stupid process would stop; I would be able to get my medication and ... rest.'"

The commanding officer then ordered the regimental police to escort Private Tiessem to the cells. On the way, he began shaking uncontrollably.

After he was taken to the base's medical post, the regimental police were told by an army doctor that Private Tiessem was too unwell to be jailed and should be driven home.

Instead, he was taken to his sergeant major's office. His statement reads: "He yelled at me, 'Do you have a chit (medical form) that says you can't stand up?' I responded, 'No, sir.' He said I could stand while he then tore strips off me too. I was blacking out and cannot really recall what he was saying to me."

Private Tiessem was told by another officer that he would be disciplined and must report to base at 8am the next day.

"I was continually repeating, 'I just need my medication and need to go home.' I explained that I couldn't drive and I didn't know how I would get back in the morning. The company sergeant major told me, 'I don't give a f--k how you get here, but you better be here at 0800.'"

When he returned home that evening, another soldier took him to hospital, where he remained for three days.

"I have a great deal of anxiety about my uncontrollable shakes and feel self-conscious when they are occurring ... during the event, I felt I had been treated like a dog," his statement reads.

Private Tiessem's alleged mistreatment occurred almost a month after Minister for Defence Science and Personnel Warren Snowdon wrote to another Townsville soldier, dismissing previous concerns that members of 2 RAR were mistreating soldiers with mental health issues.

"A detailed unit level investigation ... (has found) no evidence to support your claim that 2 RAR is making it more difficult for soldiers with mental illness to discharge," Mr Snowdon wrote.

A colleague of Private Tiessem told *The Age* that he was still shaken and wanted an inquiry.

In a statement, Private Tiessem's wife says: "I felt deep anger towards those who ignored (army doctor) Dr Wong's medical advice and detained Ted for far longer than what was required. He ... (has) severe (psychological) wounds ... For these to be ignored is reprehensible."

Private Tiessem has been charged with insubordination for his actions on July 8. It is understood the charge partly relates to Private Tiessem not calling senior officers "sir".

A Defence Department spokesman said Defence had no concerns about Private Tiessem's treatment and his "insubordination is subject to ongoing disciplinary action".

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