

# Inquiry into Australian Defence Force abuse will hear survivors recount harrowing tales

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Former Navy recruit Tim Kidd was abused while on the HMAS Leeuwin in the 1970s. He now lives in Penguin, Tasmania. *Source: News Corp Australia*

THE Australian Defence Force was supposed to protect its young recruits. Instead, senior officers did the unthinkable.

From the 1960s all the way through to the early 2000s, it's believed ADF officers preyed on cadets. Victims claim they were told being bullied, bastardised and raped was part of being toughened up for service.

The hard lessons have stayed with victims for decades while those responsible have been protected from scrutiny. It appears that is finally about to change.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse announced on Monday it would hold a hearing next month.

It will look into what happened aboard the HMAS Leeuwin in Perth from 1960 to 1980, at an Army Apprentice School from 1970 to 1980 and to ADF cadets as young as 15 from 2000 to present.

Former Leeuwin recruit Graham, 61, [told a Senate inquiry](#) in 2014 that he wanted to kill the two men who raped him one night at Leeuwin.

"I've lived with that for 46 years," he said. "I still live with it. I have terror every day. I can't get it out of my mind. I hate nights. I can't sleep.

"I'm not a healthy man. I'm a complete mess mentally. I've never felt like a complete man. I'm sure the other victims are still suffering as I am today."

He said the government needed to come clean with what he called a "cover-up for all this time".

Tim Kidd went through two years of hell at the Navy training base in Fremantle as a teenager. He was just 15 when he took the train to HMAS Leeuwin.

"We joined up to serve and protect our country," he told *The Australian* from his home in Tasmania. "Not to be treated like that."



Tim Kidd now lives in Penguin, Tasmania. *Source: News Corp Australia*

Mr Kidd said he was raped by an adult crewman and, when he told a service chaplain what had happened to him, he was told the treatment was designed to toughen him up. Instead, it silenced him.

The individual stories are disturbing but so too is the potential scale of abuse. Between 1960 and 1984, thousands of young men were trained at the naval base along the Swan River.

As well as hearing the experiences of abuse survivors, the commission will examine the policies, practices and procedures of the ADF.

Former and current defence chiefs will be called to testify starting June 21 in Sydney. It follows a landmark report tabled in Federal Parliament on June 18, 2014, which provided clues about what the inquiry will likely uncover.

More than 140 pages long, the report — based on testimony from 200 complainants — found abuse was far more widespread than previously thought and that much of it went unreported and unpunished.

Personal accounts included recruits being abused with a mop handle and held down while boot polish was smeared over their genitals.

Former judge Len Roberts-Smith led the taskforce investigating ADF abuse. He said men now in their 60s had broken a lifetime of silence to speak out about what really went on.

“I commend their courage in coming forward to shine a light on the dark history of HMAS Leeuwin and to show the serious and lasting impact that abuse has had on their lives,” Mr Roberts-Smith said.

“It is my hope that the lessons that can be learned from the stories of abuse at HMAS Leeuwin will contribute to and inform the ongoing efforts by Defence to prevent, stop and respond to abuse.

“This is particularly important in situations where those at risk are young people, who are among Defence’s most vulnerable.”

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