

Victoria Cross recipient Ben Roberts-Smith has been accused of pushing a handcuffed Afghan farmer off a cliff before shooting him in the head.



BEN ROBERTS-SMITH

DUTY FIRST NOT TRIAL BY MEDIA

Abalinx 24 September 2019 Peter Adamis

PREAMBLE. One of the many things I was taught whilst in the Army was to allow the man on the ground to be free to use their initiative, skills, knowledge and assets to complete their mission.

My generation was fortunate to have strong leaders who knew how to get the best out of us and to ask more of us when faced with challenges we had never trained for. The Army also trained us to be tough, resilient, disciplined and to use our initiative whenever the opportunity arose. Such was our high level of training that we always knew the difference between a lawful and unlawful command.

Those that failed soon found themselves packing their kit and taking the first train out. That went for all ranks including officers. There was no room for cowboys, self-seeking glory hunters or mentally challenged individuals. Our leaders when giving their "O Groups" (Orders Group) always asked for questions and opinions at the end. In other words we had the opportunity to contribute to the mission.

CULTURAL CHANGES. Since the war in Iraq, Australian soldiers were not allowed to participate in hostilities but were involved in retraining a whole new generation of Iraqi soldiers. It is of interest to note that the previous Iraqi Army were completely ignored by the Coalition and there was no contingency plan to embed former soldiers within the new Iraqi Army.

Therefore thousands of former Iraqi soldiers became instantly unemployed and as a result they used their military skills in irregular warfare. This was a very poor decision on the part of the Coalition planners. It laid the foundations of a invisible irregular force that spawned the early signs of ISIS.

Australian soldiers involved in the training of Iraqis were not happy with this scenario despite being given the opportunity for an overseas guernsey. They had trained for such a contingency. Only the SAS were allowed to be involved in hostilities. Suffice to say, the successful involvement of the SAS changed the culture and their role from gathering intelligence to one of engaging with the enemy.

As the battle for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people wore on, Australians also became involved in East Timor, Solomon Islands and Afghanistan. Military planners and political strategists encouraged by the success of the SAS raised the role of the Commando Regiment. Using one of the Regular Battalions as the nucleus for further expansion, they believed that they would relieve the pressure on the SAS. However in the process, no one could foresee that a vicious competitiveness would arise between the two specialist forces.

As history has demonstrated, Afghanistan was to be the testing ground for such competitiveness between the SAS and the Commandos. Clashes occurred, errors, poor leadership and judgement in some areas and certainly a change in culture. It appeared that the roles between the two became blurred and cultures developed as a result of mateship, loyalty, Duty First attitude and the need to demonstrate the warrior ethos that all soldiers are endowed with during training.

When our Soldiers were murdered by a renegade Afghani soldier embedded within the Australian military corridor, it was natural for Australians to seek out the Afghani perpetrator. During the process, competitiveness, warrior ethos, duty first, revenge and caution may have crept into the minds of those seeking to find the renegade Afghani soldier. Is this not a natural reaction on the part of the Australians? One would assume so.

Those involved in the seeking out of the Afghani renegade did so as ordered, using their initiative, skills, knowledge and assets to complete their mission. In other words they were free to do what was necessary to complete the task. If during such operations, decisions were made, rules of engagement changed or use of assets to come to a successful conclusion, is there still room for reflection.

I use the word "reflection" liberally to describe methodologies and actions used and or acted upon during operations. Should those methodologies and actions be challenged during battle or because of the fog of war are left to be reviewed at a later date.

I categorically deny the allegations made against me in tonight's 60 Minutes program. These allegations are already the subject of a defamation action against the Sydney Morning Herald/Age and the journalists Nick McKenzie and Chris Masters. It is beyond comprehension why a media organisation has chosen to repeat defamatory claims against me before the Federal Court has determined the matter. I have filed comprehensive evidence in the Federal Court which clearly demonstrates that these allegations are false and should not have been made let alone repeated. I will not be intimidated by their actions in re-publishing the defamatory allegations and look forward to the Court determining this matter.

Let me be clear: I have never committed any of the acts alleged in the 60 Minutes' broadcast. I have never contravened any laws of war. I am proud of my military service and I believe I can demonstrate with the support of numerous witnesses that I have acted honourably at all times in my military service.

I am concerned that tonight's story and the previous publications by the SMH/AGE are an attempt to improperly influence the outcome of the IGADF Inquiry. I have not been approached by the AFP in relation to any alleged inquiry by it. It is unprecedented that a media organisation has sought to either influence or prejudice the outcome of an investigation before its conclusion.

None of the witnesses on tonight's broadcast provided any direct evidence of any sort to support their allegations. I have never met nor served with either of the two soldiers named in 60 Minutes' story. Moreover, the other two unidentified purported serving SASR soldiers, whose claims were delivered by actor voiceover, made assertions that suggest neither man was actually a direct witness to any of the alleged incidents in which Nine falsely slurs me as a war criminal.

I am appalled that the service of my colleagues and my service to my country and my regiment is being traduced in such an irresponsible way. I have fully cooperated with the Inspector General ADF. I am also gravely concerned that there appears to have been an attempt to compromise the integrity of the Inspector General's inquiry whereby, on Nine's admission, there has been malicious leaking against me from within the ADF. It is utterly improper that I am subjected to false claims in the media while I am defending my reputation in both military and civil investigations.

I strongly support the investigation of alleged war crimes. I do not understand how Nine and the SMH/AGE can justify this story when there is already an ADF inquiry underway that will no doubt test the veracity of these claims. Nine has recklessly allowed its journalists to slur my reputation by calling me a war criminal and by slurring the SAS I have been so proud to serve. It appears to be prejudging the outcome of an inquiry.

We have now come to an impasse of whether to judge our soldiers who make decisions during the heat of battle or to make their decisions for them. Our soldiers are trained to such a high level that they instinctively know what decisions to make. As such decision making should be left for those in the field.

Our soldiers should not be judged once they have returned from an operation but counselled if there is a requirement to do so. Any actions taken that are deemed illegal or unlawful should be dealt with immediately within the environment by those in command or refer such actions higher up the chain of command.

THE MEDIA. History has always been a good teacher as it reflects on the past and lays the foundations for the future. The media have the luxury of conducting their own research based on information that has been provided freely. If that information involves national security or matters involving the credibility and integrity of our Defence Forces, they have a duty of care to advise the relevant ministers and proper authorities.

If the relevant ministers and proper authorities fail to act upon information provided by the media, then and only then should such information be made public? The Media is not qualified nor is it endowed with legislation to judge others but merely to report the facts.

BEN ROBERTS-SMITH. A retired soldier who has done his bit for Australia is now being investigated for actions taken whilst he was a serving soldier. In fact this highly decorated soldier is being hauled over the coals without any charges being laid. The media on the other hand are like piranhas in a feeding frenzy. They are airing matters still under investigation and in effect laying the foundations for a miscarriage of justice.

The media is being fed information from a number of quarters and publicizing that information because it is in the business of making money for its shareholders. Whatever the outcome and whatever the case may be, I am of the opinion that:

- A. This witch hunt has nothing to do with heroism and bravery and it is certainly a sad day indeed for our men and women of our armed forces.
- B. Such matters should never be made public until investigations are completed and efficiently done irrespective of who the individuals are. Otherwise justice is not seen to have deemed done.
- C. That a change in culture has occurred is true. The roles of the SAS, Commandoes and Infantry are different.
- D. Whether there was poor leadership, Rules of Engagement, and a change in culture is not for the media to decide. This media has much to answer for and unfortunately will lead to catastrophic outcomes.
- E. During the fog of war, there is no time to dive beneath the surface to see how big the iceberg is. Therefore these media allegations will now ALWAYS be considered as trial by media. Not a pleasant methodology and one sure to leave a bitter taste in one's mouth.
- F. Sending soldiers to hostile environments is the responsibility of Government. Therefore if our soldiers are to be judged then that responsibility must go all the way to the top. The Government cannot wash their hands of any alleged guilt judged by a media who believes they are above the law.

Trial by media is not the way to go and the Australian culture of Fair go should prevail. I would have thought lessons were learnt from the Lindy Chamberlain case in the Northern Territory, but it seems not.



Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Social Media Commentator and writer. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), and Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Website: abalinx.com Contact via Email: abalinx@gmail.com