

**Submission
No 9**

**INQUIRY INTO GAY AND TRANSGENDER HATE CRIMES
BETWEEN 1970 AND 2010 - 57TH PARLIAMENT**

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Hon. Shayne Mallard, MLC
Committee Chair
Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Submission to Inquiry into Gay and Transgender hate crimes between 1970 and 2010

Dear Shayne Mallard, MLC and Committee members,

I write this submission in my personal capacity as a historian who specialises in the history of LGBTI people in Australia. To date I have been the first chief investigator on two Australian Research Council-funded projects: one examining the history of LGBTI people in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and the other focusing on the history of transgender people in Australia. My research draws from a mixture of archival documents, old media reports and, most importantly, oral history interviews with LGBTI ex-service members and transgender Australians.

Other historians in the field of LGBTI history have already made a comprehensive submission to the inquiry last year (see No. 19 Dr Andy Kaladelfos, Dr Bianca Fileborn, Dr Yorick Smaal, Associate Professor Lisa Featherstone, Associate Professor Shirleene Robinson). I fully endorse and commend their submission, so I will not re-canvass the long history of discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTI people here.

Instead, I wish to draw the committee's attention to an important aspect of hate crimes against LGBTI Australians which has not yet been discussed in any submissions or your two reports: the role of ADF service members as perpetrators of hate crimes. This important information came to my attention through the course of my research. There are two types of hate crimes which targeted LGBTI people: those perpetrated against service members suspected to be LGBTI, and those perpetrated against civilians. I will not canvass the former here because that is less pertinent to your inquiry's terms of reference, but I will note that from the 1970s-90s, LGBTI service members – especially gay men and those *perceived* to be gay men – suffered hate crimes included being bashed, thrown down stairs, raped, thrown off ships (tantamount to attempted murder), verbal assaults and death threats. Rarely did service police investigate these hate crimes, partly because they were rarely reported. To do so threatened to out a person, which until November 1992 meant discharge.

This submission instead addresses the issue of ADF members who committed hate crimes against LGBTI civilians. One oral history interview I conducted described members of the ADF perpetrating hate crimes against gay men in NSW in the 1980s. A further two interviews described violence directed at the LGBTI community in the 1990s, after the ban on LGB military service was repealed in November 1992. I have also come across media reports about Army and RAAF members committing hate crimes in Townsville in the 1980s. These pieces of evidence all reinforce that there was, in some sections of the ADF, a homophobic culture where men felt comfortable not only perpetrating hate crimes, but actually doing them together.

Military sociologists and historians have long written about the masculine cultures that permeate militaries. In Australia, Ben Wadham is the most prominent scholar in this field. He has described the ADF culture as a 'fratriarchy', or rule of brothers. He explains, "These men live together, work together and play together. These young men are rapaciously heterosexual and homophobic. Heavy alcohol use is the predominant social lubricant. Mateship as the fundamental form of brotherhood is played out through a mixture of



humour, larrikinism and brutality.”¹ Wadham’s research has explored the ways that militaries have long inculcated cultures where group violence is central to how servicemen ‘prove’ their masculinity.² Wadham and overseas’ scholars work has focused primarily on the way martial masculinity and fraternity have contributed to cultures of abuse *within* the ADF and other militaries.

My oral history interviews, however, uncovered that the fraternal bonding through violence extended, in the 1980s-90s, to groups of ADF members who together assaulted gay men. One ex-soldier I interviewed, known as “Geoff”, served in the Australian Army from 1984-91, attaining the rank of lance-corporal. In our interview, “Geoff” described when his soldier-mates stationed at Holsworthy Barracks in western Sydney used to go “poofster-bashing” on the weekends. While Geoff did not witness the bashings, he did see his mates harass effeminate men around Oxford Street, and Geoff even warned some men to leave lest they be bashed (interview excerpts in Appendix A). I have also uncovered media reports from 1988 about Army and RAAF members bashing gay men in Townsville. Their persistent harassment of gay men earned them the nickname AJs: Army Jerks. The ADF, however, denied that its members were targeting gay men (see newspaper report in Appendix B). Although this was not NSW, the reports suggest a cultural problem which would reinforce “Geoff’s” memories about Holsworthy Barracks.

Two more oral histories suggest that Defence members continued the pastime of harassing gay men into the 1990s. Matt Cone, a gay sailor who served from 1992-97, was closeted in 1992-93 when he was posted at HMAS Watson in Sydney. The ban on LGB people serving in the ADF had just been lifted, but Cone knew it was not safe for him to come out of the closet. Reinforcing this view was when on multiple occasions he witnessed homophobic sailors driving along Oxford Street yelling slurs and throwing bottles at gay men outside the Albury Hotel (interview excerpts in Appendix C). Colin Edwards, an ex-sailor turned gay activist in Townsville, recalls that the AJs there increased their attacks on gay men almost as a response to the lifting of the LGB ban (interview excerpts in Appendix D). If we extrapolate from his interview, it is quite likely that Defence members based at the multiple Navy, Army and RAAF bases in Sydney and other NSW communities may have been perpetrating similar hate crimes.

These examples only graze the surface of ADF perpetrators of hate crimes in the 1970s-2010. Because my project focused on the experiences of LGBTI service members, I was not searching for instances of heterosexual men attacking LGBTI civilians. A more focused study would likely turn up more cases.

The ADF did not sanction these attacks; that said, nor did it take steps to address the homo/transphobic culture in the 1980s-90s. It would be after 2005 that the ADF shifted its tone to support LGB inclusion; after lifting the ban on transgender service in September 2010, the ADF has actively worked to support service members from across the rainbow alphabet. The contemporary ADF most certainly has taken a more proactive stance against homo/bi/transphobia and intersexism. But just as this inquiry is about examining a dark chapter in NSW and Australia’s past, so too is the ADF part of that history.

Yours sincerely

Professor Noah Riseman

¹ Ben Wadham, "Brotherhood: Homosociality, Totality and Military Subjectivity," *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 76 (2013): 226.

² "Violence in the Military and Relations among Men: Military Masculinities and ‘Rape Prone Cultures’," in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, ed. Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).