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27.4.71

To the Minister for the Navy.,
Parliament House.,
CANBERRA:

Dr. Malcolm Makay, M.P.,

Dear Sir,

In view of newspaper reports of bashings at H.M.A.S. Leeuwin, I must consider myself at fault in not having addressed this to your office a great deal sooner.

I am an ex-navy man, British Royal Marines, and I have been quite content for those of my sons who have wished to do so to enter the permanent armed forces. Of seven sons, two are in the RAAF, another will join next year.

One of my sons, CJA , had set his heart on joining the navy as soon as he attained the required age. This I permitted him to do at the age of 15 as a junior recruit.

To indicate the calibre of this lad, I should tell you that just before he left for Leeuwin, he told his mother and I that swimming had always held considerable fear for him until he beat his fear without ever a word to us. In doing so he won a full complement of life-saving awards.

At all events, his first letters from Leeuwin were not so cheerful as we had anticipated considering the enthusiasm and happiness with which he had embarked. Shortly afterwards he suggested that he felt he little in common with many of the trainees and that he was finding it very difficult to practise his faith either publicly or in private.

During his first leave he was extremely withdrawn and far from the happy boy we had known. Even so he made no complaints but asked for my assistance with finance to take a crash course in boxing. This arranged and carried out for the period of his leave, he returned to Leeuwin.

Shortly after this the torture he was undergoing became too much, and I received frantic telephone calls to help him by getting him out of the Navy.

To my everlasting shame and the distress of his mother, I doubted matters could be as he described them and told him to stiffen his back.

The calls became more frequent and he was clearly in terror. He described the nightly beatings - the gauntlet run between rows of bullies and their attendant cronies wielding heavy boots and belts.

I then took action by contacting the Catholic Chaplain and demanding he look into it. This proved more unsatisfactory than I would have believed possible.

While I was still considering my course of action, the lad took matters into his own hands. I must say, in due fairness, that the Officers at Leeuwin, from the Commodore down, afforded me every courtesy and every assistance in subsequent discussions and actions. Moreover, every officer with whom I spoke and who had had contact with my son, said that he had persevered in his duty and had been an excellent recruit.

On being granted a discharge, CJA very ably managed a small business I obtained for him, then joined another branch of the services, in which he has already achieved the trade he desired.

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As Press Secretary to Queensland's Minister for Education, Mr. A. R. Fletcher, M.L.A., I am very well aware of the heavy load of duties borne by a Minister and I therefore let matters drop without further comment.

Last year, while holidaying at Caloundra, the owner of the flats where my family stayed noted another of my growing sons and volunteered the advice that we shouldn't allow him to join the Navy... 'because her son had gone to Keewatin and she was receiving pathetic pleas to get him out and she was at her wits end as to what to do'

Of course I advised her, but again, with no credit to myself I failed to do more.

With all due respect, sir, I believe there must be very good reason for an enquiry in depth into the matter of the brutalities inflicted upon junior recruits by older recruits at that establishment.

Yours faithfully,

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