



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

### Statement

**Name** CJV  
**Address** Known to the Royal Commission  
**Date** 24 May 2016

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.

### Introduction

3. My full name is CJV . I was born in 1957 and I am 58 years old.
4. I was born in Fremantle and raised on a farm REDACTED in Western Australia. I am the eldest of five siblings.
5. In May 1972, when I was 14 years old, I decided to apply to join the Army Apprentice School to study a trade in electronics as my parents couldn't afford to send me to university. At the time, joining the Army seemed like a perfect way to finish my education and establish a career.
6. In October 1972, I travelled to Perth to sit the entrance exam for the Army. In addition to a written academic exam, I undertook a physical and psychological test. Part of the psychological exam focused on whether or not I was attracted to women. I understood that this was because the Army did not accept homosexuals at the time.

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7. Later that year, I received a letter informing me that I had been accepted into the electrical apprenticeship at the Army Apprentice School, Balcombe in Victoria (**Balcombe**). I was part of Balcombe's 28<sup>th</sup> intake of apprentices.
8. On 17 January 1973, at the age of 15 years, I was formally enlisted in the Army.

#### **The Army Apprentice School, Balcombe**

9. When I arrived at Balcombe, I was assigned to my 'Company'. There were five companies at Balcombe. Companies A, B, C and D each contained a mix of first and second year apprentices. E Company contained the third year apprentices. I was assigned to B Company.
10. B Company contained apprentices from the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> intakes. The apprentices from the 27<sup>th</sup> intake were in the second year of their apprenticeships. We referred to them as the seniors.
11. Each company was divided into three platoons, each comprising around 50 apprentices. B Company was made up of 4, 5 and 6 platoons. I was placed in 5 platoon.
12. My platoon sergeant was a man named Sergeant Chris CARTER. Sergeant CARTER was a veteran of the Vietnam War. He was responsible for instructing us on military drills during the day. He was tough but fair. I respected Sergeant CARTER a lot and was grateful that he was our platoon sergeant.
13. The barracks for A, C and D companies were essentially a large open dormitory with rows of about ten to twelve beds down each wall with no partitions between the beds. We referred to these barracks as "guts huts."
14. The barracks for B Company were different to the "guts huts". B Company stayed in small rooms connected by a wide veranda along the front. Each room could sleep two apprentices. We referred to these rooms as "dongas."

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15. When I first arrived at Balcombe, I shared a donga with an apprentice from Tasmania, who was discharged after a couple of weeks. I can't recall why he was discharged, however the result was that I slept alone in my donga for the remainder of my first year at Balcombe. I believe being alone in my donga at night made me an easy target for the abuse that I later suffered at Balcombe.

#### **Supervision in the barracks and the apprentice hierarchy**

16. Staff members never stayed in the barracks with the apprentices during the night. They slept in their own officer barracks or off base with their partners if they were married. The only time I saw a staff member in the barracks was at around 9pm, when a duty sergeant would walk around and order "lights off". The physical and sexual abuse that I experienced at Balcombe almost always occurred in the evening after lights out when there were no staff around.

17. A senior apprentice slept in the donga next to mine. He was the Hut Corporal of our barracks. Hut Corporal was not an official Army rank. It was an unofficial title given to a senior apprentice who was responsible for any issues in the barracks when the staff were not around.

18. There was a well-entrenched hierarchy between the apprentices at Balcombe. I quickly learned that as junior apprentices we had to do whatever the senior apprentices told us. The senior apprentices used to make us polish their boots, do their laundry and fetch their food from the canteen or mess. I didn't mind this as I understood it was part of testing us out as soldiers. However, what I didn't like was the physical beatings we received if we didn't do what we were told.

19. The senior apprentices were often drunk at night time. There was a second year apprentices' bar at Balcombe which served beer to senior apprentices over the age of 16. The senior apprentices would often spend their evenings at the bar and return drunk to our barracks just before lights out.

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20. On one occasion during my first year at Balcombe, my Hut Corporal called me over to him and punched me hard in the chest. The force knocked me to the ground. I said to him "What did you do that for?" to which he replied "No reason." I was shocked and in pain.
21. On another occasion, I was held down by about six senior apprentices while the other senior apprentices beat the shit out of me. My Hut Corporal was one of the senior apprentices that beat me on that occasion.
22. I didn't report these incidents to anyone. The normal chain of command would require me to report the incident to my Hut Corporal first, but I couldn't because he was one of the apprentices that had assaulted me. I didn't report the incidents to a member of staff because I knew that if the senior apprentices found out that I had "dobbed", I would have been subjected to worse beatings. I didn't want to create further trouble for myself. I just wanted to get through this first year.
23. The Army was aware of the physical assaults by senior apprentices on junior apprentices at Balcombe at the time. There was an incident at Balcombe in early 1973 involving a junior apprentice who was badly beaten by four senior apprentices. The incident made it into the newspapers and the senior apprentices were disciplined and discharged [IND.0366.001.0026].

#### Sexual Abuse at Balcombe

24. Not long after starting at Balcombe, I woke up one night to find two senior apprentices in my donga. They were standing at the end of my bed and playing a game which they called "gotcha". This involved them grabbing my genitals and saying "gotcha". As a naïve 15 year old boy, I didn't know what to do. I tried to fight them off but they were older and bigger than me. I was scared. They then tipped my bed over so that I fell out onto the floor. This was a practise that I came to know as "arseholing". They then upended my locker so that my clothes went everywhere and then they left the room.

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25. The next day, the senior apprentices who had sexually assaulted me did not say anything to me about what had happened. I didn't report the incident to anyone. I was too scared that it would lead to further abuse.
26. For the remainder of my first year at Balcombe, I was woken almost every weeknight by the same senior apprentices grabbing or pulling at my genitals. Once I woke up on the floor with the bed tipped on top of me.
27. Often I woke up to see one of the senior apprentices sitting on the end of my bed leering at me. I believe that more happened to me on those occasions but my memory has perhaps deliberately blocked them out.
28. I grew to hate night times at Balcombe. I would lay awake at night time with my hands over my genitals to protect myself. I could hear the voices of the seniors as they walked backed from the senior apprentices' bar. I heard their footsteps coming towards my donga and outside my door. I would lay there terrified, waiting for them to come in. I knew I couldn't do anything to stop them and no one was there to protect me.
29. I never reported the sexual abuse to any of the staff members at Balcombe. I was scared that if I reported, the abuse from senior apprentices would get worse. I didn't want to appear weak and I felt humiliated about what the senior apprentices were doing to me.
30. Despite the fact that he slept in the room next to mine, my Hut Corporal never intervened to protect me from the other seniors. He must have heard what was happening to me.

#### **Life after Balcombe**

31. I never experienced any physical or sexual abuse after my first year at Balcombe.
32. In 1974, I moved into the second year of my apprenticeship. That year, I had access to the senior apprentices' bar and started drinking heavily. Looking back, I think that was my way of coping with life at Balcombe after what had happened to me. I never participated in physical assaults on other junior apprentices during my second year at Balcombe.

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33. In 1975, I moved into E Company which was for third year apprentices only. The E company barracks were separate from the first and second year apprentice barracks. I didn't experience any physical or sexual abuse during this time.
34. In December 1975, I graduated from Balcombe as an electronics technician.
35. I remained in the Army for another 6 years. In late 1981 I did not opt to re-enlist in the army at the end of my nine year term. I was officially discharged on 16 January 1982.

#### Disclosure of abuse

36. Around 1977, while I was posted to an Army base in Queensland, I started to reflect on what happened to me at Balcombe. I was still ashamed and developed low self-esteem and trust issues with other men. I became reclusive, unmotivated and depressed. As a result, I was referred to an Army psychologist. I visited the psychologist a number of times but I didn't feel I could tell him about the sexual abuse at Balcombe. As a result, he diagnosed me as having some personal issues relating to my family. I knew that my depression was related to the sexual abuse that I suffered, not issues with my family.
37. I didn't know who to talk to about the abuse, or how to talk about it. Instead I drank heavily and managed as best I could despite continuing anxieties around sleeping and trust issues with men.
38. Around June 2014, I saw a program on TV about the sexual abuse of women within the Australian Defence Force Academy. That was turning point for me. It made me really angry that sexual abuse was still happening in the Defence Force and I thought, "it's time that people know exactly what happened at Balcombe and if these women are brave enough to come forward, then I can too."
39. Around that time, a friend told me about the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce (DART), but by the time I contacted DART, I was told that they were no longer accepting complaints from survivors.

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40. In August 2014, I went to see my psychiatrist and was diagnosed as suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of the sexual abuse at Balcombe.
41. In January 2016, I sought legal advice to initiate a civil claim for compensation against the Department of Defence for the physical and sexual abuse that I suffered at Balcombe. That claim is still ongoing.
42. I know that compensation can't make up for what happened to me at Balcombe. However, I want to make Defence take notice that this sort of thing is unacceptable now and was unacceptable back then. I feel that if Defence is faced with compensation claims then they have a financial imperative to ensure that sexual and physical abuse no longer occurs in the Australian Defence Force.

#### Impact of abuse

43. To this day, I am still anxious at night time. I have had trouble with my sleeping habits for many years. For many years I slept with my hands over my genitals. I am still very sensitive to noise in my room at night time. My wife has told me that I would often wake up in the middle of the night yelling "get out!" or "who's there?!" This occurred as late as last year.
44. I have always been uncomfortable with male bosses throughout my career. I am generally more comfortable with female superiors than with male superiors in the workplace.
45. I have been diagnosed with depression and PTSD and I continue to see a psychologist every few weeks.
46. Ever since my second year at Balcombe, when I was 16 years old, I started to drink heavily. Drinking has helped me cope with the effects. I still drink heavily today.

#### Recommendations for the Royal Commission

47. I believe that the Army knew about the physical abuse that was going on at Balcombe. They knew full well about the incident which led to the newspaper articles concerning the  
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four senior apprentices that beat up juniors at Balcombe in 1973. I believe the Army also knew that those who reported were subject to further physical abuse for "dobbing".

48. I think that there should have been an education program in place to inform staff and apprentices about acceptable behaviour in the barracks. I also think there should be a reporting mechanism that enables soldiers to report physical or sexual abuse without feeling like they will only make themselves a target for further abuse.

49. I am angry when I hear that abuse still occurs within the Australian Defence Force. If the Army had taken things seriously back in 1973, it would have been stamped out.

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Date: .....

24 MAY 2016

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24<sup>th</sup> May 2016