

## **Senate Inquiry into the use of the Quinoline antimalarial drugs Mefloquine and Tafenoquine in the Australian Defence Force.**

To whom it may concern,

I am currently 40 years old that is now a discharged member of the Australian Defence Force living in Townsville. I served in the Australian Defence Force from September 1995 through to my discharge in April 2006. During my time in the ADF I was posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) that was chosen to be a part of the Australian Malaria Institutes (AMI) Mefloquine and Tafenoquine trials conducted while on deployment to East Timor from October 2000 through to April 2001. I have requested and received my malaria trial paperwork and can confirm that I was given Mefloquine for the period of that deployment including a period before deployment when I was given a "loading dose".

While I was a soldier in 1RAR I was told that the ADF's policy for anti-malarial prevention while working in an area of operations that was malaria effected, was to give troops a drug called doxycycline which we were familiar with as it had been given to us while working in jungle environments while on exercise throughout Australia.

Towards the middle of the year in 2000 we were called to parade where our Commanding Officer LT COL John Caligari, announced to us that the Battalion had been placed on standby and was going to deploy to East Timor for operations before the end of the year. At that stage the whole Battalion erupted in cheers, excited in the prospect that we were going to have a chance to put all of the training that we had been doing into practice. When the cheers had died down it was at this point that LT COL John Caligari stood in front of us and informed us that the 1RAR Battalion Group would be a part of a medical trial of a new anti-malaria drug. At that point surrounded by 700 odd men, I reckon you could have heard a pin drop. Absolute dead silence, everyone was just looking at each other. LT COL John Caligari then said that everyone will be apart of the trial and if you didn't want to be part of the trial your ethics as a team member and team player would be called into question and you would not deploy with the Battalion. Again, dead silence. I remember turning to my mate next to me and whispered "well I guess we're going on the trial". He turned to me and under his breath said "yep, we've all just been voluntold, I'm glad we got a say in it". We were told in no uncertain terms, if you don't go on the trial, you will not deploy. This came from our Commanding Officer, LT COL John Caligari. At this point someone spoke up and asked about the side effects of this new drug. We were told that as little as 1 in a 100 people 'may' experience a 'small' amount of depression or anxiety but this would disappear when the drug was stopped. When we started the pre-deployment medical regime for AMI this was what we got told as well. Basically, we got told that depression and anxiety were the only two side effects and there may be a chance we could develop a build up of some chemical imbalance in the back of our eyes, but if we did experience it, not to worry about it because it would disappear when we ceased the drug on return to Australia. They also said that the chances of it happening to you were extremely minimal.

When the pre-deployment training was coming to a conclusion in early October 2000 I was apart of a group of soldiers that were required to take what was known as a 'Loading Dose' of these trial drugs. This "Loading Dose" consisted of us taking one tablet a day for three to four days in a row. We were told this was the normal way that the drug was taken to build up the bodies defences to malaria before entering East Timor. From research that has been undertaken, this is not the correct way that the drug is to be taken. A loading dose is not to be taken unless the person does not have the required time to take the one tablet a week for preceding weeks leading up to entering the malaria prone area. As I stated before, we were given a warning order about the deployment in the first half

of 2000 and not deploying until mid to late October, which gave AMI more than enough time to be able to deliver the drug in the correct manner. At no stage while we were given this loading dose were we monitored by AMI more than them watching us take the drug to ensure that it had been taken. I don't recall them at all asking if we were having any side effects, although myself and a lot of people in my platoon at this stage started saying that they were having very vivid, lucid and violent nightmares.

At no stage was I informed by the Australian Malaria Institute (AMI) or the Australian Defence Force (ADF), that the drugs that were being trialled on me were in anyway shape or form going to have any long term health effects on me.

Once we had been deployed to our Area of Operations within East Timor more people in my platoon started having these nightmares. I was still experiencing them myself but they mainly happened on Sunday through to Wednesday nights, the worst of the dreams were on Sunday nights. We all slowly worked out that these dreams came from the trial drugs as we were required to parade on Sunday mornings and take the drug. We would joke about the dreams that we were going to have later that night. Throughout the tour I got these extremely violent nightmares where I had visions of myself getting extremely angry which resulted in me hurting and killing people in various ways and not just random people but people that were close to me, friends and family. Never in my life up to this point had I ever experienced nightmares like this. It was quite frightening and disturbing waking up to this. One of the guys in my platoon that was suffering quite badly from these nightmares, one night got up through the night grabbed his weapon, loaded it and walked to where our platoon commander was sleeping and then at this stage, he then woke up standing above a very concerned looking platoon commander. Throughout the tour the dreams/nightmares continued as well but over time I started to develop ringing in my ears that slowly got worse and worse. It was after this tour that I was diagnosed with tinnitus in my left ear, which is now known as a side effect from Mefloquine. While in a small town called Tonabibie on the East Timor Border I had an incident while walking back from gun piquet, on a Sunday night (night time guard duty). While walking down from the guard tower I started to feel weird and dizzy. I stopped for a moment and then had to sit down as I started to get vertigo. This lasted for about 2-3 minutes which ended up with me on my hands and knees dry reaching. In the morning I reported to my company medic about it and all I got from him was he asked if it was still happening. When I said no he said 'good, your all cured then'. This happened a couple of times throughout the tour but after the first time reporting it to the medic, I thought of it pointless reporting it again after what his response had been the first time. Vertigo is now known to be a side effect of Mefloquine.

As the tour continued, I and other people in the platoon noticed that we all were getting very edgy, not having very much patience and some people just snapping with outbursts of anger. We just put it down to the pressure of the tour, living in very confined quarters with so many guys, not sleeping very well due to the nightmares, having no time off and just wanting to get home.

When we did return home from the tour, we were given a couple of checks from AMI that lasted less than 10 minutes each, an eye test and then sent on our way. A couple of months later we received a letter from AMI that said you had no side effects and you were all good. It's not surprising that no one can find that paperwork in our trial documents though.

After 17 years, I still suffer from these outbursts of anger for no reason, depression varying from slight through to suicidal thoughts, unwanted thoughts of hurting people, anxiety and edginess, lack of patience, mood swings and constant tinnitus in my left ear.

The unwanted thoughts are something that I really hate. I can just be standing there talking to a friend, work mate or family member and from out of nowhere I'll get a fleeting thought come into my mind of what if I just did something violent to them right then and there. If I'm holding a shifter

or a piece of timber in my hand that I've been working with, what if I just smashed this into their heads or into their throat as hard as I can, what would it do? It only lasts for a couple of seconds then it's gone but it still scares me when it happens, thankfully I have never acted on it and hopefully never will. The depression and anxiety started more or less straight after we got back from the tour. Massive bouts of it for no reason. At that stage I was 21 years old in the prime of my life with no real issues to be concerned about. I hadn't seen anything on tour that would have mentally affected me in anyway, I have had a very good up ringing and family life with everything I could have asked for. I couldn't work out why I was getting like this. It was later in 2001 that I turned to using mainly marijuana (but also other drugs-ecstasy, cocaine, LSD) and alcohol to stop my mind from going into these dark places. This drug and alcohol use turned into addiction pretty quickly as I felt that I had no one to talk to about this due to if I let the army know that I was having mental issues I thought would have been given a medical discharge out of the army or discharged through illegal drug use. Another of the issues that I've had very big trouble with is outbursts of anger. Before being on this drug I had never been even remotely like this. For no reason I feel angry, aggressive and I am very irrational and blunt towards people even if it's family and friends. I've had more than a few people mention to me while at work that I can be a 'short tempered bastard'. These anger outbursts had a massively detrimental impact on my life in September 2016.

While having a conversation about the direction of our relationship with my partner of 5 years, I had one of these outbursts of anger which lead to a very heated argument that resulted in her walking out of our relationship, a neighbour calling the police, then a heated argument with the police which ended with me being tazered 4 times, a gun being drawn on me, being wrestled to the ground and charged with 2 counts of serious assault on police and one count of wilful damage. This is one of the only times that I feel if I had had one of those unwanted thoughts during this time, that I would have acted on it and could have seriously hurt someone or myself. The subsequent legal proceedings continued for approximately 12 months, with the police recommending that I go to gaol for my conduct on that night. The only thing at that stage that kept me out of gaol was a very good (and expensive) solicitor and barrister. Just before the case was to go to trial, the 2 serious assault charges were dropped by police due to a lack of evidence. Before this night in September 2016 my only dealings with the police and the legal system was a very low range drink driving charge (0.6 BAC) in 2008 and a couple of speeding fines that did not result in a loss of licence.

It scares me to think that if I again have an anger outburst at the same time as I have an unwanted thought what the consequences of this could be.

It was after this that I started to look for help from DVA though counselling. Luckily this Coen-sided with DVA, FINALLY, having counselling services for veterans that were somewhat, a little easier to access. Slowly I have started to try to manage these issues that I feel have been caused by my exposure to Mefloquine on my first tour of East Timor. It has taken a long time to find out the reasons why I have these issues but the more that information becomes available, the clearer it is that I am having the same issues as other veterans are. Becoming aware of this has been through social media groups and talking to other mates that I served with that I'm still in contact with. At no stage has DVA tried to give anything other than the absolute most basic of care for me. It seems that the deny, deny, deny and wait for them to die policy is, unfortunately, still in full effect.

My issue now is how do I continue to still get help for, what I see, will be issues that I will have for the rest of my life. The conditions that I have, if they come to light in regards to my work life, I will not be able to work in my fields of choice. If my employers find out, or I put on the required medical forms that I have to fill in that I have been exposed to brain altering drugs that have life long health

effects, I will never pass a medical examination again. Remembering that now my medical records are now accessible by any doctor throughout the internet due to the current governments policy. So if this does happen, how do I pay my mortgage or support my family? What do I do about the tens of thousands of dollars that I have put into training and upskilling to be a useful member of society once I left the military that would be no longer usable. Will the government cover my costs adequately if my employers find out that I'm damaged goods or should I just continue to lie on every medical form that I fill in for applications for work that I don't have a mental health condition?

Where do I go from here?

After the way the trial was conducted, the total lack of informed consent from the participants and the long term health effects that people have suffered from these drugs I feel there should be a royal commission into the way this trial was conducted and the subsequent hearings that were conducted after it.

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