

Gist of MG's evidence

MG was questioned by Counsel to the Inquiry, Jonathan Polnay KC, in a CLOSED hearing in Autumn 2024, over approximately half a day. The following is a gist and, where possible and relevant to do so, a transcript of sections of the evidence, with any sensitive terms redacted and replaced with a gist or cipher.

MG gave evidence having contacted the Inquiry directly.

At the outset, CTI confirmed that MG had made two statements: one to the Inquiry on 18 July 2023, and one to the Inquiry on 2 July 2024.

MG provided an overview of her career. MG had been a journalist until 2012, when she retired. She had written a health column for a national newspaper and also published a number of books in this field. MG described undertaking voluntary work post-retirement, before becoming bored and obtaining a job working on a UKSF military base. MG worked on the military base between 2015 and 2018. She left as she became fed up but remained in contact with some of the individuals that she had become friendly with whilst working there.

MG said that she had two roles whilst working on the military base. The first role that MG undertook was working in the kitchen on a training camp. She described the work she undertook as heavy industrial work. Whilst working in this role MG would speak to others, including some members of UKSF. The second role that MG undertook was as a storeman. She described what this role entailed. MG, again, as part of this role came into contact with members of UKSF.

MG confirmed that she had written a book about her experiences. She said that she hadn't originally planned to publish this book but that an individual at what later became her publishing house read the book and said that they would love to publish it. MG did not think that it would be possible to publish the book. She went on to describe the process that she followed prior to publication, which included seeking approval from the Ministry of Defence ("MOD") and the Defence Security Media Advisory Committee. There were a significant number of redactions made before the book was approved. None of these redactions related to information that may impact on the reputation of UKSF.

MG confirmed that on 11 April 2022 (around a year after the book was published), she had received a letter from the MOD (UKSF) informing her that she was being considered for exclusion by the UKSF Disclosure function due to the publication of the book. MG was informed that the test for exclusion was:

"Has the individual, by any deliberate and considered action/s, placed his/her interests above [UKSF], and (or) behaved in a way which is at odds with the [UKSF] humility principle, causing actual damage, such that their position within [UKSF] is no longer considered to be tenable and exclusion is justified?"

MG stated that she was very angry upon receiving this letter and called the author to ask why she had been sent it. They said "you've upset a lot of people". MG put forward a bundle in mitigation and ultimately received a notification of Censure.

MG stated that she believed that had she mentioned Afghanistan in the book, it would have been redacted.

Prior to working at UKSF, MG described meeting [NAME3]. MG described [NAME3] telling her about detainees, being abused in both Iraq and Afghanistan:

Q Okay. Again, this is just part of your witness statement where you set out: "He talked about the way that prisoners would be treated in Iraq. I specifically recall him telling me that he would put prisoners on a forklift, raise it up and drive very fast so that they fell off. He said that he behaved in the same way in Afghanistan."

A Yes.

Q And: "He said there wasn't much to do in Afghanistan and that he did this for fun."

A Yes, I was appalled and he thought it was funny.

Q And, again, just to check, I do not want to sort of engage unfairly in a sort of textual analysis, but when it says in your witness statement that he did it "for fun", was he telling you that effectively he put prisoners on a forklift in Afghanistan or was that how you understood it?

A No, I understood that it was him or whoever he worked with.

Q Him and whoever he worked with?

A Yes, I mean, he wasn't doing anything alone, but it was something they did for fun doing this and jamming on the brakes so they fell off and I never asked him anything...

MG said that she came across [NAME3] again when she started to work at the military base and that *"he was not well liked"* and people would say he was *"the only person they would wish harm on"*.

In 2012, MG met [NAME4] who was suspended due to something that had happened in Afghanistan. MG described [NAME4] being concerned that they would be returned to their unit. MG understands that [NAME4] was ultimately returned to his unit. MG described later becoming aware of a more general fear amongst UKSF that they would be returned to their units. MG attributed this fear to a loss of status and pay, and also shame.

MG described the atmosphere when she began to work on the training camp:

Q And in your witness statement you describe the atmosphere as "coarse and feral".

A Yes.

Q Are you able to give an example or explain why it is you used those words?

A Well, Mr Polnay, I am a woman of the world. I've worked in many more places than just newspapers. I've worked in the construction industry, I've done full-time work since 1982 and I've never been anywhere that was as bad as there

and it was, I tried very hard, I was not, as it were, behaving as the person you see here now. I was aware that I was starting to need a job. I was terrified actually. You felt that people had been let off the leash somehow, that they knew that, you know, like they wore their own clothes, the soldiers I mean mostly, and you felt no one was really watching them and the language was just, I've never known the language like it. Now that was just, I understood that that's what the place was like, so I didn't, I just thought "What a place. What am I doing here?" and it was feral. Yes, it was a lot of inappropriate things that would never be allowed anywhere now between some of the talk of the men with the women there and so on. Nothing awful was happening, but it was just sexual banter, I suppose, that went on from the beginning of the day to the end.

MG also described there as being a rivalry amongst the main units of UK Special Forces that went well beyond professional rivalry. She described overhearing conversations. MG stated that people did not care what they said to her due to her status as a kitchen or store worker and so they would speak to her in a way that they may not speak to other more senior members of UKSF. She described one of the main units of UKSF as having an attitude of *"we're better than you"*. In contrast, MG said that individual sub-units would close ranks to protect a member of their own sub-unit.

With regard to her second role, within the store, MG confirmed that people would take high value items from the store and that these thefts would be issued off. MG said that when she reported that two items worth £12,000 in total had been stolen, [NAME1] told her that she was disruptive. MG described a sense of entitlement amongst members of one of the main units of UKSF. MG said that she was eventually able to stand up and say no but found this hard to do.

MG stated that [NAME1] was expected to receive a promotion but unexpectedly left before doing so. [NAME1] did not have a leaving party which MG considered to be unusual. Two years later, [NAME2] told MG that [NAME1] had left as he was under investigation for war crimes in Afghanistan. MG said that she asked [NAME2] about some comments that she had seen online by an ex-member of UKSF who said that allegations about UKSF committing war crimes in Afghanistan were untrue. [NAME2] told MG that he knew the allegations were true as he was there.

Whilst working on the military base, MG met [NAME5]. [NAME5] told MG that *"we are all under investigation from this Afghanistan thing"*. MG stated that she kept in touch with [NAME5] after she left the military base and in 2021 [NAME5] told her he was leaving the military base stating *"that's it, I'm packing up, I'm leaving, I can't be doing with dealing with these people"* and *"everything's in the garden, I'm burning it all"*.

MG had also met [NAME6] whilst working on the military base. [NAME6] told MG that they had been dismissed due to taking medication. [NAME6] told MG that he was disturbed by the culture in Afghanistan.

Q When he said "culture" are you able to help a bit more about what he might have meant by that?

- A Yes, we did actually have a conversation where he brought up the book Lord of the Flies and I'm sure people know that, where it was just a group of men really who were, he felt, threatened by them. I think he was quite a sensitive soul and indeed we talked a bit about the fact that I found, as I have said earlier here today, it difficult and feral and we talked about whether that was us, whether it was my upbringing that made something normal seem shocking and he was a bit the same about Afghanistan but not about, but about the people that he was working with.*
- Q And that is what I just wanted to check you were referring to when you say the culture and the Lord of the Flies type culture.*
- A Yes.*
- Q That was the people he was working with ----*
- A Yes.*
- Q -- not, for example, the people who might have been the people he was fighting against.*
- A Oh no.*
- Q The people on his side he was talking about.*
- A Absolutely, but that it was, he felt that he, well I remember something he said which isn't here, but he said "At least back in [location removed] you can go home at the end of the day", he said, "but we're stuck out there with all these people we work with who have just sort of gone wild".*
- Q "Gone wild". And I think you say that he described being "intimidated and scared"?*
- A Yes.*
- Q That there were "people [that] he did not want to let down"?*
- A Yes, that's right, yes.*
- Q And he said that "... people did what they were told as there were promotions coming up".*
- A Yes.*

Evidence concluded.