

DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION (DFWA)

CURRENT ISSUES

RELEASE OF SERVICE RECORDS BY THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (3 Mar 10)

The Association is following up its serious concern over the current practice of the National Archives making available to the general public the service records of members and former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) during the "open access period" as defined in the Archives Act 1983.

The Association understands that the current practice is that any member of the public, upon payment of the prescribed fee, can obtain a copy of the entire service record of any ADF member or ex-member where that record is in the open access period.

A recent case brought to our attention revealed that not only were the details of the ex-member's service history (such as dates of enlistment and discharge, promotions, service postings and duties performed in such postings) supplied, but also personal details such as confidential performance reports and medical history records.

•This was done without any reference to the ex-serviceman concerned and we believe the release of such personal information to be a gross invasion of the ex-serviceman's privacy.

Our further understanding is that while the National Archives, under the "open access period" rule, must make available to the public all such personal and private records, it will not reveal the identity of the person who has made application for access to such records, nor does it appear that it has any control over the purpose for which those records will be used.

•It would seem there is a clear imbalance of privacy interests in operation here?

In the Association's view some parts of a serviceman's record should not be open to unrestricted public scrutiny. We submit that confidential performance reports and medical records are of a private and personal nature, and others such as disciplinary records and course training reports and results could also be similarly regarded.

The Association is following up on this matter at the highest levels and will provide an update when further information is available to us.

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