Hazing in the ADF: A Culture of Denial?
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ABSTRACT

Hazing, or bastardisation, has been the subject of repeated scandal in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for at least 40 years. At its most serious, as documented in the 2011 Piper Report, hazing is clearly criminal behaviour. This article uses the techniques of criminology to explore hazing as a group social practice in the ADF, and considers whether the response of the ADF to hazing can be characterised as collective denial.
It is important to treat hazing patients as victims of violent crime.

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Introduction: ‘A personal dignity’

Reflecting on the remarkable fighting qualities of the men he had commanded during the First World War, General Sir John Monash wrote:

The democratic institutions under which he was reared, the advanced system of education by which he was trained — teaching him to think for himself and to apply what he had been taught to practical ends [meant that] ... mentally the Australian soldier was well endowed. In him there was a curious blend of capacity for independent judgement with a readiness to submit to self-effacement in a common cause. He had a personal dignity all his own ... Psychologically, he was easy to lead but difficult to drive.2

Monash was neatly defining the Anzac legend, a set of characteristics which are central to the Australian national identity, a proud military heritage which is commemorated each year on Anzac Day.3

There is a darker side to Australian military culture, however. In 2012, ‘The Report of the review of allegations of sexual and other abuse in Defence: Facing the problems of the past’ was released.4 Often referred to as ‘the Piper Report’ (after the multinational law firm DLA Piper which prepared it), the document assesses claims of abuse from nearly 850 people, finding almost all of them credible:

[Al]legations received relate to sodomy, rape, and incidents of sexual assault at ADFA with other cadets looking through the window and other incidents of filming consensual sex and taking photographs. Young sailors who were sodomised were threatened with further like treatment if the incident was reported. Young women had their breasts grabbed. Young men were given ‘regimental’ showers which comprised being scrubbed with a wire brush and often thereafter ‘nuggeted’ which involved having boot polish rubbed on their genitals and anus.5
The report documents examples of cruelty and humiliation directed towards new recruits in every branch of the ADF, including its training institutions, in every decade from the 1950s. In some sectors during some periods it was endemic. Yet, until recently, the military community's response to allegations of hazing has usually been one of denial.

This article will apply techniques from the discipline of criminology to explore how the ADF and the wider Defence community have collectively responded to the exposure of hazing in the ADF.

‘Part of the ordinary routine to toughen you up’: hazing
While the Piper Report considers many forms of abuse in a wide range of contexts, this article will concentrate on ‘hazing’, also referred to as ‘bastardisation’. The term ‘hazing’ will be used, except in direct quotations, as ‘hazing’ is more widely understood than ‘bastardisation’, which has other meanings and is used in this sense only in Australia.

Hazing refers to the practice of established members of a group engaging in systematic and often ritualised abuse of new entrants to that group. The particular forms of abuse vary. Common forms include physical beating, burning or branding, sexual assault, the forced consumption of foul or toxic substances, forced over-exercise and confinement in small spaces. Dangerous over-consumption of alcohol is often associated with all these practices. Hazing has occurred across cultures and institutions, including universities, sports teams, criminal gangs, and the armed forces.

Hazing may be primarily psychological, but often involves the infliction of physical pain and the deliberate humiliation of the newcomer. While unusual, it is not unknown for hazing to cause serious injury or even death. More commonly it causes emotional harm to its victims, some of whom develop mental health and/or drugs and alcohol problems. Some victims leave the organisation. Others stay, and perhaps become abusers themselves. Some are so traumatised that they take their own lives.

Hazing is a resilient cultural practice in military organisations. Credible studies have documented hazing in the armed forces of the United States, Canada, South Korea, Russia, the Philippines, Brazil and Norway. There is no reason to think that the ADF would be immune from such practices.
The Piper Report notes that:

The majority of complaints received by the Review from young people have involved bastardisation of various kinds. This has ranged from making life temporarily uncomfortable to savage and repeated assaults that, if they occurred in the civilian population, could properly be regarded as criminal offences.¹⁵

The report assessed hundreds of specific allegations, some with accompanying photographic evidence, of cruel and humiliating hazing rituals. One man who had personally experienced hazing wrote to the inquiry: ‘At RMC Duntroon in 1983 the physical and mental abuse I (and others of my year) experienced was shocking by any measure. I am tormented by it still to this day.’ He described a photograph of one ritual:

Here shown is a cadet being held down by his hands and feet by several other cadets. His groin has been forcefully smothered with Metsal (a liniment ointment similar to Dencorub, it causes excruciating burning pain when applied to genitals). The cadet subject of the activity is being bucketed with a concoction comprising human excrement and a multitude of other things (coffee, vegemite, sour milk, and the like). This is but just one of the types of conditioning activities cadets were subjected to on a daily basis.¹⁶

The Piper Report is an important document in the history of the ADF because it provides credible and authoritative confirmation of the reality and extent of hazing. However, few of its findings are unprecedented. Credible allegations of hazing in the ADF recur, year after year. A cursory search of the NewsBank media database¹⁷ tells the story of the recent past: ‘Brutality inquiry extends deadline - Defence swamped with complaints’;¹⁸ “Defence suicides inquiry ‘overdue’”;¹⁹ ‘Suicide and bastardisation in the defence force’;²⁰ ‘Probe casts doubt on defence force behaviour – again’;²¹ ‘Inquiry slams military justice of Defence Forces’;²² ‘Defence abuse figures soar’;²³ ‘Drunken antics at Defence event’;²⁴ ‘Claims Defence hid sex assaults’;²⁵ ‘Defence sex scandal - Cadet secretly filmed liaison with colleague’.²⁶ This is by no means a complete list, and if the database had access to older records, the litany would extend back at least to the 1960s.²⁷

A 1970 inquiry conducted by Justice R.W. Fox found that hazing, with varying degrees of intensity, had occurred at the Royal Military College (RMC), Duntroon, from its creation in 1912.²⁸ The Fox Report, it is clear from subsequent inquiries, did not succeed in changing the culture at RMC Duntroon. Hazing has also
occurred at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) and many other ADF
training institutions.\textsuperscript{29} Formal inquiries have found credible evidence of hazing and
similar abuse in particular sectors of the ADF in 1971,\textsuperscript{30} 1994,\textsuperscript{31} 1996,\textsuperscript{32} 1998,\textsuperscript{33}
2000,\textsuperscript{34} 2001,\textsuperscript{35} 2002,\textsuperscript{36} 2005,\textsuperscript{37} 2006,\textsuperscript{38} 2008,\textsuperscript{39} and 2009.\textsuperscript{40} Such relentless
exposure of similar patterns of abuse begs the question: why does little seem
to change?

‘Reporting of bastardisation was useless’: cultures of denial

The idea that someone is ‘in denial’ has become a cliché of pop psychology and self-
help books. The principle is that humans often conceal from others and from themselves
ugly truths, such as addiction. The lie becomes part of the harmful condition,
trapping the person in a cycle of denial and abuse.\textsuperscript{41} However, denial is a social as
well as a personal phenomenon. It is rare that one person belonging to a generally
healthy and supportive community is in denial. Families, groups, large organisations
and even whole societies can be in denial. When denial is the collective ‘reality’,
it becomes extremely hard for an individual to challenge. A person with a drinking
problem, for example, has a bleak future if he or she belongs to a family or
workplace in which excessive drinking is the culturally sanctioned norm.\textsuperscript{42}

This tendency for established social systems, even those which are dysfunctional,
to protect themselves from change, is referred to as homeostasis. Referring to
homeostasis in families, Douglas Scaturo writes:

\begin{quote}
In its adaptive form, its function is to preserve the family from destructive
influences and alterations and to prevent disintegration by keeping a
dynamic balance within the family’s system. In its maladaptive form,
it rigidly prevents the family from making the necessary adaptations to
normative changes that generally occur and need to occur across the
family’s life cycle.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Though they are larger and more complex in their operations, social systems such
as businesses, schools, churches and government agencies demonstrate similar
patterns.\textsuperscript{44} Institutional cultures will tend to protect themselves from change.

Essential to homeostasis in dysfunctional systems is collective denial, usually
manifested in a code of silence. This may be literal silence — certain things are
just never spoken about — or silence through evasion, rationalisation and
language games. The silence even extends to victims.\textsuperscript{45} It is no coincidence that
institutions with a culture of silence, such as the Catholic church, police services
and the armed forces, tend to be both resistant to change and at high risk of
abusive practices.\textsuperscript{46}
The exact extent of hazing in the ADF is not known, partly because with rare exceptions the ADF culture has discouraged victims from reporting the abuse. According to the Piper Report, ‘The consistent story has been that reporting of bastardisation was useless in times past. Either the complainant was told to get used to it and/or it resulted in further mistreatment.’

In the past, hazing has been talked around and over, minimised and trivialised. ‘LegoLingo’, a glossary of ADFA cadet jargon first published in 1987, defines ‘bastardisation’ thus: ‘The boys having fun. Nothing whatsoever as harrowing as the Press makes out. Simply Character Building.’ The treatment of the Duntroon cadet described above was, by any objective assessment, a criminal assault. Had it been inflicted on a prisoner of war, it would probably be classified as torture. But such terms were never used by perpetrators, or indeed by victims.

The person who supplied the photographs to the Piper Report explained:

It wasn’t considered to be abuse by those involved, it was just ‘part and parcel’ of the ordinary routine to toughen you up, and to sort out whether a cadet was of the ‘right stuff’ for arduous Army service.

The Piper Report, and the many other reports preceding it, document hundreds of incidents of assault against ADF members, ranging in seriousness to the aggravated rape of a minor. While it is difficult to determine the number of ADF personnel disciplined for such assaults, the Piper Report found that ‘many people who have carried out abuse — including sexual and other assault — in the ADF have not been identified, or — if identified — have not had any significant action taken in relation to them.’

At times what might be termed ‘statistical denial’ is used to minimise the significance of the Piper Report. It is pointed out that the ADF is a very large organisation with tens of thousands of members, so multiplying that by the 60 years of the Piper Report’s scope, the number of allegations of serious abuse is comparatively small. Such arguments ignore well-known truths: that all forms of abuse are under-reported in the community; that under-reporting is particularly pronounced in relation to assaults which are degrading and/or of a sexual nature; that this trend is even more evident in environments with a strong culture of non-reporting, and greater still among male victims.

That ADF members have failed to report abuse, in part because they have had no faith that the response would be effective, and that they had a justified fear of retribution, is well documented. An investigator into misconduct at ADFA in 1998 noted that: ‘even though there was clear evidence that offences had
occurred and notwithstanding the support which the Review Team may have been able to offer, cadets were reluctant to speak out and were not prepared to submit formal complaints. Fear of retribution in the form of ostracism or victimisation or worse is a very real concern for cadets.\textsuperscript{56} Far from being a secret, the hostility and contempt held for cadets who reported misconduct by their fellows was traditionally a matter of pride. In ADFA slang, one pejorative term, ‘jacking’, could mean ‘putting yourself ahead of the team’, ‘not showing the required effort’, or ‘informing on fellow cadets’.\textsuperscript{57} To ‘cross the road’ (take a complaint about a fellow student to ADFA staff) was similarly despised.\textsuperscript{58}

Stanley Cohen, perhaps the world’s leading thinker on institutional denial, describes three main ways in which organisations attempt to deny reality. If an institution is accused of serious wrongdoing, for example the use of torture, those in authority will respond with: \textbf{outright denial} (‘torture does not happen’); \textbf{interpretive denial}, in which raw facts are conceded but the meaning is disputed, often by renaming (‘we do that — but that isn’t torture’); and \textbf{justification}: what has happened is necessary, justified by some higher purpose (‘torture is an unpleasant necessity — that’s war’).\textsuperscript{59} The controversy about the use of torture by the United States military and intelligence services has followed this pattern.\textsuperscript{60}

Several examples of the first two responses are cited above; for a great many more, see the Piper Report. What of Cohen’s third form of denial, justification? Is hazing, for all its terrible costs, somehow necessary to a military organisation?

\textbf{Does hazing serve a purpose?}

There has been surprisingly little research into hazing and its social function.\textsuperscript{61} Most explanations fall within three main themes:

1. hazing generates group solidarity
2. hazing is an expression of dominance
3. hazing allows for the selection of committed group members\textsuperscript{62}

Aldo Cimono argues that hazing is related to group renewal. Any group that wishes to continue to exist must recruit and absorb new members. However, ‘Newcomers … may take the benefits associated with being a coalition member without paying the costs of maintaining these benefits in the future.’\textsuperscript{63} According to this view, hazing is a means of raising the costs of entry to a group. It is a test of commitment and character. Are the newcomers really suitable, indeed worthy, to belong to the group? Justice Fox found that hazing at Duntroon was justified as:
... a means of absorbing the new entry ... and giving the incoming classes a corporate sense of being ... the application of considerable pressure to a new cadet is one way of ensuring that he is sufficiently robust to withstand pressure that subsequently may be applied during his military career.64

These beliefs, which Fox explicitly rejected, remain widespread. They are however, difficult to document, as they tend to be expressed informally, in personal conversations or forums such as talkback radio and the internet.65 Hazing is justified on the basis that it creates group solidarity, weeds out those who are not suitable ADF members and ‘toughens up’ those who are.66 In 2004, during a Senate inquiry into the military justice system, the Executive Director of the Australian Defence Association, Neil James, was asked by a journalist whether military discipline was ‘out of step with social expectations’. The reason for the question was the alleged failure of the ADF to adequately investigate the suicide of a junior soldier who had been racially vilified. James responded: ‘Do you want the country defended by an armed forces or a rabble?’67

Whether hazing is genuinely necessary to an effective armed forces is impossible to definitively answer without a detailed comparative study. However it can be easily demonstrated that there have been military organisations with high levels of hazing which, when put to the test, have become ‘a rabble’. One well-documented example is the armed forces of the Russian Federation in the 1990s, which were infamous for brutal hazing or dedovshchina.68 Second and third year recruits would cruelly torment ‘the weak, the timid, the fat, the mentally troubled, the effeminate’.69 Such practices may not have been a causal factor in the humiliation of Russia’s military in the First Chechnya War, but they were certainly no asset. Similarly, ill-discipline was widespread and in some times and places endemic among the United States armed forces during the Vietnam War.70 There were many causes of this problem, but lack of hazing during training cannot be blamed.71

The idea that hazing eliminates unsuitable ADF members is untenable. The ADF has formal selection criteria, and these should go a long way towards ensuring that those embarking on a military career are suited to it. If the criteria are flawed, or not properly applied, that is a matter for command to address. It defies logic as well as justice that informal and illegal abuse, inflicted on new cadets by slightly older but still immature and inexperienced cadets, will prove to be a superior selection process.
That hazing has a long tradition in the ADF is at times used to justify its continuation.\textsuperscript{72} But the fact of a practice having endured a long time does not necessarily make it either necessary or beneficial. Cohen draws the comparison between institutional denial in organisations such as the armed forces and the ‘vital lies’ characteristic of abusive families, in which everyone including the victims of abuse collude in preserving a facade of normality.\textsuperscript{73} Damaging and dysfunctional behaviours, from child abuse in families to corruption in police forces, are often very resilient within groups, with even direct victims of such offences ‘graduating’ to become offenders themselves.\textsuperscript{74}

Even accepting, for the purpose of argument, that there may be some benefit to the ADF from hazing, that benefit would have to be enormous to justify the waste of human potential, the damage to the organisation’s reputation and the very significant financial costs that hazing brings. And even that assessment ignores what the Piper Report documents so starkly: the vast costs in terms of shattered lives, ruined careers, mental health problems and needless human misery which hazing has inflicted on Australian men and women.

**Scandal and reform**

Lawrence Sherman, who has studied scandal and reform in police agencies, argues that a major public scandal about a particular police force usually occurs when malpractice has been well entrenched for a long period. Organisational dysfunction generates periodic ‘little scandals’, accusations of wrongdoing which have limited impact and which can be successfully stonewalled.\textsuperscript{75} If such scandals can be survived with little adverse consequence, this can actually encourage perpetrators to believe themselves untouchable. It is only when a number of factors coincide — particularly a large number of credible allegations and support for an inquiry by respected public figures — that the ‘little scandals’ explode into a major scandal and exposure of wrongdoing by a public inquiry. This exposure, and the damage to the organisation’s reputation, create the opportunity — not always taken — for reform.

Sherman’s model applies to the Queensland Police Service in the 1980s and the New South Wales Police Force in the 1990s. In both cases, widely rumoured corruption and misconduct had successfully been denied or deflected for decades. In both cases, unusually credible allegations supported by respected public figures surfaced when there was a window of political opportunity for an inquiry. In both cases, the reality exposed by the inquiry proved far worse than the organisation’s critics had alleged.\textsuperscript{76}
The ADF has endured decades of little scandals, and some bigger ones, in relation to hazing. Unless there is genuine and sustained cultural change in the ADF, hazing will continue, and the scandals will continue. This is a dreadful prospect. Scandal is a blunt instrument. It punishes the innocent as well as the guilty, because it punishes an entire organisation. As Sherman puts it, ‘Scandal is a public act of labeling ... a ceremony of status degradation’.77 It is, indeed, almost the only way society can punish an organisation.

Scandal results from a widespread sense among the public that the organisation has breached the important social trust placed on it, that its real, informal goals have deviated from its stated, legitimate goals.78 In policing, corrupt officers have a stated goal of preventing crime, but a real goal of committing crime.

**What of the ADF. What does it exist for?**

The men who General Monash was so proud to command on the Western Front in 1918 enlisted for many and varied reasons, but one element is neatly expressed by a Norman Lindsay recruiting poster. The scene is an Australian farm which has been captured by German soldiers, presumably after an invasion. A young man watches in horror as his father is savagely beaten. In the background a young woman is seized by leering Germans, her fate obvious. The poster demands: ‘Will you fight now, or wait for THIS?’79 Gauche to modern eyes, the poster encapsulates why Australia has a military service. The ADF exists to use force, perhaps far away, in order to preserve the safety of the Australian people. In particular, the ADF exists to protect Australians from brutality and lawless violence.
Conclusion

The Piper Report documents hazing abuse, including degrading physical assault and crimes such as rape. Perpetrators appear rarely to have been punished.80 By contrast, victims have endured further trauma for the mere fact of having been victims.81 In visiting lawless violence on Australians — moreover on Australians who are comrades in arms — the members of the ADF who engage in hazing betray the core reason for the existence of their organisation.

The experience of confronting misconduct in police forces offers hope that this can change. The experience of reform in Australian policing shows that cultural change is possible. It is slow and there are frustrating setbacks. Vested interests will fight back, and opportunist or timid political leaders will at times reverse or stall reform.82 But it can be done.

One essential element is overcoming the culture of denial. One of the tragedies of collective denial, as Stanley Cohen observes, is that it prevents the group from learning. Denial dooms us to repetition: ‘We keep on doing the same stupid, destructive things.’83 The painful process of facing, openly and honestly, the reality of abuses such as hazing must continue if Australia’s military community is to successfully meet the challenges of the future. The Piper Report represents a brave and admirable step in this direction. ■
THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

3 Richard Evans, Disasters that Changed Australia, Victory, Melbourne, 2009, Ch. 2 ‘Just slaughter’.
4 Gary Rumble, Melanie McKean, D.C. Pearce, Department of Defence and DLA Piper, ‘Report of the Review of Allegations of Sexual and Other Abuse in Defence Facing the Problems of the Past, Vol. 1, General Findings and Recommendations,’ Department of Defence, Canberra, 2011 (the report was publicly released early in 2012, and is sometimes given that date. Henceforth ‘Piper Report’).
5 Ibid., p. 73.
6 See, for example, Piper Report, p. 58.
10 Finkel, ‘Traumatic injuries caused by hazing practices’.
12 Finkel, ‘Traumatic injuries caused by hazing practices’.
15 Piper Report, p. 73.
16 Ibid., p. 76.
NewsBank (http://infoweb.newsbank.com) contains ‘Complete full-text content of more than 100 local, regional, national & international newspapers. Covers community events, schools, politics, government policies, cultural activities, local companies, state industries, and people in the community’. The search which retrieved the articles cited below was conducted on Australian newspapers, with the search terms ‘military’, ‘ADF’, ‘defence’, ‘bastardisation’, ‘bastardization’ and ‘hazing’. The database’s records for most news sources go back to 2000.

19 Trudy Harris, The Australian, 30 October 2003.
23 Jason Koutsoukis, The Sunday Age, 2 April 2006.
26 Ian McPhedran, The Advertiser (Adelaide), 6 April 2011.
27 See, for example: The Bulletin (Sydney), 6 June 1964; The Australian Women’s Weekly, 5 November 1969.
28 Committee of Inquiry into the Royal Military College (Chairman R.W. Fox), Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Royal Military College, Committee of Inquiry into the Royal Military College, Canberra, 1970 (henceforth, ‘Fox Report’).
29 These include HMAS Cerberus and HMAS Success (Piper Report, pp. 71, 97), HMAS Leeuwin (p. 80), Royal Australian Naval College, Jervis Bay (p. 88), Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka (p. 88), and the School of Infantry, Singleton (p. 89).
32 Clare Burton, Women in the Australian defence Force-two studies, Director Publishing and Visual Communications, Defence Centre, Canberra, 1996 (included consideration of sexual harassment and other abuse in training institutions).
36 Senate Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Rough justice? An Investigation into allegations of brutality in the army’s parachute battalion, Parliament of Australia, 2002 (many of the victims were recruits under training).
37 Senate Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *The Effectiveness of Australia’s Military Justice System*, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, Canberra, 2005 (one focus of the inquiry was the failure to properly investigate suicides by trainees who had possibly been subjected to hazing abuse).

38 A.M. Whiddett and B.L. Adams, *Report of an Audit of the Australian Defence Force Investigative Capacity*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2006 (found that investigative capacity was seriously inadequate, and that this was a factor in the non-reporting of abuse).

39 Senate Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, ‘Report on Reforms to Australia’s Military Justice System’, 2008 [this report included the assessment of reasons for under-reporting of hazing practices, including ‘elements within the ADF culture that tolerate bullying and harassment and other forms of victimisation of those who are perceived to be weak or who report wrongdoing’ (s 4.32).]


45 Finkel, ‘Traumatic injuries caused by hazing practices’.


47 Piper Report, p. 73.


49 See, for example, Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), S31, c1-3. Every Australian jurisdiction has similar definitions of assault.


52 Ibid, pp. 71–73 for examples.

53 Ibid., p. 121.


56 Piper Report, p. 110.

57 Ibid., p. 209.

58 Ibid., p. 110.
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61 Østvik and Rudmin, ‘Bullying and hazing among Norwegian army soldiers’.


63 Ibid., p. 246.


66 Kane McKay, ‘Where’s Help When We Need It?’, The Advertiser (Adelaide), 13 July 2013, p. 52.


68 Herspring, ‘Undermining combat readiness in the Russian military’.


70 For the most extreme example, see W.R. Peers et al., The My Lai Massacre and its cover-up: beyond the reach of law?, Free Press, New York, 1976.


72 Piper Report, p. xxix.

73 Cohen, States of Denial, pp. 6, 10, 51.

74 Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (Northern Territory), Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Board of Inquiry, Darwin, 2007.


77 Sherman, Scandal and Reform, p. 64.


79 Norman Lindsay and W. E. Smith Ltd, Will you fight now or wait for this, Commonwealth of Australia, 1918. The poster can be viewed online at: http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an14166011.

80 Piper Report, p. 51. This section of the Report is titled: ‘Defence has not been able to provide records or other information to indicate that all or even many of the perpetrators of specific abuses and/or perpetrators of specific mismanagement of allegations of abuse covered by previous Reports were called to account.’

81 Ibid., p. xxxiii.
