

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

WWW.THEAUSTRALIAN.COM.AU FOR THE INFORM

WEEKEND NEWSPAPER OF

\$3.80
AUGUST 11-12, 2018
PRINTED IN AUSTRALIA

EXCLUSIVE P35
Raising Endeavour
New bid to find James Cook's legendary ship



THE FOOD ISSUE
What's hot in 2018



MANSION
Home is where the art is



REVIEW
AFTER THE SIMPSONS
The next chapter for Matt Groening

JOHN NEWCOMBE 'You'll kill the Davis Cup' (P39) • JANET ALBRECHTSEN The pronoun wars (P19) • SPECIAL OFFER Free headphones when you subscribe (DETAILS P34)

VICTORIA CROSS RECIPIENT BEN ROBERTS-SMITH LODGES DEFAMATION SUIT AGAINST FAIRFAX MEDIA

War hero lashes his accusers

EXCLUSIVE

PAUL MALEY
DEBRIEFING EDITOR

Australia's most decorated war hero, Ben Roberts-Smith, has lashed out at a small band of disgruntled former SAS troopers who he accuses of running an anonymous smear campaign that has ruined his reputation and even him accused of everything from war crimes to violence against women.

In an exclusive, wide-ranging interview with *The Weekend Australian*, Mr Roberts-Smith broke his silence to respond to years of rumours that he abused Afghan prisoners while he was a trooper with the SASR, that he bullied and assaulted fellow troops in the field and that he was involved in an angry domestic violence incident with a young woman after a function at Canberra's Parliament House.

The Victoria Cross recipient said he had yet to be interviewed by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, who is conducting an inquiry into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan.

He added that in 20 years of military service no formal allegation of wrongdoing had ever been put to him.

Mr Roberts-Smith also gave his most thorough account yet of a battle in 2006 in which an Afghan sniper was shot dead and Mr Roberts-Smith was awarded the Medal of Gallantry for his bravery under fire.

An at-times emotional Mr Roberts-Smith said rumours and reports about his service record in Afghanistan had had a "devastating" effect on his life and family and left him in profound shock.

"My family and I sit here and wonder, what's next?" he said. "What's the next bit that's going to run in the paper? I'm not a politician, I'm not famous. I went and fought for my country, and I'm being attacked because I fought for my country and I got a medal. I just don't understand how I ended up sitting here in this position. I really don't."

The VC recipient's comments followed reports in Fairfax Media yesterday alleging he had engaged in an extramarital affair with a woman who had then accused him of domestic violence.

Mr Roberts-Smith said the truth was very different. He said that during the period in question he was separated from his wife, their marriage having come under "significant pressure".

In that time, he began a relationship with a woman who, along with Mr Roberts-Smith, attended a function at Parliament House on March 28. Mr Roberts-Smith said that, after the function, while he was summing up a car, the woman, who he said was heavily intoxicated, fell down a flight of stairs.

"When I got there, there were two federal police officers, they were basically holding her up. She had a huge lump on the top of her head and what appeared to be a scrape on the top of her eye and she said she had a sore hip."

"But she was very intoxicated to the point of being incoherent, so they were literally holding her up."



Afghanistan war hero Ben Roberts-Smith with his wife Emma on Queensland's Sunshine Coast yesterday

Mr Roberts-Smith said that, after the function, while he was summing up a car, the woman, who he said was heavily intoxicated, fell down a flight of stairs.

"When I got there, there were two federal police officers, they were basically holding her up. She had a huge lump on the top of her head and what appeared to be a scrape on the top of her eye and she said she had a sore hip."

"But she was very intoxicated to the point of being incoherent, so they were literally holding her up."

An ACT Police spokeswoman refused to say if an investigation had been initiated, or even if a complaint had been made.

Mr Roberts-Smith categorically denied any suggestion he was violent towards the woman and said he had never been contacted by the police about it.

He said he accompanied the woman to the airport the next day and even saw her a few more times before breaking off the relationship a week later.

He said the domestic violence charges against some ex-Diggers

PMs warn against rush to judgment on SAS

EXCLUSIVE

PAUL MALEY

The four prime ministers who oversaw Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan have thrown their support behind the Special Air Services Regiment, amid mounting expectations that a secretive inquiry into alleged war crimes is set to recommend charges against some ex-Diggers

John Howard lashed out at small sections of the community which he accused of wanting to demonise the military, while Tony Abbott urged prosecutors to stay their hand, should credible examples of war crimes be uncovered. Kevin Rudd said Australians who watched the war from the "comfort of their living rooms" were oblivious to the savagery of the Afghan conflict, while his Labor successor Julia Gillard spoke of the military's "profound sense of service and sacrifice".

The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence is conducting a wide-ranging "scoping" inquiry into persistent allegations that some members of the SASR and the Commandos committed war crimes, including murder, during the decade-long fight in Afghanistan. The inquiry is being conducted by NSW Supreme Court judge Paul Firestone and has been running since 2016. The inquiry's terms of reference are classified.

The Defence Force privately expects some allegations will be deemed credible, paving the way for potential criminal prosecution of some ADF members by the Australian Federal Police. The prime ministers spoke to *The Weekend Australian* last week, before Fairfax Media published new claims against Victoria Cross winner and SAS veteran Ben Roberts-Smith accusing him of bullying, intimidation and the use of force.



Roberts-Smith in Afghanistan, above, and receiving his Victoria Cross from then governor-general Quentin Bryce in 2011



LINDEN MCELREATH

Return to schools damage control

EXCLUSIVE

SIMON BENSON
NATIONAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

Malcolm Turnbull has been forced to intervene a second time to resolve the school-funding fallout and will hold crisis talks with the independent schools lobby next week following a backlash over plans to strip \$2 billion from the sector.

The meeting was organised after a revolt by independent school principals who were blocked from seeing secret government modelling given to the peak independent school associations, which claim to represent more than 1800 schools and 600,000 students nationwide.

The *Weekend Australian* understands that representatives of the independent schools in Victoria have met privately with senior ministers including Dan Tehan, Michael Sukkar and Alan Tudge, warning them that any moves to take money back from the sector could backfire on the government.

The crisis meeting with the independents comes weeks after the Prime Minister met the 59-year-old Melbourne and Brisbane Catholic archbishops to assure them that funding would be restored to the sector after a review confirmed Catholic schools had been short changed by up to \$2bn under Education Minister Simon Birmingham's Gonski 2.0 reforms.

The *Weekend Australian* understands that several senior cabinet ministers have also raised with Mr Turnbull their concerns about the electoral damage being caused by the on-going dispute with the Catholic schools sector.

The move to address the risk opens up a second front in the education funding stoush, and follows a public intervention by John Howard last week in support of the Catholic schools sector.

The former Liberal prime minister is also understood to have privately told senior Liberal Party figures that Mr Turnbull quickly needs to repair the schism with the powerful Catholic school sector which now claims to have lost confidence in Senator Birmingham.

Speaking at the opening and blessing of two residential colleges in a Catholic tertiary college in Sydney, Mr Howard delivered a veiled swipe at Senator Birmingham as he called for the Catholic sector to be treated with "fairness and justice".

"For decades after decades, Catholic education in this country received no assistance at all from the government — and I'm always proud in that context to acknowledge the extraordinary

Continued on Page 2

MORE REPORTS P2



The night Mossad struck, using fake Aussie passports

INSIDE STORY

JAMIE WALKER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Israeli assassins had missed their man once but there would be no mistake this time.

When Mahmoud al-Mabhouh stepped into his luxury hotel room on a chilly January night in Dubai in 2010 they were waiting for him.

Two powerful sets of arms held the Hamas weapons dealer, knocking his way back to the corridor. A third man, the executioner, gagged him with one hand and, with the other, pressed to Mabhouh's neck an ultrasound instrument loaded with saxanthonium chloride, a potent anaesthetic.

"The men maintained their grip until al-Mabhouh stopped struggling," writes Israeli investigative journalist Ronen Bergman, taking up the story in his new



Mabhouh

book, *Rise and Kill First*, a history of targeted assassinations by the country's spy agencies.

"As the paralysis spread through his body, they laid him on the floor. Al-Mabhouh was wide awake, thinking clearly, seeing and hearing everything. "He just couldn't move. Foam formed at the corners of his mouth. He gurgled."

"Three strangers stared at him dispassionately, still holding his arms, just in case. That was the last thing he saw."

It has taken until now, with the publication of Bergman's book in

Australia, for the full account of Mabhouh's murder to emerge, with its loaded implications for Australia's relations with Israel.

That's because four members of the 26-strong Israeli hit squad used forged Australian passports, evidently doctored from genuine documents held by Australian dual citizens living in Israel, to track and kill him after he was marked to die in what is known as Operation Plasma Screen. What

Continued on Page 8

Labor hired GetUp! strategist

EXCLUSIVE

MICHAEL MCKINNA

A veteran strategist for GetUp! was hired by Queensland Labor Deputy Premier Jackie Trad at taxpayer expense as a "temporary adviser" for last year's state election that was dominated by the left-wing activist group's anti-Adani campaign. Just a day after Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk called

the November 25 election, Josh Genner was made a senior political staffer earning about \$300 a week — on a contract that ended on the eve of the poll.

A government spokesman yesterday said the activist, whose LinkedIn profile states he is still GetUp!'s political director, worked as a media adviser for Ms Trad. But a source said Mr Genner was only hired "because of his campaign skills".

FULL REPORT P3

ROAR YOUR WAY

EXCEPTIONAL OFFERS ON ALL NEW AND DEMONSTRATOR JAGUAR E-PACE, F-PACE AND F-TYPE MODELS.

Search Jaguar Offers

THE ART OF PERFORMANCE

*Offers end 30/08/2018.



FEDERAL COURT OF AUSTRALIA

NSD 1485, 1486, 1487 of 2018

Date: 25 June 2021

Ben Roberts-Smith v Fairfax Media Publications Pty Ltd & Ors

Exhibit No: R71
Assoc: Alice O'Connell

MFI No: