

Defence leaders abandon SASR in time of need

By [cairnsnews](#)

Feb 18, 2026 [#channel 9](#), [#Nick McKenzie](#)

by Dr Kay Danes, OAM (Human Rights and Veterans Advocate)

FEB 17, 2026

When a decorated soldier stands accused, the nation watches. When that soldier is abandoned by the very institution they served with distinction, we witness not just a personal tragedy, but a profound failure of duty and loyalty.



Ben Roberts Smith VC after fighting Taliban in Afghanistan returns home to fight an enemy from within. Will the Bondi massacre by Jihadists force a switch in loyalty to Australian defence forces over Islam for Channel 9 and its reporter Nick McKenzie who have irreparably smeared the ADF?

Australian Defence chiefs once celebrated Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith's valour and pinned medals to his chest, the highest in the land. Yet those same leaders distanced themselves with unseemly haste when controversy arose. Where was the distinguished service in command that earned these Defence leaders their own medals for leadership during the Afghanistan conflict? The moral injury inflicted by this institutional desertion may prove more damaging than any courtroom verdict. When an organisation turns its back on its people during their darkest hour, it sends a chilling message to all who serve: you are expendable, your service forgotten when politically convenient. Recent revelations about secret payments and media dealings only underscore how this matter has been handled with more concern for optics than justice.

Nine pays \$700k to BRS mistress in secret deal <https://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/courts-law/nine-pays-700k-to-brs-mistress-in-secret-deal/news-story/5a3d3f6a9556e2bc098f7f7e1d3e056d>

From the moment allegations first emerged within the patrol, Command should have acted decisively according to established Defence policy: immediately refer all allegations to the appropriate lawful authorities for formal investigation, ensuring confidentiality and procedural fairness for all parties.

But they didn't.

This raises a critical question: why? Several possibilities emerge, none flattering to military leadership. Perhaps it was fear of institutional embarrassment—prioritising public image over member protection. Or maybe political pressure drove Command to appear decisive rather than follow due process. More troubling still, a formal investigation might have exposed systemic failures in oversight, training, or rules of engagement—questions that would reflect poorly on senior leadership themselves. Internal factional dynamics may have also influenced the response, with Command effectively choosing sides instead of upholding impartial justice. Or perhaps most damning: leadership simply lacked the moral courage to stand by a decorated veteran during controversy.

Whatever the reason, this failure represents a profound dereliction of responsibility with devastating consequences for Roberts-Smith and every member of the SASR community affected. A duty of care to serving members and veterans does not evaporate when controversy arises. Command should have prevented the divisive culture that emerged, emphasising that lawful investigation and due process—not rumour, media leaks, or factional division—was the proper forum for resolution. Every member of the SASR family, regardless of which side of an allegation they stood on, deserved the protection of proper military justice procedures dealt with swiftly, not left to fester for over a decade.

More troubling still, the failure appears to extend beyond mere inaction. By not immediately referring these matters to lawful authorities, Command effectively covered up serious allegations that should have been handled through established military justice channels. This deliberate circumvention prevented independent investigators from examining the facts and determining the truth. The consequences will echo through the Australian Defence Force for years to come—a cautionary tale of what happens when institutions not only abandon their people in favour of expedience, but actively obstruct the path to justice by shielding matters from proper legal scrutiny.

Journalist Nick McKenzie admits to ‘deceptive methods’ if in the public interest during Ben Roberts-Smith bid for appeal

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/may/01/secret-recording-ben-roberts-smith-defamation-appeal-nine-ntwnfb>

Failures of Command by Hugh Poate <https://www.amazon.com/Failures-Command-death-Private-Robert/dp/1742237231>

Numerous questionable court findings clearly make the case that every litigant or defendant has the Constitutional right to a jury of his peers. Editor