

Australia's SAS culture has already changed says Gavin Pearce

Braddon Liberal MHR Gavin Pearce, a veteran soldier, has spoken out to defend Australia's SAS troops.

Mr Pearce said not all SAS members should get "tarred with the one brush" because of Ben Roberts-Smith.

His comments come after a federal court judge found the Victoria Cross recipient killed civilians while serving with the SAS in Afghanistan and lied about it.

According to Pearce, who has served in East Timor alongside the SAS, Australia's special forces unit has already undergone significant changes and has a different culture today.

"It's a different cohort," he said.

Mr Pearce declined to comment on court findings regarding Roberts-Smith's failed defamation case due to the appeal process.

However, he believed the role of those who oversaw SAS operations in Afghanistan should get examined by the Brereton inquiry.

The Office of the Special Investigator was established to look at cases listed in the Brereton report, which raised allegations of the unlawful killing of 39 people in Afghanistan.

Mr Pearce said 30,000 Australians served in Afghanistan, where 41 died, and the vast majority acted professionally and did the right thing.

"When my soldiers make an error, I wear that because (as the officer in charge) I'm responsible," Mr Pearce said.

"The leader sets the culture, and if you are not watching the next level down and what's going on and you allow that culture to develop into sub-optimal culture, then you wear that as a leader."

As a corporal, he said Roberts-Smith was "relatively junior" with several ranked above him.

Mr Pearce said his heart went out to the "absolute overwhelming majority of soldiers that do nothing but the right thing" and were impacted by Roberts-Smith's actions.

"When you commit so much, it's literally your life you're committing, and someone is found guilty of an offence like that, or there's some impropriety that has taken place, it's a really big attack on you personally because you feel so strongly about doing the right thing," he said.

"I feel for the ones who have done the right thing and continue to do the right thing.

"We are continually making them go through hell and back to defend the country, and I don't want them tarred with the one brush.

"Make no mistake, members of Australia's special forces, are the most lethal professional unit we've got.

"These are our best that we send into the worst conditions you could ever imagine, but the rules of armed conflict apply, and underpin their operation as a SAS capability.

"They are there to kill or capture the enemy adhering to the orders for opening fire and the rules of armed conflict, and that's a pretty serious ask."

Mr Pearce said he'd seen the change in SAS culture.

VICTORIA CROSS 'SHOULDN'T GET REVOKED'

Ex-Prime Minister Scott Morrison sent him and other senior veteran MPs to visit the SAS unit after the Brereton inquiry announcement.

"The last time I saw SAS troops before that was serving with them in East Timor, and I saw a lot of young blokes with plenty of gear and attitude," Mr Pearce said.

"What I see today is something very different; I see the most professional, selfless Diggers."

Mr Pearce said he resonated with comments made by King George V years ago, who opposed revoking a VC.

"King George said that even if a soldier is found guilty in a court of law of being a criminal, they still won the VC for their gallantry and can wear that VC as we execute them, and that to me says a lot," he said.

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Article by Libby Bingham