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The case of Ranger Paul Cochrane

Paul Cochrane was a soldier in the 1st battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR). He died on 30 July 2001 at Drumadd Army Barracks in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. Ranger Paul Cochrane had dreamed of becoming a soldier since childhood. He had been in the RIR for less than two years, and at Drumadd Army Barracks for about six weeks before his death. According to his parents, Paul Cochrane was to be one of the youngest men, if not the youngest, put forward for promotion to Junior NCO (non-commissioned officer).

He was only 18 years of age when he reportedly took his own life by shooting himself in the mouth while speaking on the telephone with his father. Ranger Paul Cochrane left three suicide notes. One of the notes states that he had been forced into a corner by "bad men" and "I want you to get these people for forcing me into this corner, mum". The parents of Ranger Paul Cochrane told Amnesty International that one note also refers to an audiotape on which they believe their son had secretly taped a meeting he had had in the afternoon prior to his death with a senior military officer. There is contradictory evidence as to what happened to the tape; it was reported that three days after his death a tape was discovered mangled and unintelligible in the grounds of the Drumadd Army Barracks.

Ranger Paul Cochrane had been deemed unfit for duty in the days immediately preceding his death because of a severe ear infection of which he had been complaining for five weeks. Several tests carried out by Army medical personnel and non-Army doctors had confirmed his illness. Ranger Paul Cochrane had sought permission from the military authorities to go on home leave. However, his request had been denied.

Ranger Paul Cochrane's parents have expressed their concern to Amnesty International at the circumstances surrounding their son's death. They told the organization that neither they nor other soldiers and friends of their son had any indication that he had been severely depressed or in a suicidal frame of mind in the days preceding his death. In particular, the parents of Ranger Paul Cochrane are questioning why he was so frightened; why he had possession of a weapon when he had been deemed unfit for duty; and what happened to the tape.

"Today, we still have had no explanation as to why a happy, talented boy should shoot himself."
William Cochrane, Paul Cochrane's father.

Paul Cochrane's parents have also expressed their concern to Amnesty International that the military authorities' investigation into the circumstances surrounding their son's reported suicide was wholly inadequate. An inquest into the circumstances surrounding Ranger Paul Cochrane's death has

been scheduled for September 2003. The initial investigation was conducted by the SIB with the assistance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. A separate SIB investigation into his death concluded that there was insufficient evidence of his having been subjected to ill-treatment. The Army Board of Inquiry began its work reportedly in May 2002 and completed it a year later. This inquiry focussed specifically on training and procedures and reportedly omitted any possible military leadership issues linked to Ranger Paul Cochrane's death from its scrutiny. The Inquiry Board's report did not contain the report of the SIB investigation. Moreover, the parents have not been given other relevant reports, including forensic reports.

In recent weeks, the MoD has reportedly launched an investigation into the command structure concerning serious allegations attesting to a climate of bullying, harassment and negligence by senior officers in failing to uphold their duty of care to their subordinates. The allegations centre on the regime of a particular RIR Colonel and his time at Drumadd Army Barracks, including at a time of Ranger Paul Cochrane's death. It has been reported in the media that questions raised at the Army Board of Inquiry into the circumstances of Paul Cochrane's death prompted the MoD's move. Neither the family nor the lawyer has been informed by the MoD of this development.

Since the death of their son, Paul Cochrane's parents have campaigned to reform the way in which deaths in the military are investigated. His family believes that his death was brought about by bullying and intimidation.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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