

“We want a full public inquiry into all non-combat deaths”

Lynn Farr, mother of dead British soldier, speaks to the World Socialist Web Site

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In the past 10 years 1,750 personnel in the British army have died in “non-combat situations”. Some were suicides, some “unexpected deaths”, some were murder and many were the result of bullying and abuse.

Lynn Farr is the mother of Daniel Farr, an 18-year-old trainee soldier at Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire, who died under suspicious circumstances on June 10, 1997. Since his death Lynn has campaigned tirelessly for a proper investigation into the death of her son. Along with other bereaved families, she has set up an organisation—*Deepcut and Beyond*—to demand a full and open public inquiry into all non-combat deaths in the British army.

Lynn contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* after reading the article “Scores of deaths in British barracks unaccounted for”. She spoke to Barbara Slaughter at her home.

She explained, “I am not anti-military. My dad served in the trenches in the First World War and my mum’s brother was killed on the Somme.

Daniel had always wanted to go into the infantry—the Prince of Wales Own Regiment of Yorkshire. He joined up in June 1996 and the recruitment officer at Hull told my husband that he got the highest possible rates in his test. He went up to Glencorse in Scotland for his Phase One training and then came to Vimy Barracks at Catterick Garrison in Yorkshire.

He went through the stage of being homesick, as I think every soldier does. There is a “cut-off” date before which they can leave the army without any problems. Captain Foster Brown rang and said it would be a shame if he left because his shooting abilities were phenomenal—his night shooting marks were top of his platoon. And so between us we talked him round to stay in and he seemed to settle down.

Then the week before he died we got a phone call to say he was trying to make his way home. He had got to Scarborough and must have run out of money and was trying to walk the rest of the way. He said he wanted to talk to me and asked me to go on my own to pick him up. But I had no one to leave my younger son Patrick with, so he came as well and Daniel refused to talk to me. I took him straight back to camp and he took a bag of my shopping with him so the guards would think he had just been down to the shops.

The following Friday I picked him up at York station and I saw that he was limping terribly. He told me he had this pain in his back, so I took him straight to York hospital. I asked him, “Why haven’t you reported it at work?” and he said, “They wouldn’t have let me out.” He told them he had a stress fracture in his leg and they said that was probably causing the problem. On Sunday night I took him back to Catterick.

The next morning he was rushed to hospital. There were marks on his body, which were brown, not the colour of a bruise. I asked what they were and was told they were “webbing burns”. At Northallerton Hospital

they asked me what the marks were and I said I didn’t know. The sergeant and corporal were outside the door the whole time. At the time I thought nothing of it, because all this was new to me.

Six years after Daniel died, I managed to track down his post-mortem report. It said that all his organs were fine. The only part that was affected was his lungs. He had bilateral pneumonia—that’s fluid on both lungs. It also said that the pneumonia was the secondary infection and the primary infection couldn’t be found.

He was transferred to St James’ Hospital in Leeds, where microbiologists, orthopaedic surgeons and other consultants, examined him and they couldn’t find anything. They gave him different antibiotics, but nothing made any difference. They did everything possible.

Because Daniel died in St James, the Leeds coroner was involved and he wanted an inquest. But within three hours, Jeremy Cave, the North Yorkshire coroner, was on the phone saying he had taken the case over because Daniel had been stationed at Catterick and an inquest was not necessary. So we agreed because we were so numb when it was only a couple of days since he had died.

Jeremy Cave had dealt with the majority of deaths at Catterick up to the year 2000, where the majority of the results had been open verdicts, suicides or natural causes. In February 2003 Cave was sentenced to three years imprisonment for fraud and maladministration of his solicitor’s practice.

I have been very concerned about this, thinking if he had problems there it could overspill into other matters, but no one would listen to me.

When my son died the army was very good at his funeral. But afterwards we never had any further contact with them at all.

Three months after Daniel died another young lad called Merridith went to bed with pains in his chest and was found dead.

Eighteen months after Daniel died, William Beckley-Lines collapsed and died after a three-mile run. Again he had fluid on the lungs.

Jon McKenzie was in the same regiment as William—they were both in the Royal Green Jackets. In 2000 he collapsed and died after a five-mile run—again fluid on his lungs. So there were four of them that died from the same cause—Daniel, Merridith, Beckley-Lines and McKenzie. They were all fit young soldiers before this happened.

I think there are problems with the NBWC training, for nuclear and biological warfare. It involves going into a gas chamber unprotected, then the gas is released and they are ordered to put on their gas masks.

A couple of months ago I had a message from a soldier via a third party. He told me that a few weeks before Daniel died he had had problems in the gas chamber—he couldn’t get his gas mask on properly. The message was that they had to more or less drag Daniel out of the chamber and they were all then made to go on a run straight afterwards.

Vimy Barracks was opened in 1995. The first soldier to die there was

Richard Robertson. He had been ordered to go on night exercises on crutches. He was shot in the head. That was in 1995.

Three months before Daniel died another soldier, Brian Isherwood, had shot himself at the same barracks. Brian did his initial training at Glencorse with Richard Roberts. Brian came out of the army at one point because he couldn't cope. Then he reenlisted and ended up at Catterick with Daniel. Now all three soldiers are dead.

After Brian died, Daniel told me that he had been on guard duty with him the night before. Brian had told him he had had enough and he was going to shoot himself. At the end of the guard duty they went back to the barracks and the next they heard was that Brian had put the gun in his mouth and shot himself.

At first after Daniel died I accepted that nothing could be done. But then I began to question it. I kept in touch with the padre at the camp and he used to tell me if there were any other deaths and give me contact numbers for them. And I got in touch with the families to see if I could help. I let them know that they weren't on their own, because the army is very good at making you feel it's only happened to you. I used to ring the relatives and say, "Look, we've been through this."

In 2001 the Infantry Training Section decided to hold a memorial service for all the soldiers who had died on ITC training. Before that I had been protesting about the number of deaths at Vimy Barracks, but nobody would listen to me.

The army produced a memorial booklet for the service and listed the names of every soldier that had died on ITC from 1995 to 2001. That was how I got the 19 names. In the past 18 months I have managed to get in touch with all the cases that were in there. And while we were looking at the Infantry Training Section we uncovered about another 25 deaths on top of that at the rest of Catterick Garrison. There have been hangings, carbon monoxide poisonings, shootings and a young lad who was "jogging" and collapsed and died.

That's when I set my website up and Geoff Gray—the father of the young soldier Geoff Gray that was shot at Deepcut barracks—picked up on it. And that was the beginning of our campaign, *Deepcut and Beyond*. There are too many similar stories. It really needs looking at, but the Ministry of Defence insisted there is nothing wrong.

In *Deepcut and Beyond* we have about 50 families, made up of families from Deepcut, families from Catterick and families whose sons died abroad, like Jan Milligan Manship, whose son Alfie was shot in 1992 at Osnabruck in Germany.

Jan was originally from Scotland but she lives in America now and has been trying to find out the truth. She has a website which is linked to mine. It's like a forum board. The Deepcut families write on it, we write on it and I picked up the article on the WSWS from it.

There are lots of us go on this board, families and people that support us, including Frank Swann a ballistics expert who investigated the deaths at Deepcut. Any information we get we paste on there to let everybody know.

We meet together in London three or four times a year. The meetings are chaired either by Kevin MacNamara MP for Hull or the Scottish MP Annabel Ewing, because she represents one of the families. My MP won't represent me because he is on the Defence Select Committee and he says it would be a "conflict of interest".

Some of the stories you hear at the meetings make you want to weep, especially if it is a new family. And that is not just from Catterick, but from different places around the country, including Deepcut and the barracks in Northern Ireland. There is a separate website for Northern Ireland; it's called RIR, Royal Irish Regiment. It has headstones—it's like going into a virtual cemetery.

In the army they break the recruits down and then "rebuild" them. Six weeks after Daniel joined up I could see a huge difference. They are no longer your children. They are brainwashed about what they should be

doing and what they shouldn't be doing.

You have got to have discipline in the army, because at some point a soldier's life will depend on it. But there's a cut-off point where discipline finishes and bullying begins, and it's that fine line that shouldn't be crossed.

I know that bullying is going on at Catterick, but some cases we can't speak about because there may be pending cases or future inquiries.

One young lad was down at Bassingbourne for his first training and he was doing well and getting certificates. Then he went up to Catterick and had to come out because he started self-harming. A couple of weeks ago he tried to hang himself. And that's all because of bullying at Catterick.

The army authorities say that they have zero tolerance of bullying. That may be the policy, but they have to demonstrate it, which they are not doing at the moment. If anyone shows any kind of weakness, that's when they get singled out and bullied. They only tell their parents a limited amount. They are traumatised.

On one occasion I was asked to go up to Catterick and spoke to Major Smethers. He told me that they had been doing a small piece of research in which they had asked some recruits to retake their entry test and 50 percent of them failed. This can only mean that the recruiting officers are helping them pass first time. Then they get in and become the butt of the bullying culture.

Terrible stories have come out and have been confirmed. One lad had a television dropped on him in bed. Another was hit with an ironing board.

There was the case of John Le Marie from Glasgow, who was discharged. He had to sign papers to say he withdrew all charges against the army, which is a general thing that happens. His complaints were that he had been beaten and kicked around the head and other areas of his body and physically and verbally abused.

When it was in the paper about British soldiers in Iraq urinating on prisoners, some people said they couldn't believe it. But I said, "I can." I am not saying whether the photographs were genuine or not, but I do believe that British troops are capable of doing it and probably even worse. If they can treat their own recruits like that and get away with it—people they barrack with during the night, or the lads that are under them if they are NCOs—with the stories that we know about, then they can do it to anybody.

Britain enlists young people at 16 years of age. It is the only country in Europe that enlists under the age of 18. At one time youngsters enlisted into the Junior Divisions at 15, even before they had left school. By the time their enlistment came through they had left school and were ready to go in at 16. Then in the 1970s the age was put up to 18, but recruitment dropped to an all time low and so they lowered the age back down to 16, but didn't bring back the Junior Divisions.

The army advertises on the television—"Be the best". And so, at 16, these young kids go into platoons of about 30 soldiers, which can be made up of 16 year-olds to 25-year-olds and anybody in between.

Amnesty International is with us, because they are totally opposed to young soldiers being put into war zones even though they are there as support.

We want a full public inquiry into all non-combat deaths, not just one section but all. We don't expect an inquiry into every single case, but the ones that have come forward and are asking for a public inquiry. We are looking to put clusters together of similar incidents, to pick out the strongest ones and use them to open the door to for an inquiry into the clusters. But it needs to be a full public inquiry of all non-combat deaths. If an independent inspectorate is set up it should be run on the same lines as the national inspectorate of the police or prisons, which can go in and investigate without notice, at any time and just look at everything.

As long as there is any army involvement it can't be satisfactory. And the same applies to the police, especially in areas where there are army camps because in those areas you will find a lot of ex-military police in

the civilian force so they still have links within the army. At Catterick the civilian police and the military police occupy the same building”.



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