

That is not to say that I have always found it easy to cope with an enraged government. When the Prime Minister and his lackeys attack you personally in the press and the parliament, it gets the blood pumping and brings a new focus to your thinking. It's not for the faint-hearted or for those in any way unsure of their claims. The difficulty of dissent is surely enough to deter many potential rebels and to break most of those who dare to take a stand. Certainly I've felt on occasions that I couldn't handle for much longer the circumstances I'd created for myself. It can take a lot of discipline at times to hold it all together and keep up the straight face.

What has given me confidence is the knowledge that my past offers no opportunity to discredit me, a fact established, checked and re-checked through three Top Secret PV clearances – one in 1999 before being seconded from the army to ONA for the first time, another before returning to ONA in late 2001, and a final one during 2002 as part of my interest in ASIS.

I readily acknowledge that I was a barikin in my youth, in particular during my five years as a cadet at Duntroon, where I set some kind of record by incurring around 250 punishments, 175 of them on consecutive days. You name it and I probably got in trouble for it back then – including roughing up the anti-uranium protesters' camp site outside Parliament House, souvenir flags for the cadets' bar, giving junior cadets a hard time, smothering an instructor in shaving cream, and getting caught with a woman in the barracks. Eventually, though, I was deemed officer material and graduated as an infantry officer with many of the values and skills that almost 20 years later would encourage me to resign from ONA and survive the difficulties that followed. In the end I was, to some degree at least, the government's own creation.

After resigning from ONA I received gestures of support from many people. There was not a flood of mail, but there was more than enough over the months to reassure me that I was far from alone in my concerns – and to my continuing regret there was more than I have had time to reply to. Some of the letters were revealing, such as the words of encouragement from a number of serving intelligence and military officers, including some in very senior positions. Others brought me to tears, such as a letter I received shortly after my resignation which more than a year later still cheers and inspires me, and which I feel compelled to reproduce here almost in full:

Just wanted to thank you, Andrew, for your courageous effort to put a little more hope and sanity into our world. Your news was like turning a corner and seeing a beautiful rainbow. I am an 82-year-old Sister of Mercy. My mother lost two brothers in WWI and the lives of the three others were greatly affected. I lost a brother and a cousin and three other brothers affected in WWII. I thought after Hiroshima and Nagasaki there never would be another war ... Gandhi and Martin Luther King have proved there is another way – peaceful work for justice. Jesus pointed out forgiveness and speaking out with love when authorities are wrong ... There is a price, but the world will never forget what these three great peace lovers did. I hope and pray your price isn't too heavy. Many I know are extremely grateful to you. You've been a light in the darkness. You and yours will always be remembered in my prayers. God bless, comfort and guide you. Sorry about the writing. I've arthritis in my hand, but I did want you to know you mean a lot not only to Sr ... but to many.