

# Army chief's disgust after 1,000 women tell of sexual abuse in the ranks

Widespread accusations of appalling behaviour have emerged as an inquest looks at the death of Gunner Jaysley Beck, who was found hanged after a party

Editor, D. (2025). Army chief's disgust after 1,000 women tell of sexual abuse in the ranks. The Times.

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, Defence Editor

Tuesday February 18 2025, 7.40pm, The Times

**T**he head of the army has written to senior officers condemning the

“appalling and shameful behaviour” in the service as more than 1,000 women shared their stories of abuse in light of the death of a teenage soldier.

In a letter seen by The Times, General Sir Roly Walker said he was disgusted by the treatment of female officers and soldiers and suggested that senior ranks might even be “actively complicit” in the behaviour.

“Step up and play your part as a leader, visibly and confidently, to stop this,” he wrote to the chain of command in a letter on Friday, several years after army chiefs pledged to stamp out abuse and harassment.

More than 1,000 women have shared stories of being raped, abused and harassed while serving in the military in the course of an inquest into the death of Royal Artillery Gunner Jaysley Beck, 19. She was found hanged in her barracks at Larkhill Camp, Wiltshire, in December 2021 after a block party.

She had been sent thousands of messages by her supervisor and was allegedly pinned down by a senior soldier who tried to kiss her, Salisbury coroner’s court has been told.

On Monday a former soldier and friend that women in the army were subjected to “nasty” comments from male colleagues.

Serving women and those who have left the army sent anonymous messages to Fill Your Boots, a social media account, which then posted their messages for others to see online.

Women said they had been affected by Beck’s death, having gone through similar experiences. One said that, after being bullied and harassed by a senior commissioned officer, she had felt suicidal.

Another woman said she was groped in front of colleagues and kicked to the floor by a sergeant who then carried out a sex act on her, and that “nothing was ever done”. She tried to end her life after suffering for two years.

One woman said she had had “two experiences of terror”, one when a man pinned her against the wall after coming out of the shower, dropped his towel and told her that “he knew exactly what I needed”. She was so frightened to use the bathroom after that she used to urinate in a bucket in a room.

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Several women described holding their breath in their rooms so male soldiers did not know they were inside as they tried to break in and attack them.

“The thing that sticks with me is the amount of times I’ve had my door tried by drunk lads,” one woman said. “They think it’s funny. You can hear them laughing. It’s terrifying. Holding your breath hoping they just move on, messaging other women to ensure they’ve locked their door.”

She said that on one occasion she had not locked her door and a man had walked in and looked at her “dead in the eyes and smiled at me”. “When I didn’t smile back he moved forward until I yelled at him to get out and thankfully he did leave. I didn’t sleep that night,” she said, adding that she had told military police and they said the man had probably forgotten which room was his.

“It was brushed off. A note was put on our front door the next day reminding us to keep our rooms secure. It’s as if they were blaming us,” she wrote.

In another case, a woman said she was raped by someone in her unit and the case never made it to trial. She was told by a lieutenant colonel that “I can’t have been that drunk otherwise I wouldn’t have remembered it”.

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One woman said that when she was 18 another colleague had stroked her legs and pulled her onto his lap and started thrusting. When she later became pregnant, two male married corporals “started discussing loudly about porn involving pregnant women and how they’d love to have sex with a pregnant woman”.

“To say I felt uncomfortable was an understatement. These are just a few encounters and experiences, it’s a shame this is still happening to a lot of females and still not getting reported because of the stigma attached,” she wrote.

In one of the latest posts, Fill Your Boots posted: “I am the Mother of Jaysley-Louise Beck. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have given and to say how proud I am of others for speaking up.”

There were so many disturbing messages that Vice-Admiral Phil Hally, who is head of Defence People at the MoD, urged victims to contact the ministry’s serious crime command. “There is no place for unacceptable sexual behaviour in our armed forces,” he wrote on X.

, then wrote a letter last week, saying: “These [messages on social media] report numerous allegations of appalling and shameful behaviour still going on in our ranks. I hope, like me, you are disgusted by what is being written.

“Let me be clear: it is just not good enough that behaviours that do not match our values and standards are still happening. It is even worse if the chain of command is not doing enough or is actively complicit in this.”

An MoD spokesman said: “This unacceptable sexual behaviour has absolutely no place in the armed forces and will not be tolerated. Our people deserve to feel safe and supported, which is why we have implemented a range of measures including two zero-tolerance policies and a sexual exploitation and abuse policy.

“Any behaviour that falls short of our standards will result in the most severe consequences including, where appropriate, criminal charges and dismissal.”

the former veterans minister and former army officer, said of the posts: “Whatever policies have been put in place, whatever sternly worded letters have been sent out, that women feel like this and have experiences like this in today’s military makes me deeply sad and betrays profound failures in leadership.”

The inquest into Jaysley Beck’s death continues.

