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IN THE COURT MARTIAL

held at

MILITARY COURT CENTRE, CATTERICK

on the

18th day of September 2025

in the case of

REX

V

30175375 Leading Hand John Rankin

Personal Support Group, Faslane

JUDGE ADVOCATE

Judge Legard

Assistant Judge Advocate General

SENTENCING REMARKS

JUDGE ADVOCATE: Thank you, do sit down please and please remove headdress, thank you. Leading Hand Rankin, you fall to be sentenced in respect of two separate charges for possessing Class A drugs, namely cocaine, with an intent to supply the same. To both those charges you pleaded guilty. You did so at the earliest opportunity and in respect of that you will receive an appropriate amount of credit in due course.

You are 39 years of age; you are leading hand with some 12 years or indeed nearly 13 years of service in the Royal Navy including service with the submarine flotilla up in Faslane. You have an unblemished service record. In 2001 you received a caution for criminal damage and possession of Class B drugs. You were a 14-year-old boy at that time. Given their age, and notwithstanding the reference to Class B drugs, we ignore both of those matters for today's purposes. We treat you as a man of hitherto good character.

I will deal briefly with the facts although they have been opened in commendable detail by Commander Hannah. In October of 2023, you were interviewed by service police in connection with an unrelated matter and during the course of that interview you volunteered to police that you had supplied cocaine at a friend's wedding although you gave no further details at that time. As a result of that admission your phone was seized and subjected to forensic analysis. You gave the PIN number for your phone as well. It took a considerable amount of time for the service police to conduct that forensic examination, in part no doubt because they were under resourced. Nevertheless, it was not your fault. You were re-interviewed in February of this year.

Those messages contained on your phone revealed that you had had a series of WhatsApp or text exchanges with someone called Alex Gregory. You said he was a close family friend, and you admitted to supplying him, on a regular basis, with cocaine although you denied making any financial gain. You said you were using it pretty much every day and you would obviously buy whatever for yourself and then, "If I had some or if they couldn't not get hold of it", then you would get it essentially for them.

You admitted you were a frequent user of cocaine, that you had been addict for some six years, and that your friends would collect cocaine from you, but you would not make any money. You sold it in £30 or £50 bags. In respect of the other charge, you said you sourced that cocaine for both your own and others' consumption. There were no other service personnel at that wedding, and you supplied cocaine only to those who requested it. That having been said, you said you would not tell service police who you sold cocaine to and you could not say how much you actually supplied.

Leading Hand Rankin, you do not need to be reminded by me as to how damaging and how potentially dangerous the supply and therefore the taking of substances such as cocaine can be. It is the ruin of many a promising career and it often leads to major health problems, both physical and mental. For that reason, supply is considered to be an extremely serious matter. You will also be well aware that drugs supply or possession is wholly incompatible with service within the Armed Forces. It runs contrary to the ethos, to the values, and to the high standards that the public rightly demand from those who serve their King and Country.

In particular, in the role that you had in the submarine service, it also opens you to the very real risk of blackmail from others including civilians. The Board consider this and these matters with the utmost seriousness.

Before we consider the Sentencing Council Guidelines, we should also take account of the sentencing guidance for drugs offences within the service environment, issued by the Judge Advocate General. The guidance makes clear that, in respect of drug offences other than possession, we must or are encouraged to refer to the Sentencing Council Guidelines. We are also invited to take account of what might be described as additional aggravating and mitigating factors relevant to service life. In addition to any criminal sanction, it says the defendant must be dismissed unless it is not in the service interests so to do.

We now turn to the Sentencing Council Guidelines. Charge 1 is the more serious of the two charges, but, that said, we are content to treat each of these offences as falling within the lesser role category for culpability. That being on the basis that you had little, if any, expectation of financial advantage and there is no suggestion of you performing an operational management function within a chain.

In terms of harm, we also find that both offences fall within category 3, on the basis that this constituted supply to other users. We are not persuaded, despite Commander Hannah's eloquent submissions, that we should elevate it into category 2. That is despite the fact, in the case of charge 1 in particular, the duration and frequency of supply. Accordingly, an appropriate start point in your case is one of three years' custody with a range of two years to four and a half years' custody. We have been unable to identify any aggravating factors whether statutory or from a service perspective, which would justify an increase in any sentence from that notional start point.

In mitigation, we have listened with care to everything that has been said on your behalf by Ms Bastock, and you have much to thank her for. As I have already indicated, we are prepared to treat you as a man of good character. You have openly admitted, indeed volunteered, your involvement in the supply of Class A drugs. In part, because you realised the harm that your drug use was having upon your career, upon your mental health and upon your relationships. You wanted it all out in the open. Indeed, in order to force a lifestyle change and you describe it as coming as something of a relief. You therefore fully cooperated at every stage of the investigation, with the service police including providing your phone and PIN numbers. You have a wife and two teenage children both of whom have medical issues or similar with which to contend and all of whom are, to a greater or lesser

degree, dependent upon you for emotional, practical, financial support. The death of your father, back in 2021, had a profound impact upon you.

There has been a significant delay in this case of almost two years, which is highly unusual in this jurisdiction and for which you are not at fault. The blame for this delay lies at the door of the service police who, even allowing for pressures of work, even allowing for limited resources and so forth, took an extraordinarily long time in which to subject your mobile phone to forensic examination. During that two-year period, you have demonstrated that you are capable of honest endeavour. You have severed your relationship with and your addiction to drugs. All those features serve to lower the sentence from that notional start point.

We have also read with interest a very detailed pre-sentence report as well as several references from your wife and from your former chain of command. You are assessed at being a low risk of re-offending and serious harm. The author recognises, as does your counsel, the risk that you face the prospect of an immediate custodial sentence today but nevertheless recommends a community-based disposal.

Leading Hand Ranking will you just replace headdress and stand, please? Supplying Class A drugs is simply incompatible with retention in His Majesty's Armed Forces especially those, such as yourself, entrusted with highly skilled or sensitive roles. You will therefore be dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces.

Furthermore, having considered the matter with care, the Board has concluded in respect of both charges that the custody threshold has been crossed in this case and both offences are so serious that a period of custody is unavoidable.

Making allowance for all the mitigating factors that have been brought to our attention by Ms Bastock, we have concluded that the least possible sentence that we can impose, having regard to the seriousness of both offences is one of 30 months' imprisonment on each charge. We took as our start point 36 months but mitigation outweighed aggravation and that reduced it to 30 months imprisonment. Notwithstanding the date range gap, both sentences shall run concurrently with one another.

Giving you full credit for your guilty pleas, we reduce those sentences to 20 months' imprisonment. That is significantly less than that which we originally had in mind. You have much to thank your counsel for.

Leading Hand Rankin, this case presented us with a dilemma. Do we sentence you to an immediate term of imprisonment? That would clearly be merited on these facts. It would satisfy the principles of punishment and deterrence, and it is what ordinary members of the public would both expect and other members of the service, particularly submariners, would expect. If we were to do so, you could not reasonably complain. These are very serious offences and people justifiably expect deterrent sentences to be passed.

That said, and having given the matter detailed consideration, and having applied the relevant guidance on the imposition of custodial sentences, the Board has decided, with considerable caution, to follow the recommendations set out in the pre-sentence report, albeit attached to a suspended sentence. In our judgement, immediate imprisonment would not be a proportionate sanction in these particular circumstances. Overall, we consider society would be better served by you undertaking unpaid work on behalf of the community rather than a relatively short period of incarceration where you would be rubbing shoulders alongside hardened criminals in an overcrowded prison system.

Also, we take account of the impact that such a sentence would inevitably have upon your dependent teenage children and finally we consider your cooperation with the authorities, together with the delay in this case, during which you have effectively rehabilitated yourself, to be also strong factors in favour of suspension.

There will therefore be a suspended sentence order of 24 months' duration. So, the custodial term is one of 20 months, which will be suspended for 24 months. If in the next 24 months you commit any offence, whether or not it is the same type for which you are being sentenced today, you will be brought back to court, and it is likely that this sentence will be brought into operation either in full or in part. Do you understand that?

DEFENDANT: Yes, your Honour.

JUDGE ADVOCATE: As a condition of the suspended sentence, you will also be required to undertake 200 hours of unpaid work on behalf of the community. What that means is you must meet your supervisor when and where you are told. You must cooperate fully with any instructions your supervisor gives you, and if you fail to perform the work, you fail to do it properly, you will be in breach of the order.

SENTENCE

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD: Leading Hand Rankin, you are sentenced to 20 months imprisonment suspended for two years and to be dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces