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IN THE COURT MARTIAL

held at

MILITARY COURT CENTRE, CATTERICK

on the

31st day of October 2025

in the case of

REX

V

25063109 Reverend (Captain) Huw Deniol Ryden,

3rd Battalion the Rifles

JUDGE ADVOCATE

Judge Legard

Judge Advocate General

SENTENCING REMARKS

JUDGE ADVOCATE: Thank you. Do sit down please and please keep headress on. Thank you. Yes, so for the purposes of these sentencing remarks I will refer to you as Captain Ryden, but you are, or you have been, convicted after trial of a single charge of conduct prejudicial to good order and service discipline. You are 52 years of age, an ordained Chaplain in the rank of Captain, you have six years' service behind you but previously you served in the Parachute Regiment for a number of years. In 2022 you were censured by your Commanding Officer for inappropriate conduct whilst intoxicated. With that one exception you were until recently a man of hitherto good character.

Now, on 22nd July last year during the Salamanca celebrations you approached [victim name redacted]. She was a [unit redacted], and you suggested that she should accompany you to the smoking shelter for a cigarette and a private chat. At that point in time, as you well knew, [victim name redacted] was a complainant to a sexual allegation involving another member of the battalion. That person was [name redacted], someone to whom you were providing pastoral support. You spoke privately to [victim name redacted] and you abused your position as the unit Padre by encouraging her to withdraw her complaint of sexual assault. You informed her as to the amount of compensation to which she may be entitled and you subjected her to emotional blackmail, there is no better way of describing it, pointing out the impact that the proceedings and a conviction would have upon the accused, [name redacted], were he to be convicted, namely dismissal and placement on the sex offenders register. That was essentially the conduct that the Board found and having done so the Board unhesitatingly concluded that such conduct was prejudicial to both good order and service discipline. You flatly denied encouraging [victim name redacted] in that way and to all intents and purposes you maintained that [victim name redacted] had lied. Your version of events was unequivocally rejected by the Board.

Let me explain why the Board considers this to be such a serious matter. If the Armed Forces are to remain operationally effective all those who serve within them, men or women, must be able to do so in the safe and secure knowledge that any complaints made by them of sexual misconduct will be taken seriously, investigated fairly and thoroughly and without interference and that justice is allowed to run its course whether or not that leads to a conviction or an acquittal. And the importance of all those who serve, be they women or men, having confidence in the system of military justice cannot be overstated and your position as Padre for the unit is both critical and unique and it also carries with it certain responsibilities. You hold yourself out to be not only a man of God but someone in whom all ranks can confide, from whom they can seek guidance and upon whom they can rely on for moral, emotional and spiritual guidance and support. And whatever your motivation may have been it is no part of your role to interfere in an ongoing police investigation or criminal proceedings relating to an allegation of sexual misconduct and I am sure that the irony, namely that earlier this week [name redacted] was acquitted of the charges that you encouraged [victim name redacted] to withdraw, is not lost upon you.

Now, we have read out to us a victim statement, an impact statement, from [victim name redacted]. She describes your actions as amounting to a fundamental breach of trust and she says as follows:

“His actions have made me not want to ever go and speak to a Padre and I am more cautious of speaking to other people of rank as if a Padre can do what he did to try and silence a victim then what are other people of rank capable of. I felt there was no duty of care to me, he was very motivated to keep my voice not heard for the benefit of the other party. He had no intention of my wellbeing and my mental health.”

Now, the charge in respect of which you have been convicted is of course a service disciplinary offence and therefore peculiar to the Armed Forces and in those circumstances, we turn to the Judge Advocate General’s sentencing guidelines. And before we identify an appropriate category I will just briefly quote from those guidelines as follows:

“The efficiency, effectiveness and reputation of the Armed Forces depends on personnel acting in a disciplined manner. Conduct which falls below the required norms, which are often higher than those of contemporary society, undermines the integrity and high reputation of the Armed Forces. Where the conduct publicly undermines discipline or the command chain it is more serious. In all cases of culpability A, the Court must consider loss of seniority and, in the most serious of cases, dismissal.”

Well in terms of capability the Board consider this to fall squarely within category A. This was a clear case of an abuse of rank and position, a Padre and commissioned officer seeking to discourage a private soldier from pursuing an allegation of sexual misconduct and in so doing deliberately isolating her from her colleagues and friendship group in the hope and expectation that she would comply with or follow your suggestion. This offence clearly falls within category A for culpability. In terms of harm the Board finds that this conduct did have a more than trivial impact on both good order and service discipline however looked at in the round the Board place harm in category 2 albeit towards the upper end. Now, the fact that this matter has attracted a degree of publicity has not impacted upon our view as to categorisation.

A 2A placement provides for a start point of a high level community order, a range of a medium level community order up to 12 months’ detention. An officer cannot of course receive a sentence of detention. In terms of aggravating features the fact that you occupied a position of responsibility and trust is something that we have already taken into account when placing this in category A. The Board finds that you were to a degree under the influence of alcohol at the time, that may have acted as a disinhibiting factor, and we also note your previous disciplinary matter. However, in the overall context of this case those features do not weigh heavily in the balance. In terms of mitigation we have taken into account all that has been very ably expressed on your behalf by Mr Bolt, you have much to

thank him for. We have taken into account a number of references from friends, colleagues, chain of command and so forth all of whom have attested to your personal and professional qualities. The fact that you have provided Queen, King and country with valuable service in the past is not lost upon us. We cannot of course give you any credit for any guilty plea.

We have also read a pre-sentence report, and we thank Miss Cassidy for that report. In your interview with the probation officer, you gave voice to your deep seated conviction that the current zero tolerance policy on sexual misconduct within the Armed Forces is wrong and it would appear that this view that you hold was in part the trigger for you seeking to intervene in the way that you did. You are assessed as presenting a medium risk of re-offending and medium risk of serious harm to others.

Would you now please stand? Thank you. Now, whatever your motivation may have been, your conduct was inexcusable, it represented a betrayal of the values and standards of the Armed Forces. It also tarnishes the reputation of the uniformed services and the officer corps more widely. The insignia on your shoulders, the presence of a dog collar, they are all worn for a reason. Your job, indeed, your duty, is to uphold and to demonstrate the high standards of behaviour and integrity and more especially as both the Padre and an officer you ought to be a living, breathing example of the person to whom subordinate soldiers and indeed officers should be aspiring to become. The contents of the pre-sentence report, specifically your comments about your entrenched thinking, your implacable refusal to understand or appreciate why your actions were wholly misguided, inappropriate and frankly dangerous has only served to reinforce our view. And the fact that you spoke about [victim name redacted] in a condescending and derogatory manner in your interview implying that she was an attention seeker who got what she wanted that also speaks for itself, it does not require any further comment from me. There was no remorse, no insight, no understanding, no acceptance or acknowledgement of wrongdoing. You clearly cannot be entrusted to discharge the role of a commissioned officer let alone Padre. You will therefore be dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces.

Now, we recognise the undoubted impact upon you, both financial and in terms of your future employability that dismissal will have upon you however all actions have consequences and I would simply add this, and this is so the message can go out to the Armed Forces more widely. Any officer or individual holding rank who abuses their position or rank to discourage or dissuade an individual from pursuing a criminal allegation, whatever their motivation may be, will almost inevitably be dismissed. Now, this is a very serious case and on one level it occupies the high end of the scale for offences of this nature and ordinarily a custodial sentence would be an appropriate sanction. That said the Board is of the opinion that this offence does not meet or cross the custody threshold but is

serious enough to require a community order and we so order. You will be subject to these requirements. You will complete 240 hours of unpaid work within the next 18 months working when and where you are directed by your supervising officer and you will also be subject to a supervision order over that same 18 month period.

We understand that because you reside in Scotland these requirements will be discharged by way of a community payback order under the supervision of your local council. But what that means is you must meet your supervisor when and where you are told, you must co-operate fully with any instructions that your supervisor gives you and if you fail to complete the unpaid work or fail to do it properly or fail to co-operate you will be in breach of the order and that means you will be brought back before a Court and may be given further requirements or re-sentenced and that may well mean custody. Now, we are reassured by the probation officer who authored the report that the relevant authorities in Edinburgh are competent to ensure that the order of this Court is carried into effect. But if for whatever reason that proves not to be the case then the matter must be referred back to this Court without delay. And for the avoidance of any doubt a financial penalty will rarely, if ever, be appropriate for an offence of this severity. And, finally, we do not consider this to be an appropriate case for compensation.

Mr President, will you now please pass sentence?

SENTENCE

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD: Captain Ryden, you are sentenced to a community order of 18 months and are to be dismissed from His Majesty's Service.

JUDGE ADVOCATE: Thank you. If you just bring everyone up to salute, please. Thank you. That concludes the matter.