

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Media Briefing

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## The case of Private Geoff Gray

Pte Geoff Gray from Hackney, East London, joined the UK Army in January 2001 on his 17th birthday. He had wanted to be a member of the Armed Forces since childhood. His family describes him as "a bright lively young man with a zest for life".

On 17 September 2001 while on guard duty at the Deepcut Army Barracks, he was found dead with two bullet holes in his head. He was only 17 years old when he died.

At the inquest into Pte Geoff Gray's death held in March 2002, evidence was heard describing the following events. Early on the morning of 17 September 2001 gun shots were heard at Deepcut Barracks. A message was sent indicating that Pte Geoff Gray was missing. A patrol was sent to search for him. When the patrol arrived at his post, two other soldiers who were supposed to be patrolling with Pte Geoff Gray were told to stay in the guard hut -- purportedly as a result of the fact that they had apparently reacted nervously upon hearing the sound of shots being fired and at the news that Pte Geoff Gray had gone missing. It was intimated that they were in no fit state to carry out a search. The search party carried out a sweep of the area and fence. It is understood that at no time were soldiers more than arms' distance from the fence. Nothing was found. A further three searches were carried out amid reports of people hearing a fence rattle and a sighting of an intruder running away. Still nothing was found. On the fifth sweep of the area, the lifeless body Pte Geoff Gray was discovered only 30cm away from the fence with two bullet wounds to the head.

Almost immediately after Pte Geoff Gray's death the UK Army reportedly asserted that he had committed suicide. Initial investigations were formally launched on 17 September 2001 by the civil police. However, the initial investigation was conducted predominantly by military police and found that there were no suspicious circumstances.

The inquest into the circumstances of Pte Geoff Gray's death returned an "open" verdict after hearing evidence that Pte Geoff Gray had two gun shot wounds to the head and no evidence corroborating the theory that he had committed suicide. Furthermore, the coroner stated that he did not believe that the boy had taken his own life.

The family of Pte Geoff Gray does not believe that he committed suicide and consider that the UK Army has tried to cover up the circumstances surrounding his death.

In April 2002, in a statement before the UK Parliament in response to a parliamentary question, the UK MoD confirmed that Pte Geoff Gray had died from gunshot wounds to the head while on guard

duty at the Deepcut Barracks but declined to make any further comments on the circumstances surrounding his death. The MoD also stated that evidence arising from the circumstances of Pte Geoff Gray's death would be considered by an internal UK Army Board of Inquiry whose purpose would be "to establish the facts and ascertain whether any shortcomings in service equipment or procedures caused or contributed to the incident leading to a death and, if necessary, make recommendations to prevent a recurrence". *Ibid.* The statement further specified that such an inquiry would be "an internal investigation [...] not open to members of the public or the media..."; that once its investigation was completed, the Board of Inquiry would make available a copy of its report to the family "subject to any minimum security/disclosure requirements"; that it was likely that the inquiry would take some time and it was not possible to predict when the board would finalize its report. *Ibid.*

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