



10 JAN 2019

Witness Name: John Rufus Pentith

Statement No.: WITN0069001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated: 4th January, 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JOHN RUFUS PENTITH

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 6th December 2018.

I, John Rufus Pentith, will say as follows: -

1. Introduction

1. My name is John Rufus Pentith. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry. I am a retired military serviceman. I joined the Army aged fifteen and left in 1988. I served as a Bandsman and Medical Assistant.
2. I intend to speak about my experience having being told that I received contaminated blood during an operation which had been conducted at the

Infected Blood Inquiry

Fleetbank House, 1st Floor, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8AE

contact@infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk

Freephone 08081691377

Cambridge Military Hospital in 1985. I intend to speak about how this experience has affected my mental health and wellbeing.

2. How Affected

3. I have been asked to provide a statement because I was informed that I had been given contaminated blood. However, I did not subsequently contract any infection.
4. In 1977, I suffered a haemorrhage following dental surgery undertaken at a hospital in Woolwich. I was admitted to the Westminster Hospital about six weeks later where I was given a non-definitive diagnosis of a blood disorder similar in nature to haemophilia.
5. In 1980, I was diagnosed with mild type-two-variable Von Willebrand's Disease at the Westminster Hospital. As a result, I was medically downgraded within the Army. I did not require treatment except when undergoing surgery or dental procedures. Although I was not diagnosed until 1980, I believe that I had had Von Willebrand's disease from birth. I always bled heavily during dental procedures and struggled with nosebleeds.
6. The only time I had been given blood was in 1985. I have never been given Factor VIII or cryoprecipitate blood products or any other blood transfusion.
7. In 1985, a dentist referred me to the Cambridge Military Hospital to have an operation to reconstruct my nose. My medical record was noted that I should be treated as would a haemophiliac. I was therefore given two units of fresh frozen plasma before the nasal operation. The blood was given to me through a cannula. Due to the

lapse in time, I am unable to recall the name of the doctor who performed this procedure. My clotting time was twenty-nine minutes. The policy was to give blood to haemophiliacs before operating, as not doing so apparently constituted a surgical risk. Due to the lapse in time, I am unable to recall if I was informed of this before the surgery.

8. Within approximately three months of the operation, I was asked to see a Colonel Thomas in the Pathology Laboratory at a follow-up appointment. Colonel Thomas said that he had some 'bad news;' I had been given contaminated blood. He told me that I should prepare myself, and my family, that I might not see that Christmas. Colonel Thomas did not say what the contamination consisted of. I heard that some military hospitals were using what was referred to as 'squaddie blood' in addition to ordinary NHS blood products.
9. I left the Army in 1988, and worked for the ambulance service until 1990. I suffered a sharp injury (an accidental 'prick' from a hypodermic needle) and spoke to my occupational health department. I was checked for Hepatitis B, which was negative. I understand that there was not a test for Hepatitis C at that time. I was referred to a Dr. Currie of the Oxford Haematology Centre at the Churchill Hospital by occupational health and my G.P. It seemed to me that members of medical staff were obsessed with testing blood. I had not been told, and was not then told that I should have attended yearly, although personally I had been aware I needed to. I never received any information, or results from the blood tests that were undertaken regarding my Von Willebrand's Disease, informing me that I had any form of infection.
10. I think I was tested for vCJD. I am unsure if I was tested for any other infections, following subsequent injuries, but I have not received any

'bad news.' However, I was told that I could not become a blood donor.

11. In 2016, I was informed by letter that I no longer needed to attend the Oxford Haematology Centre, at Churchill Hospital, for my Von Willebrand's disease, but that I would need to be given blood were I to undergo any future dental work.

4. Consent

12. I had not been tested for blood borne infections before 1985. In the late 1980s, I underwent many blood tests at St. Luke's Hospital and St. George's Hospital. I do not know why I had been referred. The NHS screening was conducted outside of the military; the Army could not take regular blood samples as they lacked the necessary specialists. I saw a Professor Flute at St. George's Hospital. Doctors at St. Luke's Hospital wanted to check my clotting time. However, they took seventeen (17) bottles (phials) of blood and subsequently told me that I had been screened for HIV infection.
13. Although the tests were done nicely, I felt that I was being treated like a guinea pig. It seemed that members of medical staff were embarrassed. Sometimes, I felt like a leper and was saddened when they had to ask me if I used drugs, something I had never done.
14. It seemed unnecessary that between twelve (12) and fifteen (15) bottles (phials) of my blood were taken at the Oxford Haematology Centre. Members of staff were helpful in trying to explain, but I was anxious that doctors were going to find another diagnosis when they assessed my risk factors.

15. I felt that there was a 'doctor knows best' environment, because blood samples give doctors a picture of your health. The doctors were clearly in charge, and did not like it when I disagreed or wanted a second opinion. The anxiety this provoked was not always necessary, it knocked me back a bit and caused me to distrust doctors.

5. Impact

16. I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder aged fifteen. I was diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in either 1985 or 1986 when a psychiatrist was reviewing my medication and flashbacks from military experiences. In October 1987, I had suicidal thoughts and drove to Beachy Head with the intention of driving off of a cliff. Whilst I believe that the causes of my PTSD predate my having been given contaminated blood, my mental health was particularly poor towards the end of the 1980s and much of that time was and remains, a blur.
17. When I was first diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, I was prescribed mood-enhancing drugs including Haloperidol and a drug like Phenobarbitone or another Lithium drug. I did not require medication in my twenties and was not taking any medication when I was given the contaminated blood. I had a mental health crisis in 2012, which resulted in my being hospitalised and placed on a treatment programme. This treatment is presently being followed up. The South Central Veterans Service have also referred me to psychiatric services. I have additionally sought to treat myself as I am a qualified music therapist.
18. As a result of having Von Willebrand's disease and being told that I had been given contaminated blood, I have suffered from 'white coat fever,' in so much as I distrust doctors and find medical appointments stressful, particularly where I may wish to obtain a second opinion and

/ or disagree with the doctor. I would do anything to avoid medical intervention, including maintaining a healthy lifestyle, so that I would only need to attend if requiring surgery. I additionally suffer from high blood pressure. There is a balance between doing the right thing by going to medical appointments, and not being scared if it is bad news, whilst wanting to maintain a stiff upper lip and not attend appointments. As I know that my grandchildren need me, I worry less about this nowadays. However, any sort of mental or physical pain grips my whole life.

19. I have feared the unknown ever since I was apparently given contaminated blood. I have always been worried as to what infection(s) may develop, particularly because of the media coverage of HIV at the time this occurred.
20. In the period after I was told that I had received contaminated blood, I had to declare if I had been tested for certain infections when applying for life insurance. The only way around it was where you had been anonymously tested, as a blood donor, which did not apply to me. They have now changed the way they ask questions.
21. Being told that I had been given contaminated blood was just one factor in my decision to leave the Army. My friends became ^BBand Masters and Directors of Music, and I may have become a Sergeant, but I would have left the Army, around the time that I did, regardless. Whilst I had been medically downgraded before I received any contaminated blood, I believe that this ensured my medical grade would never have improved. I do not hold a grudge against Colonel Thomas; I was aware that I would ^{be} change ^{after serving in} when I joined the Army.

6. Support

22. The psychological treatments I have had were not provided as a direct consequence of being told I had been given contaminated blood, they were provided due to my pre-existing disorders.

7. Financial Assistance

23. I have not applied for any financial assistance.

nor was I made aware that you may be eligible for assistance

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

8/2/19

