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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW, 2GB (FED)

Minster for Defence, Peter Dutton, discusses ABC reporting on November Platoon, cancellation of submarine contract, and Melbourne Cup.

306Y1800

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THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

TRANSCRIPT
THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
INTERVIEW WITH BEN FORDHAM,
RADIO 2GB, SYDNEY

02 November 2021

Subjects: ABC reporting on November Platoon; cancellation of submarine contract; Melbourne Cup.

EO&E.....

BEN FORDHAM:

Now, the ABC owes some of our veterans an apology. They are refusing to remove a damaging story about our troops who served in Afghanistan. It's been on their website for 12 months. The ABC claims Australian soldiers executed an Afghan prisoner in cold blood in 2012. They relied on a witness statement from an American soldier, an unnamed American soldier.

The soldier claims seven prisoners were captured and hog tied, but there were only six seats on the aircraft and so he claims our Australian soldiers decided to shoot one of the prisoners dead. The unnamed American soldier didn't see it happen, he said he heard a pop, and he reckons that was enough proof that our troops had committed a war crime.

I've now spoken personally to several of the soldiers involved in that operation with November Platoon. They all say the same thing; this did not happen. The Defence Minister Peter Dutton's on the line. Good morning to you Minister.

PETER DUTTON:

Good morning Ben.

BEN FORDHAM:

Should the ABC be showing some further evidence or trying to back up their story in some way when you've got all of these soldiers saying; "Hang on a moment. This did not happen"?

PETER DUTTON:

Of course they should Ben and thanks to you and to many of your listeners who have taken an interest in this topic. On many occasions our soldiers are treated, particularly by the ABC if I might say, with complete disdain. Our soldiers have served in our country's name and they should be respected accordingly, and if the ABC has evidence or they're sitting on some facts that they haven't yet released after 12 months, they should release them. This takes a huge toll on the families, it takes a huge toll on the professional career of individuals that are accused without factual basis – and if the ABC has the evidence, cough it up.

BEN FORDHAM:

Look, we know that there are all sorts of incidents that have occurred in war time, and some of them are the subject of investigations, but we're talking about one particular mission, one particular allegation made by one man and one man only – even though he wouldn't reveal his true name – and I've spoken to these soldiers. They say, "Did it happen? Not a chance." Another said to me, "As soon as I heard it, I knew it was fabricated. I don't know the motivation of the American soldier. He's the only one claiming it. He has zero backing from his own side. I'd like the Australian public to know the truth."

We deserve that, don't we?

PETER DUTTON:

We do deserve the truth and we also need to acknowledge the service of our troops. I think it's important for, as you point out, us to recognise that people go through some horrendous situations in a theatre of war. That's the reality.

As you also point out, some soldiers have done the wrong thing in the past and that is being investigated by the OSI – the Office of the Special Investigator – that's the process according to law, as it should be.

But if you're going to publish details, serious allegations, it needs to be backed up by evidence and if the evidence is there then it should be produced and at the moment there's a cloud hanging over people without that being clarified. I think that's the onus on whoever it is that publishes that information – to say where they've got their detail from – and be open about it, and back up their story instead of making an allegation that isn't backed up by publicly attributable facts.

BEN FORDHAM:

There's no official investigation into this claim. It's purely a media story and we have sent notes to the ABC saying, "Will the ABC issue a correction? Does the ABC stand by its story, which alleges November Platoon executed an Afghan prisoner because they couldn't fit that prisoner on a US helicopter?" We're not getting any specific answers to those questions. Is this something that you're able to raise with ABC management?

PETER DUTTON:

Well yes it is, but I'll make this broader point about that ABC: as we know, some of these people are a law unto themselves and they make allegations, and particularly in the day and age of social media, journalists who call themselves journalists, who run a story off one tweet or an unverified account of some circumstance that they allege has happened, that's where we need to shine the spotlight and this is a broader issue for the ABC, there's no question about that.

So I think there's a bigger concern here, a bigger issue at play and many people have spoken about it, there's an attempt to deal with it by different appointments to the board over a long period of time, but there is a cultural issue that prevails, and they've got a special onus as the national broadcaster to produce that evidence, to make sure that stories are properly researched, and if there are allegations to be made, they should be investigated by the police. As we say, we've got this OSI process which has been set up, there are serious allegations that have been made against some people, and they should be investigated and people have their day in court if that's what the investigators and the prosecutors decide.

BEN FORDHAM:

Okay. I'll be seeking to interview other members of November Platoon over coming days. On another issue, you've been Defence Minister since March this year. The cancelled submarine deal would have been one of your first projects, and the French President Emmanuel Macron is claiming that we lied to him over the cancelled submarines deal. Scott Morrison has now provided text messages and other notes of conversations to prove that that's just not the case, so it sounds like the French President is telling fibs.

PETER DUTTON:

Well Ben, there's just no suggestion at all that can be credibly made about the Prime Minister lying. I've been intimately involved in these discussions. There was a working group between the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, and we worked very closely together in lockstep. There was a no-surprises strategy. The United States and the United Kingdom were kept informed of our every move, and similarly us of theirs, and the suggestion that we went outside of that or there was some other process, is of course just plain wrong.

Of course, you know, we had factored in all along that the French were going to be upset about losing a contract of this size. So you understand that the emotion within France and by the French President, but to accuse the Prime Minister of lying is just a bridge too far and completely absurd on all of the facts that I've seen and I think the sooner we move on from this the better.

BEN FORDHAM:

Now, as a guest on our program today, you get a horse in the Melbourne Cup sweep. You've got number Five, *Explosive Jack*, which is quite a fitting name. Number Five, *Explosive Jack*, for Peter Dutton, our Defence Minister. Thanks very much for joining us this morning.

PETER DUTTON:

Thanks very much Ben. Take care mate.

[ends]

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