

Gunner Jaysley Beck, four years on

On 15th December 2021, the body of Gunner Jaysley Beck of 47 Regiment Royal Artillery was discovered in her room at Larkhill Camp, the morning after a party in the SLA block where she lived. It was the first day of her Christmas leave, and she had been in the Army for fewer than three years.

Her death sent ripples of shock through both the services community and the wider civilian world. She showed promise, dedication, and commitment to her army career, and was a ‘poster-child’ for the profession she loved. So what went wrong, and what steps have been taken in the last four years to try to prevent such tragedies from happening again?

Gunner Beck’s Army career

Gunner Beck joined the Army at the age of 16 in March 2019, completing Junior Entry Basic Training at the Army Foundation College, Harrogate. She graduated into the Royal Artillery, joining 47 Regt, and in February 2021, she was selected for the Corps Engagement Team (CET), based in the Regiment’s Headquarters (RHQ), where she was serving when she died. The Army wanted to use her as an exemplar, someone to encourage others to follow in her footsteps.

Sexual relationships, assault, and harassment

Shortly after she left Harrogate, a relationship emerged between Gunner Beck and one of the instructors at the Army Foundation College, Sergeant George Higgins (then a Bombardier or Corporal). This lasted for approximately 20 months, despite intermittent breaks caused by his alleged infidelity, and ended definitively in November 2021.

On 12 July, 2021, Gunner Beck was on a training exercise on Thorney Island and attended a social event that evening at which she was one of the youngest and most junior present. In the early hours, she was sexually assaulted by WO1 Michael Webber (then a Battery Sergeant Major) but escaped so frightened that he would pursue her that she hid in the toilets with her feet on the seat to evade discovery. She then took refuge in her car for the remainder of the night, rather than in her hotel room. When she reported this incident up the chain of command to Major James Hook (then a Captain), he initially tried to dissuade her from reporting the incident. When Gunner Beck persisted, the matter was escalated to Regimental Colonel Samantha Shepherd, who gave WO1 Webber a minor sanction under AGAI 67 and told him to write a letter of apology to Gunner Beck.

In September 2021, Gunner Beck began to receive unwelcome and inappropriate communications from her line manager, Bombardier Ryan Mason. There were over 1,000 WhatsApp messages in October and over 3,600 in November, declaring his unrequited love for her and threatening self-harm. His behaviour was described as manipulative and controlling, while Gunner Beck was reported as being scared of him and sleep-deprived due

to his persistently messaging her through the night. On 7th December, when Gunner Beck was staying a hotel in Newbury with colleagues for work, his behaviour there scared her to the extent that she left the hotel and returned to Larkhill Camp.

In November 2021, Gunner Beck rebounded into a relationship with a recently married SCNO, Sergeant Cory Budd, a choice that was in marked contrast to her strongly held moral values. The amount of time they spent together raised suspicions, and the pressure to keep the relationship secret caused additional strain. On 14th December, Sergeant Budd left a Mess function at approximately 23:00 to visit Gunner Beck at her block party. They had a conversation in her room, after which Gunner Beck's friends noticed that she was visibly upset. Communication between them continued until approximately 02:00. She was found dead the following day.

The Service Inquiry Investigation

On 30 May 2022, GOC (LONDIST) directed a Service Inquiry to convene and investigate the death, and the panel published their report on 9th June 2023. It identified five factors that were causal or contributory to Gunner Beck's death.

The causal factors identified by the Investigation were the persistent unwelcome attention of Bombardier Mason, and the death of her uncle by suicide the previous year and 'other family issues' that were less clearly specified but related to a sense of needing to take care of her family's welfare in the wake of her uncle's death.

They identified contributory factors being, firstly, that she had been in a relationship with a married SNCO in the final few weeks of her life, and secondly the ending of her relationship with Sergeant George Higgins. The third contributory factor was alcohol, although the report conceded that her attitudes towards alcohol and her drinking behaviour were like many other soldiers around her at the time.

The panel also identified several other factors that had not directly contributed but were still relevant, including unclear and inadequate levels of support at RHQ RA for a soldier as young and inexperienced as Gunner Beck, unenforced alcohol controls during the Thorney Island exercise, and maladministration as to the management of accommodation at Larkhill.

The report made 18 recommendations for changes to avoid recurrence of similar incidents, focusing on tackling inappropriate behaviour, alcohol use, and raising awareness of welfare support services and mental health.

Findings of the Inquest

An Inquest into Gunner Beck's death was held from 11 to 20 February 2025 at Salisbury Coroner's Court. Coroner Nicholas Rheinberg's findings differed substantially from those of the Service Inquiry Investigation.

Firstly, the Coroner found that the ‘family issues’ identified as a causal factor by the Service Inquiry were not a factor in her death at all. It was found that Bombardier Mason had put this reason forward to deflect responsibility for Gunner Beck’s death away from himself.

Secondly, the Army had failed to deal with her sexual assault report adequately, a failure which had been recognised although not highlighted in the Service Inquiry Investigation. It also found that the way in which Gunner Beck’s complaint of being sexually assaulted in July 2021 was handled played more than a minimal contributory part in her death. The following facts were found: (1) Major Hook did not initiate any investigations into Gunner Beck’s allegation; (2) Major Hook made assumptions as to her veracity without any factual basis for doing so; (3) he pressured her to drop her allegation; and (4) he only reported the matter to higher command when it became apparent that Gunner Beck’s line management had been involved in pursing the complaint.¹ The coroner concluded:

Jaysley was left with a feeling of injustice but more importantly lost faith in her ability to complain effectively to the extent that she did not complain of the harassment that she was receiving from the Bombardier. Jaysley’s superiors were aware of the fact that a serious wrong had been done to Jaysley by a senior officer. Trivial disciplinary action was taken under the guise that this is what the injured person wanted and that this course was victim led.

According to the Coroner, the matter should have been reported to the police, and failure to do so breached Army policy. The Coroner referred to *R v Somerset (ex parte Middleton)* (2004) UKHL 10 in finding that the State had arguably breached her Article 2 right to life without justification because of the failure of the ‘laws, precautions, procedures and means of enforcement’ that the Army, as an arm of the state, was obliged to put in place to protect that right.

What went wrong?

It is noticeable that at the conclusion of the Inquest in Salisbury, Gunner Beck’s mother stated how the failure to properly report the sexual assault by WO1 Webber was pivotal in her daughter’s death:

I saw the change before my own eyes. She felt powerless and betrayed. She then found out he had been promoted. ‘I got a letter, he got a promotion’. That assault shattered her faith in the set-up that was supposed to look after her.

I truly believe how it was handled broke something inside her she couldn’t repair.

She describes a classic instance of moral injury, a type of psychological injury described by the pioneering clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay as being the profound sense of broken trust that can arise from a betrayal of what is right by an authority figure in a high-stakes situation.¹ Individuals respond to moral injury in different ways, but common responses are

¹ *Achilles in America: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* by Shay, J (1995)

guilt, shame, anger, anxiety, depression, and loss of social trust. Following research in the USA into complex PTSD, moral injury has become a more prominent concept in UK military circles, where the focus is usually on combat veterans.² In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic it has also been recognised in healthcare professionals who felt that they were unable to satisfy their sense of duty and responsibility towards their patients due to inadequate resourcing and political expediency. The case of Gunner Beck demonstrates that similar risks exist away from front-line combat too, whenever a structural weakness allows a difference in power to be exploited.

Subsequent Proceedings against Bombardier Mason and WO1 Webber

After the inquest, criminal proceedings were not pursued against Bombardier Mason, who had by this point left the Army. As the messages disclosed no threats of violence towards Gunner Beck, the evidential threshold for a charge under Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was not met, and the statutory six-month charging limit or the summary-only Section 2 offence had expired.

In August 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority confirmed that it would be charging WO1 Webber with one count of sexual assault. He pleaded guilty in September, and on 31st October 2025 at the Court Martial Centre in Bulford, Judge Advocate General Alan Large sentenced him to an immediate custodial sentence of six months in civilian prison and placed him on the Sex Offenders Register for seven years. Dismissal being unavailable for NCOs who have already left the services (as WO1 Webber had done), the JAG further ordered that if it could be properly done, WO1 Webber would be reduced in rank to reflect the fact that, had he been dealt with earlier before leaving the army, this sanction would have been imposed.³

Following representations made under the Unduly Lenient Sentencing Scheme, the Attorney General's Office decided in December 2025 not to refer the sentence to the Court of Appeal.

Response to the Inquest by MOD

Brigadier Melissa Emmett, head of the Army Personnel Support Group, has stated that the Army formally accepted its failures in Gunner Beck's case. Those were failures of training, and of clarity of expectations, which resulted in a lack of confidence in leadership and in the efficacy of reporting procedures.

² 'The Impact of moral injury on the wellbeing of UK military veterans', by Williamson V et al. in *BMC Psychology* (2021) 9:73, which concludes 'experiences of moral injury are associated with adverse mental health outcomes in UK AF veterans.' On the impacts of moral injury specifically caused by betrayal by a trusted authority, see 'Association of potential morally injurious events, moral injury and somatic symptoms of health in UK military veterans: a cross-sectional study' by Campbell G. et al, in *BMC Psychology* (2025) 14:56

³ *Rex v Ex Warrant Officer Michael Webber* 31 October 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/military-court-service-sentencing-remarks-2025>

On 18 March 2025 the Government formally responded to the Inquest. The MOD announced it would be setting up a new Tri-Service Complaints Unit to deal with allegations of bullying, discrimination, and harassment. This would give others in a position similar to Gunner Beck a remedial path entirely separate from the chain of command, similar to the Defence Serious Crime Command (DSCC) that was established in 2022. The second measure announced was the plan to develop the ‘Violence Against Women and Girls Taskforce’, a centrally-led unit directing regional ‘champions’ to raise awareness and tackle violence against women and girls across all three services.

As to whether these new measures will be sufficient to rebuild trust and maintain confidence in the system, only time will tell. It is fitting to end on the remark of Major General Sir Christopher Ghika KCVO CBE in reviewing the Service Inquiry Investigation report, where he noted that ‘the way [Sergeant Budd] had conducted himself whilst in a position of authority through the rank he held, suggests to me that it is at odds with the Army’s values and standards.’ Many of the 18 recommendations of the Service Inquiry relate to similar failings of leadership and failure to implement existing policies and procedures, such as those involving alcohol and the posting of inexperienced soldiers to roles outside regiments.

On 30 January 2026, the MOD announced that Major Hook and Colonel Shepherd have been charged offences under Section 19 of the Armed Forces Act, namely conduct prejudicial to good order and service discipline.⁴ As much as implementing new measures may be required, there is also considerable mileage in focusing on familiar and long-established military foundations, such as teaching and modelling moral courage, and ensuring that the Army’s values and standards are rigorously upheld across the board.

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⁴ <https://www.forcesnews.com/services/army/two-officers-face-court-martial-over-response-jaysley-beck-sexual-assault-case> accessed 30 January 2026