

Statement of Susan Wood

No. NSD 1485, 1486, 1487 of 2018

Federal Court of Australia
District Registry: New South Wales
Division: General

Ben Roberts-Smith

Applicant

Fairfax Media Publications Pty Limited ACN 003 357 720 & Ors

Respondents

Background

1. I am the former Network Head of Publicity at Seven West Media. I am Melbourne based. I am presently caring for family members and plan to return to the workforce later this year.
2. I first met the Applicant in 2013.

Articles sued upon

3. I am advised that the Applicant has issued proceedings for defamation over several articles, including:
 - (a) an article published in The Age print edition on 9-10 June 2018 entitled "*SAS's Day of Shame*" containing allegations regarding the kicking of a detainee off a cliff and his subsequent execution by an SASR soldier named "*Leonidas*";
 - (b) an article published in The Age print edition on 9-10 June 2018 entitled "*Blood Ties*" containing allegations regarding the "*blooding*" of a rookie;
 - (c) an article published in The Age print edition on 11-12 August 2018 entitled "*The Cracks in a War Hero's Facade*" containing allegations that the Applicant had engaged in domestic violence.
4. I read all three articles in the print edition of The Age.

FEDERAL COURT OF AUSTRALIA

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Exhibit No: A41
Assoc: Aline O'Connell

MFI No: _____

5. When reading the first two articles published on 9-10 June 2018, I formed the view that the SASR soldier referred to as "*Leonidas*" was the Applicant. The image of a "*fearsome warrior of ancient Sparta*" immediately suggested to me the Applicant. The Applicant is very well known for his physically imposing stature – in particular, his height. He is often pictured in the media towering over other soldiers.
6. The first article also referred to the Victoria Cross recipients and "*Leonidas*" having "*impeccable connections up the chain of command*". I have met all three recipients of the Victoria Cross, two of whom were in the SASR. Corporal Mark Donaldson VC and Corporal Dan Keighran VC are both very different physical builds to the Applicant. The image of a Spartan warrior fit the Applicant perfectly. I am also aware from working with the Applicant that he has excellent connections within the Australian Defence Force.
7. I also recall reading the third article. The fact that the Applicant was named in the article on 11-12 August 2018, simply confirmed that "*Leonidas*" was indeed the Applicant.

Applicant's reputation

8. I have worked with the Applicant for almost six years. In keeping with his reputation, I have observed the Applicant to be very direct in his approach. He is forthright and has a no-nonsense approach. He sets the highest standards for himself and others. I also know the Applicant to be loyal, honest and a person of great integrity.
9. I was very upset for the Applicant and his family when I read the articles and I contacted the Applicant to see how he and his family were coping.

(sgd) Susan Wood

24 June 2021