

SOWING THE SEEDS FOR CHANGE:

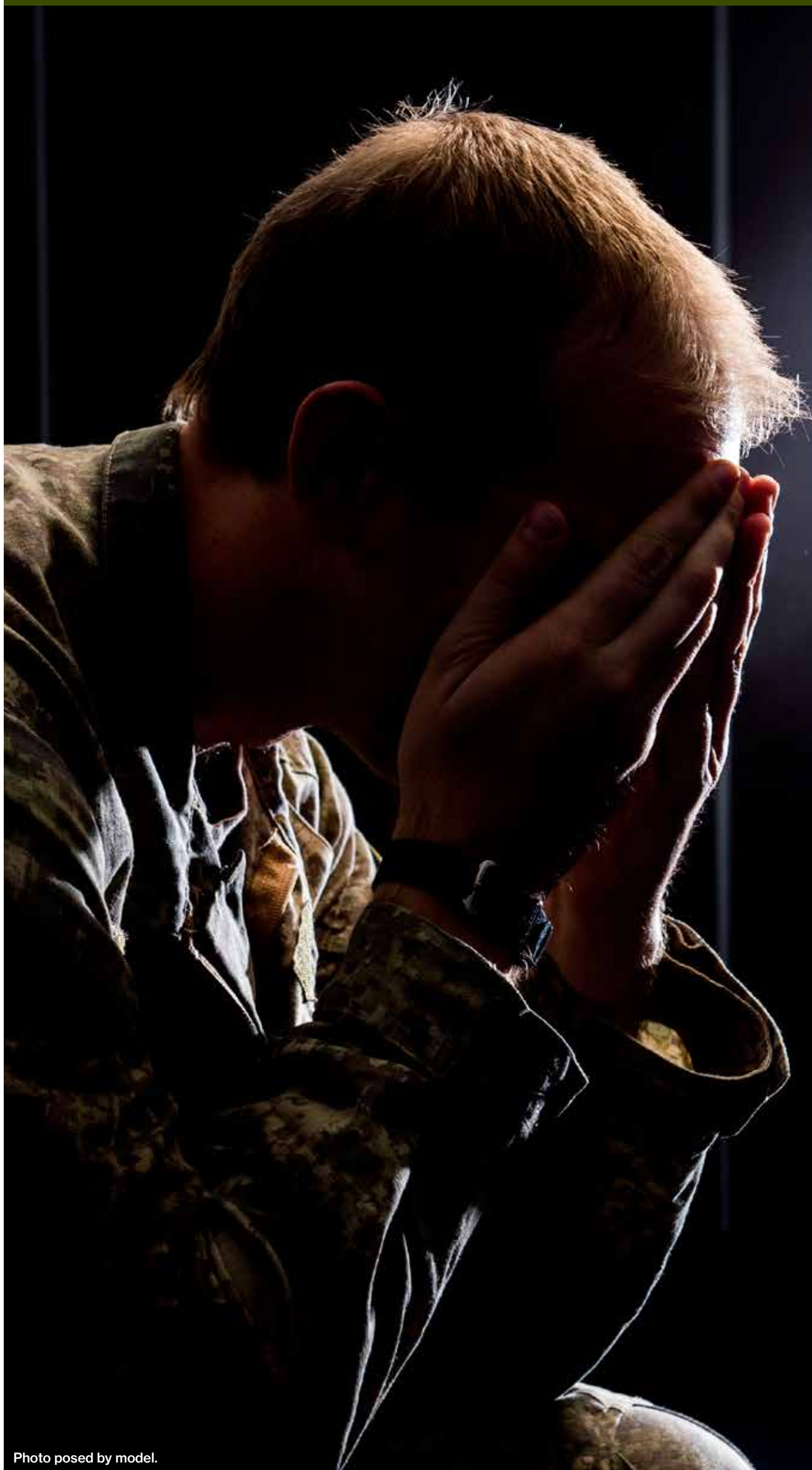


Photo posed by model.

By Judith Martin

It's not the place a shiny new soldier, sailor or airman ever expects to end up.

There are bars – the iron kind. There are few privileges, very little talking, and so many rules basic training seems like a walk in the park.

The day begins at 0600, and ends at 2200. In between there is hardly five minutes to call your own. And there is polishing. Endless polishing. To say nothing about the precision involved in room maintenance, but more about that later.

This is the New Zealand Defence Force's Services Corrective Establishment. It's the place where Private soldiers and their equivalent in the other Services are sent to, to put it colloquially, get their act together after major transgressions.

Some would call it military jail but, despite the aforementioned observations, there is something incredibly positive about this little facility tucked into a corner of Burnham Military Camp.

Military policeman, Warrant Officer Class One Shane Maslin, runs the place with his small team.

Bald and burly, he gives the initial impression he'd be unrelenting in straightening a detainee out. But after a few hours in his company it's obvious that's not the case. With a soft Southland burr he explains how detainees are fellow servicemen and women who for whatever reason have made a mistake. Often, a big mistake.

"When an individual arrives here we get them right back to basics, and then build them up again. We don't degrade or ridicule them, after all, they're still part of our organisation. We try and find out what's going on, and get them appropriate help. It could be they just stepped out of line or are lacking in discipline. About 85 percent of the time there is something else going on in the background, be it alcohol, drugs, financial, workplace or relationship problems."

A holiday camp this isn't, but after most of the day spent in its confines, it's obvious this is also nothing like the stuff of urban myth, where detainees were given nail scissors to mow lawns, and carry rocks from one place to another and then back again.

"From the moment they arrive they have to ask permission to speak. The reason behind this is we want them reflecting rather than projecting. If you are left to your own thoughts you are reflecting on what you have done but if you want to talk all the time you're not doing that."

Detainees are issued kit as they stand to attention, toeing the floor line in front of the issuing desk. Then it's an about turn to a demonstration cell to learn exactly how they should leave their own cell each day.

The stainless steel gleams, the bedroll is perfect, the shoes arranged just so. Items on the bench have exactly the same distance between each other. Picking up a small block of wood – a measuring stick – WO1 explains how it is used to make the perfect space. "It's very hard for a detainee to get no inspection points, and having the perfect cell becomes important and develops a sense of pride. When a detainee gets through an inspection with no pick-ups it's a big deal for them and the staff acknowledge this."

Detainees are reported on daily. They get feedback on their performance and then a feed forward session,

The Services Corrective Establishment

where staff focus on areas of their performance they can improve on the following day.

"This keeps the detainee focused on self-improvement. We also get the detainee to complete their own assessment and self-improvement focus so they actually "own" this process. Most detainees struggle with this because it is their first exposure to reflecting on their own performance, but after a couple of days, they are asking for more paper."

In the corridors anything brass gleams; a brass tap sitting forlornly on some firefighting equipment is the shiniest I have ever seen. It's a nod to an activity some see as pointless, and others, including WO Maslin, see as a learning tool.

"Polishing means following instruction, attention to detail, time management, and pride in the finished product. After a while a detainee gets that, and they do develop pride in what they do."

The average age of detainees is 21 and their arrival at the corrective establishment is often accompanied by feelings of self-loathing and shock that it has come to this, he says.

"Every individual receives a bespoke rehabilitation programme. It's not one size fits all. We are responsible for raising their standards, changing their attitude and getting them to a stage where they can positively contribute to their unit again.

"If mental health or substance abuse issues are present we bring in outside support. We are not trained counsellors so we could do more harm than good if we go down that track. I encourage my staff to become active listeners without offering definitive advice. We place a heavy emphasis on the NZDF's ethos and values because they are in our care."

Detainees write an autobiography and are encouraged to express their feelings when they write.

At the SCE they wake at 0600 have breakfast and then clean until 0800. The rest of the day is a mix of drill, physical training, physical labour, development sessions, researching a presentation topic, more cleaning and ironing, and then a time of reflection and preparation for the next day before lights are out at 2200.

WO1 Maslin is adamant there is no bellowing and bullying at the SCE. "Our training is designed to restore their self-confidence. Screaming at someone doesn't give them a skill set – it just adds to the stress and anxiety, and someone usually mucks up what they're doing even more."

Even if a detainee is discharged from their Service after their time in the SCE they will be given a training programme to develop personal qualities that will enhance their prospects of successful integration into civilian society. They receive help writing a CV, and given practice with handling job interviews.

The length of time someone spends in the corrective establishment varies between a week and six months, with the longer detention most likely the result of a Court Martial.

Detainees can earn privileges such as watching television news for half an hour each day. They are encouraged to complete tasks quicker and more efficiently. "We want to encourage not just compliant behaviour, we want peak performance. If we can't get them to trust and respect us we can't get to the root of what is going on, what is behind the behaviour that landed him or her here."

WO1 Maslin doesn't see the SCE as responsible for returning a perfectly reformed individual to their unit.

"All we can do is sow the seeds for change. You can't change the world in 14 days, so there has to be support back in the detainee's unit when they return." The SCE engages with the unit, and if there is a substance or alcohol abuse problem, a social worker/medical expert can continue to put a comprehensive care plan in place.

There are plans afoot to develop the SCE, and add a visiting room for partners and children that is more appealing than what is now there. It will be a truly rehabilitative centre, with gardens developed (and maintained by detainees) which will be used as a place for reflection.

WO 1 Maslin is used to dealing with young people – before he took over as Officer in Charge of the SCE he was the Command Warrant Officer of the Youth Development Unit. The SCE, he says, is about

getting a serviceperson back on track, with an increased sense of self-discipline, personal pride and adherence to the NZDF's ethos and values.

"Trust and respect is mutual here. Yeah they have done something wrong but the only way they are going to get back on track is if we help them. One important thing to note, is while we work very hard to assist our people to get back on track, utilising an ever growing pool of resources, we must balance this with the fact they are at SCE for a reason.

There must be a consequence for their actions. It's tough at SCE but everything that is done, is done for a reason.



WO1 Shane Maslin: getting errant young service people back on track. Photo: Sergeant Sean Spivey

"Although I fortunately did not have the requirement to utilise SCE too often during my tenure as a Commanding Officer, I found it a useful option to have available to me when considering punishments," says Lieutenant Colonel Hamish Gibbons, former CO of QAMR.

"In particular I found the correctional aspect useful when a soldier needed to be realigned to our Army's ethos of serving New Zealand loyally and honourably. The SCE staff are able to provide good advice as to the right amount of time to be spent at SCE to gain the benefit of its correctional value, whilst ensuring that the punishment nature of SCE time matches the transgression(s).

"In one particular case I had a soldier thank me for sending him to SCE as in his opinion it is what he needed to get himself back on track and his performance at work improved, which indicates the advice and services provided by SCE were effective."