

## **Julia Rice Statement to the Press**

This Inquest has been the culmination of the worst period of my life.

In allowing my child to participate in air experience, I trusted that the RAF knew what they were doing and that they would take care of him. It was devastating to discover that they had utterly failed him.

For me, this horrendous experience has come from the pilot's disability Ankylosing Spondylitis, which meant that the initial impact of the mid-air collision resulted in the pilot's incapacitation and left my son struggling in vain to escape the plane that in fact was capable of being flown back to the airbase. Unfortunately the abandonment training by the RAF was woefully inadequate for these cadets.

For nearly 3 years, I have felt that this inquest was about the pilot's fitness to fly as assessed by the RAF and that ineptitude, and a failure of procedures together with inefficient communication resulted in the RAF's complete inability to take care of Nicholas. See-and-avoid is all we have in uncontrolled airspace therefore having a pilot who is unable to look up and who has only 50% mobility in his neck is questionable.

In 1976, over 30 years ago, RAF medical reports advised that Flight Lt Blee should not undertake parachute training involving falls onto a mat due to the very real risk of spontaneous fracture of the vertebra. That this foreseeable risk was ignored by the RAF for 30 years is shameful.

I am astounded by the obstacles placed in our path whilst trying to uncover all the details about shambolic medicals and total lack of care and I wish to thank my legal team for the dogged determination to lay bare all the relevant facts.

The question of why a recommendation from a 2007 Service Inquiry into a near miss between a Tutor plane and a Puma helicopter resulted in no decision to fly longer sorties to keep our children out of uncontrolled airspace where air traffic density is "obscene" has still not been answered for me.

As my father suffered from Ankylosing Spondylitis I have every sympathy for fellow sufferers but I feel that the serious implications were not given sufficient credence by the RAF, particularly when flying other people's children. The Jury has found that the RAF knew about the risk of spinal fracture. The Jury have also found that the RAF management was complacent and the culture of the RAF discouraged challenge.

This has been a harrowing ordeal and I would like to thank my family and friends for all their support throughout this time