

News / Justice

Who is Bruce Lehrmann?

He didn't speak at his trial, as is his right, but he boasted of his very important 'senior adviser' role when interviewed by AFP officers.

DAVID HARDAKER OCT 27, 2022

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BRUCE LEHRMANN (IMAGE: AAP/MICK TSIKAS)

Bruce Lehrmann might have been on trial for

allegedly raping Brittany Higgins but we know surprisingly little about him. His was the absent voice as Higgins was subjected to hours of detailed examination covering everything from what she wore, to how much she drank, to who she spoke to.

What we do know of Lehrmann is contained primarily in a lengthy interview which two officers from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) conducted in April last year, shortly after Higgins was interviewed by police and her allegations became public through the media.

Bruce Emery Lehrmann was born in June 1995 in College Station, Texas, a small city of 120,000 an hour and a half drive from Houston.

According to his police interview, he had been working with the Coalition government since the 2013 election. That made him just 18 when he stepped into Canberra's halls of power.



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Lehrmann was also a student at the ANU where he was doing a double degree in arts and policy, although as of 2021 the Liberal staffer was not “degree qualified”, telling police he hadn’t graduated because “I got a bit lazy”.

By March 2019 — when he allegedly raped Higgins — he was working in the office of Senator Linda Reynolds. Reynolds had recently been appointed minister for defence industries, having previously been assistant minister for home affairs. Lehrmann, by then 23, gloried in the title of “senior adviser”.

He told police he was Reynolds’ “most senior staffer”. As such he was able to parade himself with more than a little swagger, moving in the realm of the powerful backroom operatives.

“I was in the WhatsApp group chat with all the chiefs of staff, including John Kunkel from the PM’s office,” he told police.

His ministerial role had involved “everything from liaising with your commissioner at the AFP, ASIO, handling Estimates processes” as well as “parliamentary policy [and] national security”. Lehrmann said he had “the relevant security clearances to do with that”, including “signing for the ASIO briefs and the home affairs briefs”.

Lehrmann appears to have had a keen awareness of his growing status in defence and national security circles. At the Dock bar where he had been invited for drinks on the night of the alleged rape there had been “individuals who I recognised as ADCs for various ministers”. (ADC, or aide-de-camp, normally applies to officials working with military commanders.)

“The governor-general’s ADC was there,” he told

police. “I remember meeting him [and] other officials from the intelligence community as well.”

Lehrmann described the gathering as a Department of Defence “shindig” attended by defence officials. The group also included defence contractors, according to Higgins.

In the alcohol-fuelled night that unfolded, Lehrmann recalled that the movers and shakers of the defence-security complex were keen to make themselves known to him. “A lot of the ADCs were wanting to introduce themselves,” he told police.



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Explaining the apparently mystical job of a ministerial adviser to police, he said he understood the “gravity” of his role. Among other things he had been working on ‘the submarine issue’ — a likely reference to the multibillion-dollar French Naval Group contract which was going pear-shaped at the time. He prepared question time briefs.

He was also able to explain a trick of the trade on how to keep the public in the dark: “It’s a rule within the Coalition that if you were doing political work it’s to be done on the APH [Australian Parliament House] network because it can’t be FOI’d,” he told police.

Stoked with growing self-importance, Lehrmann had taken to building his own small empire in Reynolds’ ministerial suite. Commandeering his own corner of the office, he constructed a three-desk, U-shaped workspace that let everyone know

his big-man status.

Higgins described him as “territorial”. She said the two had had a “strange adversarial relationship”. She was left in no doubt who was the boss and that she needed to do all that was commanded of her to get on in her career.

“The disparity between me and him was huge,” she said in her police interview. “He would demand me to do all these things outside my job. He was someone that I perceived to be above me in station so I did what was asked.”

Higgins recalled that Lehrmann was wearing the “standard Liberal attire” of a polo Ralph Lauren shirt and RM Williams shoes on the night in question.

Every bit the young Liberal operative on the make, Lehrmann had professed that he was looking for a career in national security before he was punted from Reynolds’ office. “Crap,” he had thought at the idea he would lose his job for the official reason of a security breach — which is exactly what occurred.

Out of the ashes of a crushed political and/or national security career Lehrmann followed another familiar path, scoring a job as regulatory affairs manager at the giant British American Tobacco.

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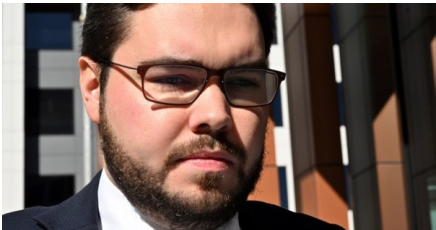


David Hardaker has an extensive career as a journalist and broadcaster, primarily at the ABC where he worked on flagship programs such as *Four Corners*, *7.30*, *Foreign Correspondent*, AM and PM. He spent eight years reporting in the Middle East and can speak Arabic.

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