Federal election 2016: Hughes sorry for Abbott ‘lunatic’ jibe

Malcolm Turnbull’s father-in-law, former attorney-general Tom Hughes QC, has written to Tony Abbott to apologise for any “offence” given by a new biography, in which he labels the former prime minister a “lunatic”.

The gesture follows revelations in Tom Hughes QC: A Cab on the Rank, to be published on Monday, that Mr Hughes sent a note to Mr Turnbull after he was toppled by Mr Abbott in 2009, saying it was an act of “fool” by the party.

The book by Liberal Party historian Ian Hancock draws on a number of personal records, including a stinging letter Mr Hughes wrote to his brother, the late Robert Hughes, about the leadership change in which Mr Turnbull was demoted.

“This is a potentially catastrophic decision,” he wrote. “To elect Abbott in his place is the equivalent of putting the bull in charge of the china shop or the principal lunatic in charge of the asylum.”

Defending Mr Hughes as a “great man”, Mr Turnbull said his father-in-law had attempted to make amends with Mr Abbott.

Mr Hughes, the father of Lucy Turnbull, was a former Liberal MP for the NSW seats of Berowra and Parkes in the 1960s and 70s. “He served in the Royal Australian Air Force in the Second World War. He served his country in parliament and at war and his memoir will be of great interest and inspiration to many people who read his life story,” Mr Turnbull said as he campaigned in Adelaide.

“Tom has great respect for Tony Abbott and the note that is referred to in his memoirs, of course, is some years old. I know that Tom has written a note to Tony to apologise if any offence is caused by that.”

Mr Abbott declined to comment on the biography, which will be launched by former High Court chief justice Murray Gleeson.

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