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A soldier's perspective on serving in Iraq and Afghanistan

I am working with my Dutch colleagues in the Task Force Uruzgan operations room on another March day in southern Afghanistan.¹ I am far removed from my University, and in a world where acronyms such as INS (Insurgents) and RPG (rocket propelled grenade), MAJ (Major), LT (Lieutenant), CPL (Corporal), LCPL (Lance Corporal), and PTE (Private) need no explanation. We are a short helicopter flight (and a long drive) north of Kandahar and Helmand provinces, areas of intense fighting. Our mountainous province, just over half the size of Wales but with a far smaller population and only one paved road, is relatively peaceful. It is something of a backwater but as a province with links to both Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, is terrain that is still inextricably linked to the conflict. On this day we have patrols of soldiers in the field, Afghan National Army (ANA) troops accompanied by their Australian mentors.

I can't remember the time the contact at Kakarak began, but the heavily redacted report of the incident tells me it began at 0931, and that an Australian casualty was reported at 0939. I can't remember these timings, but I can remember the initial contact report coming in, the sudden stillness in the operations room and the subsequent eruption of activity.

Very shortly after adopting the fire position CPL Hopkins was struck on the head by INS fire. MAJ [redacted], who had moved to this position, recovered CPL Hopkins out of fire. MAJ [redacted] and LCPL [redacted] attempted to provide immediate first aid to CPL Hopkins while at the same time having to engage the INS.²

Extra staff surge into the operations room and commanders are briefed. As reports of the TIC (troops in contact) flow in, we all carry on our now far too routine tasks, with

individual staff coordinating requests for offensive support by air, with backup contingency ground support put into operation and a helicopter evacuation planned. While supporting this contact, the positions of other troops in the multinational task group are constantly monitored, as we know from experience that in the space of minutes patrols throughout the area of operations can come under insurgent attack, while poorly aimed but still deadly rocket fire can strike any one of a number of patrol bases. Afghan, Dutch, Australian, American, Norwegian, Singaporean, French, British and Slovak - we will cooperate in a common venture across the province, playing our part as small pieces of a big machine. Those on the ground are also playing their parts, but in their case with conspicuous gallantry amongst the irrigation ditches and the wheat and poppy fields.

With assistance from ANA soldiers, CPL Hopkins was moved into the compound where LT [redacted] was located. During this period LT [redacted] requested PTE [redacted] to move forward from SGT [redacted] position to provide medical assistance to CPL Hopkins. PTE [redacted] moved forward across approximately 50 - 60 m of open ground, under fire, and began to render first aid to CPL Hopkins.³

I cannot remember any timings from this busy morning, but I remember the report coming in that indicated the seriousness of the casualty, and the duration of the battle which the subsequent report indicates as being 20-30 minutes of insurgent attacks with small arms, rocket-propelled grenade and possible mortar fire, while our troops fought back. A coalition helicopter provided fire support as the Afghan and Australian team withdrew under fire carrying the casualty. I remember the sound of the aeromedical evacuation helicopter returning to the base. What is happening now in Kakarak just 12 km north of us could be an isolated incident or the start of several other incidents - and then another TIC breaks out nearby. More soldiers in contact with the enemy, fighting for their lives. Throughout this intense morning, we keep to our routines and in rotation some of us leave the operations room and grab some food.

Walking quickly back up the hill to the operations room with a friend, I see another close friend leaving the reinforced steel bunker, striding down towards us. Our preoccupation is not with winning or losing this small battle in what will become Australia's longest-running war, but with the life or death of a fellow soldier, now identified as Matthew (Hoppy) Hopkins.

We call out ‘How’s he going?’ The shake of a head and a brutal hand gesture say all that is to be said.

Hoppy is dead, his young wife Victoria is now a widow, and his new born son Alexander will grow up to be told by others that his father was present at his birth but would only have only four days of life with him before returning to Afghanistan.

I never met Hoppy in life and saw him first in the chapel before his funeral as a forever young soldier in a photograph. As a fellow member of the task force of several hundred men and women, he was the twenty-one year old who we mourned, the flag covered comrade who we escorted to the airstrip in an all too familiar ramp ceremony, his coffin moving forward past the line of hundreds of saluting men and women, to the waiting C130 Hercules with the Padre carrying out his unenviable duty once again. The Royal Australian Air Force plane taking off to the sky and circling the Tarin Kowt basin, a beautiful harsh landscape surrounded by magnificent mountains, the tribute of gunfire from the Dutch artillery. Back in Australia the arrival of his body, yet another dead Australian, will become public memory through television news, as will his funeral, attended by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

The death of this one soldier in wartime reflects the international nature of the trauma of war. He was shot by Afghan Taliban insurgents, given immediate first aid by Australians, carried from the field by Afghan Army soldiers, his extraction covered by Dutch and American aircraft, helicoptered by the Dutch back to the multinational base where he died in the Dutch-Singaporean-Australian Hospital.

Unsettled barriers and zones of expectation

Although it is becoming easier, I can still find talking about war quite difficult with certain audiences. In some contexts it is hard to guess how one will be judged. When I returned from Iraq I was not suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but for a long time I felt deeply affected by the tragic deaths of so many Iraqi civilians, and this private condition made me feel different from those in my civilian work community who only knew Iraq as a news story or a political debate. There is a disjuncture between those who are not traumatised, and between those who have gone through a traumatic experience and who would have once expected praise and approbation but who now might fear rejection and denigration – or indifference. The extent to which I find this difficult can be gauged by the

fact that 18 months after returning from Afghanistan I gave an entire paper on narrating the Afghanistan war at the Australasian Cultural Studies Conference without ever mentioning the fact that I had been in Afghanistan or Iraq, or that I had been a soldier.

Even in the symposium associated with this book I deliberately sat in the corner near colleagues I knew well because I felt more comfortable with them beside me. I felt some anxiety when as the introductions progressed I knew I would soon have to declare my soldier identity to members of an outside University community who did not know me.

Being a part time soldier working in an academic context can make one wary about how one will be judged, and can lead one to take precautions against possible criticisms. I suspect I am one of a small number of Australians who served in Iraq and Afghanistan who looked on the United Nations website to reassure themselves that their presence was in accordance with legally binding internationally endorsed UN Security Council resolutions. It might seem obsessive or peculiar but when working in an environment where there was a widely held common view that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were illegal,⁴ I felt better knowing that the UN Secretary General had authorised me to kill to protect the citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan and members of other legally constituted coalition forces.

As an academic, I have crossed boundaries by being a soldier in Baghdad for six months between September 2006 to February 2007 during the height of Sunni – Shia ethnic cleansing, and in a far less bloody Afghanistan from October 2008 to June 2009. In Australia the memory of social divisions caused by the Vietnam War is strong;⁵ perhaps more strong in our imagination than in reality, but regardless of the individual's capacity to exaggerate this in their own mind, returning from a war to a university was problematic. Civilians do not know what to say to veterans. While no colleague had ever said anything to me with the intention of causing me distress,⁶ I well remember one response on my return from my first deployment. This involved an academic colleague whom I knew very well and whom I had had taught with for many years. I walked into his office after more than six months absence from university, having just returned from the concentrated experience of working 14 to 16 hour days, seven days a week at one of the most bloody conflicts of the decade. My own feelings of guilt for being an Australian on the sidelines of an American/Iraqi/Shia/Sunni war, the remorse I had for not being able to help much during months of futile and nauseating sectarian violence that had devastated much of Iraq, and the very exhaustion of the war experience left me vulnerable. I assumed I would be asked about what I had done, and I

expected some sort of welcome home comment. He looked up at me, said 'hello Richard', and began to talk about student matters. Indeed, he has never mentioned the war or my absence to this day.

Public memory is about the development of a common view and there are difficulties when veterans try and relate to this, but the soldier experience is so varied as to create its own challenges of understanding. I was a part-time soldier undertaking full-time service in a combat support rather than in a combat role. The experiences of a combat soldier would be different to mine. American, British and Australian experiences also differ. For the viewing edification of the general public, the soldier is usually depicted as a warrior and as a hero who engages in constant fighting and faces constant risk. Popular television representations such as *Generation Kill* and high profile box office successes such as *The Hurt Locker* were popular in Australia and re-present the American soldier's war, an experience that differs from the reality experienced by most in the Australian military.⁷

So what is the soldier-participant's experience of war? An important point to remember is most soldiers don't kill, don't see the dead, and don't tend wounded – but they are soldiers nonetheless, and they are still part of the big military machine. The experience of war is often associated with the actions of a small but exciting combat ('teeth') aspect, not the numerically larger but less interesting combat support or combat services support ('the tail'). Within one country such as Australia there are many different militaries that have different experiences. There is the obvious distinction between Army, Navy and Air Force - and deployed defence civilians who also face risks. (I've had the unusual experience of serving in Iraq with a former student working in this role). There is a sharp division between the full-time regular Army and the part-timers, 'chocos'.⁸ Despite this often deep divide, in an environment where the Australian government had consciously promoted the role of Special Forces at the expense of the infantry,⁹ for some part time soldiers from the 1st Commando Regiment their Special Forces status meant that they actually did far more fighting than some full-time infantry in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰ There is a division between combat soldiers and the rest but most of all, there is a significant difference between the Special Forces, and everybody else.

Our cultural image of the soldier is of a muscled male warrior, and many of them are. As soldiers we want to fit this role, and we idolise those who do, such as one holder of Australia's highest award for gallantry, the much admired and popular Victoria Cross

recipient Ben Roberts-Smith. His 202 cm muscled frame evokes the image of the powerful strong military man, a figure many wish to emulate. He looks like the hero he is, and represents an image of the perfect warrior. He inspires many young soldiers,¹¹ yet of course most do not look like him and will not ever perform his role.

There is a disconnect between anticipation of an event and the actual experience of it. In the twenty-first century we are more cautious about publicly expressing a desire to go to war than in earlier times. Soldiers do not necessarily want war but deep down they want to undertake and they want to experience those very activities that they have been trained for. A soldier friend of mine once compared it to being a violinist or an actor. You rehearse, you train, and you practice and you actually want to take part in the performance despite feelings of trepidation, fear and confusion. When Australian soldiers were committed to what was essentially a peacekeeping role in southern Iraq between 2005 and 2008, there was debate within the Australian Army over the frustrations of soldiers who expected to fight but were denied the opportunity to do so.¹² This is not vainglorious and is based on the understanding of the risks, but reflects the frustration of those who do not get to perform their expected or anticipated role.

We frequently view this desire to fight as a masculine sentiment, and while it certainly resonates particularly well with many young men,¹³ it is also resonates with women. Female soldiers prepare for war, anticipate war, and desire war, and face risks like their male counterparts. Just after I arrived in Baghdad, four sleeping Australian soldiers were maimed during a rocket attack, with the most seriously injured being Corporal Sarah Webster. Despite months of medical treatment, this soldier was determined to rehabilitate herself and return to active duty, which she did in a 2008 Afghanistan deployment she described as ‘a perfectly normal trip’, a comment perhaps indicative of her long immersion in the warrior culture of soldiering.¹⁴ Gender does not discriminate among those who are fired on while jogging around a camp perimeter, and when a rocket hits a shower block killing and wounding those inside, a female soldier can just as easily lose an eye and be permanently disfigured as any male soldier. Public memory might have developed a common view of soldiers as male warriors, but veterans themselves know that this does not show the entire picture.

The experience of danger creates memories that unite female and male soldiers and challenge preconceptions. Shortly after a 45 minute battle in southern Iraq I spoke with an Australian soldier I knew. She was quietly aware of her role in this event, and that she was one of the

first Australian women to have been in ground combat in Iraq. I pointed out to her that she was one of the very few female Australian soldiers to have been in battle since the Second World War - regardless of how we constitute an Anzac pantheon or debate its existence, she had no doubt in her mind where this event placed her as a soldier. Gender defined her, as did the bond she felt with her fellow soldiers who had been in the armoured vehicle with her on that day. Her (male) Regimental Sergeant Major might epitomise military identity to those who were not there, but she was the soldier who experienced this battle with her comrades, and he was the outsider.

Zones of experience

For many the experience of war starts well before deployment to the war zone, with long mission rehearsal exercises and pre-deployment training in isolated and uncomfortable locations, training which may last up to four months.

Then there is the awkwardness of pre-deployment leave spent with immediate family, a time of artificial relaxation that can never be fully relaxing, with all knowing that separation is imminent.

Then there is the actual departure from families and loved ones – the memory of my partner and one primary school-aged daughter completely breaking down, desperately sobbing. Then we had to all become calm, try to smile and brace up to go outside so I could get in a car surrounded by wonderful caring neighbours, who were there to say farewell. Once you've left family, it becomes easier as you can focus on the task ahead.

If you knew the right day of the week, you could arrive at Sydney airport and would see the groups of fit, short haired men and women in civilian clothes. There are many hours of flying in a chartered civilian A330 to a Middle Eastern destination that I can't name for reasons of operational security, but that I can recall being clearly visible on the departure sign at Sydney airport. If you arrive in summer, the heat is intense, even in the early morning. You cross paths with those returning from war. They are tanned and lean, and have tired, drawn faces - but they look happy to be going home. There is acclimatisation and a further brief period of refresher training in an unnamed Middle Eastern country, a last fix of junk food at a United States military base, then walking in pairs across the tarmac into a C130 Hercules wearing body armour, carrying a rifle and hundreds of rounds of live ammunition.¹⁵

I remember the experience of travel on flights that can last six hours with take-offs and landings at different bases of varying size. As you line up to emplane you try and reposition yourself in the queue to ensure that you are sitting right next to the smallest person you can find, and not a massive-chested weightlifter. The seats are of webbing and aluminium poles. There's the experience of being jammed side by side into an overcrowded troop plane where your knee is shoved almost directly into the groin of the man or woman opposite, and where you can't let go of your rifle. To get a book or food out of a pocket involves moving and thus waking the person on either side. If you stand up to stretch, or to go to the rudimentary toilet at the end of the aircraft you step across the seats and bodies, balancing your extra weight of body armour, weapon and rounds of ammunition very carefully as you tiptoe over these recumbent but half-waking bodies. The smell of vomit will linger in the crowded aircraft. On one memorable occasion, urine from an overfilled French Air Force *pissoir* ran back and forth across the cabin floor every single time we took off and landed at a series of small firebases.

Arrival in the war zone means experiencing very basic comforts, work in confined spaces, and only rudimentary pleasures. There are occasional visits from concert entertainers who bring a memory of home with them.¹⁶ It means long working hours in heat and cold, in the rain and in the dust, and the stench of excrement.

There is of course, the varied degree of risk of death or disability. A routine patrol or helicopter flight could easily end in tragedy, even though statistically you know that nothing is likely to happen. There is always the possibility that one discontented Afghan soldier you're working with could decide to use his weapon on those around him to deal with accumulated frustrations. Injury or death could come by misfortune from a fellow soldier through what in a civilian world would be described as an industrial accident - firearms are dangerous weapons and tired soldiers can make mistakes. There is also the threat of disease - something which can be as exotic as the viral infection Bell's Palsy, or the routine intestinal parasites that are found in Iraq and Afghanistan but not in Australia.

In a psychological sense, it means removal to a foreign place. I've flown into Tarin Kowt in southern Afghanistan in 2006 and again in 2008, and even though the second flight took place at night-time I knew where I was by the peculiar smell of human waste, spices, dust and diesel. Such smells can remain on well-packed uniforms and clothes you take home, and when opened in Australia can assault the senses.

The risk of trauma is always there in the background. There are potential psychological issues that may be small, or may go as far as fully fledged PTSD. I saw remnants of the 20 or so Afghan police who were victims of a suicide bomber attack; it wasn't my role to run to assist them. Others have desperately rendered first aid during battle, or have held a soldier's broken body after a rocket attack hit a rudimentary shower block constructed of shipping containers.

War also means rest and recreation. For Australian soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, the government's policy of flying troops on leave either to Europe or Australia, the so-called 'Rome or home' policy meant for some the opportunity of romantic engagements with loved ones who fly at their own expense to meet them in Venice or in Paris. They reconnect for two short weeks, and then disconnect as they switch off the civilian world and rejoin the war.

And finally it means return to Australia. Some are met by family and friends at the airport and others slip anonymously away. On my first return I had an unforgettable welcome by cheerful crowd of neighbours who had lined the street with yellow ribbons, a reception engineered by a Vietnam veteran neighbour who did not want me to experience the trauma of a welcome home he had not received. Then there are post-operational psych assessments, and return to boring routine soldiering. There is always a high rate of discharge when soldiers return from wars.

Memorial days, shared myths

Soldiers expect that their sacrifice, trauma and suffering will become memorialised and become part of the collective experience of their culture. In Britain, Remembrance Day is important but does not dominate the national imagination. In the United States, Veterans Day and Memorial Day commemorate soldiers who served and who died and are significant events. In Australia, Anzac Day is a national holiday held on the anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops on Turkey's Gallipoli peninsular on 25 April, 1915. This nine-month campaign resulted in defeat, yet was seen in Australia as an event that had forged a sense of national identity. Anzac Day commemorates all who served and died, and is commemorated by tens of thousands in services held at dawn,¹⁷ mid-morning parades of marching veterans and serving soldiers, and a range of associated cultural activities that include mass visits to the site of the original battle by thousands of young Australians and New Zealanders.

There is increasing interest in Anzac Day as the centenary of the original landing approaches, and there are many different meanings of Anzac Day, but what differentiates it from its British or American counterparts is that it constitutes Australia's primary national myth. There is no contending day of equal stature such as Independence Day – Anzac Day is a central moment that is seen by many to define Australian national identity. Anzac and the Australian military are linked through a national myth, and have a place as part of a national public memory.¹⁸ This centrality is contested, and historians have engaged with Anzac Day and the pervasiveness of the Anzac legend.¹⁹ Shifting attitudes have seen the legend of Anzac become inviolable, and any Australian veteran from any war now becomes part of this national heroic structure.²⁰ The positioning of Anzac as a central national myth positions the Australian soldier in a particularly unusual situation as being the inheritor and at times custodian of both a national civic tradition and a soldierly tradition.²¹ While Anzac has a place in a national mythic structure, it also has a place as an institutional myth that is part of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force. Often self-appointed veteran custodians of this respond with anger when they perceived disrespect shown to these values.²² Such sensitivity can mask trauma. As Johnson points out elsewhere in this volume, the public can use memorial as a visual and emotional stand-in and thus do not have to engage directly with the losses of soldiers in war.

Initially rare, visits to the sites of Australian battles became popular in the 1980s and the 1990s. These include the increasingly popular pilgrimages to Gallipoli, which changed in character and evolved to the extent that the commemoration of 1995 was criticised for resembling a rock concert. For the young Australians doing a few years travelling and working in Europe, attendance at a dawn service at Gallipoli now seems almost as mandatory as trips to the Munich Beer Festival or the Test cricket.²³

Following Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's affirmation that the 1942 Kokoda campaign in Papua New Guinea was more significant to the national psyche than Gallipoli,²⁴ increasing numbers of middle-aged Australians have undertaken the arduous seven to nine day trek across the jungle-covered mountains between Port Moresby and Kokoda village. Thousands complete this event and many participants are from the over forty and slightly overweight demographic of those who seek to replicate in part and thus understand the human experience of an earlier generation's war.²⁵ This structured re-experiencing of the past becomes a management of public memory which bridges the distance between those who have served and those who have visited the sites of war, but it also is a reminder of the divide

between them and us. All Australians and New Zealanders have the right to own and remake the memory of past battles, but many veterans dislike over-commercialised re-creations.²⁶

The contested nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined with concerns of operational security have kept these wars out of the Australian public gaze, often as a deliberate act of government policy.²⁷ Australian governments have been enthusiastic about supporting the United States in order to maintain the United States alliance, but there are political disadvantages in trumpeting this alliance to the wider electorate. Community disquiet about the war makes it harder for soldiers to fit into a national myth.

As both a soldier and as an academic I have conflicted roles, and this provides barriers to communication. There is an unsettled etiquette about what a returned soldier can talk about, and there is an etiquette that presents difficulty for those who wish to ask questions. It is a sign of intimacy to discuss war, as a veteran may not wish to discuss complex past experiences for fear they will be misinterpreted. Children are far more direct, and they will openly say ‘did you kill anyone at the war?’, because they have not been conditioned by the codes that govern our society and prevent such etiquette-breaching questions.

War is many different things. One soldier wounded in Italy during the Second World War wrote ‘The horror of war is not what it does to the human body (which anyway it probably does only once, if at all) but what it does to the human spirit. It is the site (and sound and smell) of the dead and the injured, the fear that what has happened to them will happen to you, together with all the feelings of revulsion and despair aroused by the human carnage and general destruction that go to make war’s horror.’²⁸ The author of this is well-known in his childhood character of Christopher (Robin) Milne, a small innocent boy who with his toy companions Winnie-the Poo, Piglet and Tigger appeared in his father’s stories in a realm far removed from war. Such are the memories that begin as private, become collective and then become public memory.

But war is more than horror – it is an in-depth experience of endurance of difficult conditions of life, something we often forget in favour of simplistic fighting narratives. War is a boring, tiring, disgusting, horrific and serious business and can result in degrees of trauma. However it can still be a source of shared humour, depending on what memories we create and select.

My youngest daughter is eight and my middle daughter ten. The news of their adoption came when I was deployed overseas, and I celebrated the additions to my family not with family

but with my fellow soldiers. I loved hearing my youngest daughter's account of the story she had told her pre-school classmates and teachers about how her father went to war in the desert and came back with a toy camel, but that in the war Daddy was scared and he hid in a hole in the ground. I like this story, and am very happy for her to keep on telling it - even if it skips much of the story.

My understanding of war and trauma is connected to family history, family memories and family service in previous wars.²⁹ For one grandfather whom I never knew this had been the Boer War. For my father, an aunt and three uncles this had been the Second World War. Our family was lucky, because our war dead only included my father's cousin, killed in Papua New Guinea in 1943.

Other families were not so fortunate, and the way this is remembered can be enacted years after the event. A sister-in-law has spoken of her own father as an octogenarian putting a memorial notice in the newspaper to commemorate the death of his much loved elder brother Robert, who survived fighting in the Second World War in North Africa only to be killed by the Japanese at Buna in one of the last battles of one of Australia's most iconic campaigns, Kokoda. Now 87 years old, Bill can still remember Robert as the brother he never knew as an adult, and the death that irreparably changed their family. There is also the memory that their father was a decorated First World War hero³⁰ who would have privately agonised over the death of a son whose military service was influenced by his example. This family trauma once belonged in the public sphere when Robert died, but with the passing of the years is no longer a public memory but remains where it began, as the trauma of the family.

This year I attended the funeral of an old family friend who died peacefully at the age of 83, comforted with all her family could provide. Margaret's well-attended funeral made a stark contrast to that of her aunt, an Australian Army soldier taken prisoner on Banka Island after the fall of Singapore in 1942. She was one of a group of nurses who had endured three and a half years of captivity in appalling conditions that included physical abuse, threats of sexual assault, the murder of fellow nurses and starvation - in her case only to die in a prison camp just three days after the Japanese surrender.³¹ My own experience of war made me acutely aware of how the knowledge of this death would have been a present reality in her niece's teenage years. The memory of trauma can be ever present but we often do not see the private, managed grief that others have in their lives. Margaret had wanted me to talk to her after I

returned from Iraq, but nothing I experienced could be compared the experience of her aunt, or the deferred memories that belonged to their family.

Family relationships can however create understanding and can bridge the gap between the public memory of conflict and the way the soldier sees conflict. Families become an extension of the veteran and are conduits of experience. One of my sisters is heavily involved in church community work and has found when a person she is helping mentions they have a partner or close relative at war, her iteration of the simple sentence – ‘my brother was in the army in Iraq and Afghanistan’ - creates an instant, indescribable bond and understanding. Such links also work for those who have the extended family experience of earlier wars. My mother was a child during the Second World War, but her empathy with me when I went to war reflected a particular understanding that went beyond the maternal. She understood war from having two brothers in the Second World War. One was a soldier in the islands to Australia's north, and the other who flew over Europe as a bomber pilot, a role with very high casualty rates. Her childhood memory of their experiences and the experiences of friends and neighbours creates a place of understanding between us. There will always be different categories of shared memory for veterans, for their families and friends, and for the wider community, but they can shape a common memory.

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¹ For a detailed assessment of the Dutch – led mission in Uruzgan province, see Beeres, R., van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., & Vogelaar, A. (eds), (2012), *Mission Uruzgan: Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. For an overview of the Australian mission in 2008-2009 see Allen, D. (ed), (2012), *War in the Valleys: 7th Battalion Battle Group (MRTF-1), Afghanistan, October 2008 to June 2009*, Wilsonton: Ryter Publishing. For a study of the cooperation between Afghans and coalition forces, see Kitzen, M. (2012), ‘Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind: the Implementation of Co-option as a Tool for De-escalation of

Conflict—The Case of the Netherlands in Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 35, no. 5, 713-734.

² 'Enquiry Officer's report into the death of Corporal M.R.A Hopkins in Afghanistan on 16th March 2009' Australian Department of Defence, Canberra, May 2009, p. 5, viewed 23 Feb 2014, <http://www.defence.gov.au/coi/reports/090624%20-%20IO%20Rpt%20into%20the%20death%20of%20CPL%20Hopkins%20-%20Redacted.pdf>

³ 'Enquiry Officer's report', *ibid.*

⁴ There is a distinction between the much debated 2003 Iraq invasion, and the UN sanctioned reconstruction and counterinsurgency phase of the Iraq. There is a similar distinction between the 2001 attacks on Taliban Afghanistan, and subsequent UN-sanctioned military activities.

⁵ Doyle, J., Grey, J., & Pierce, P. (eds), (2002), *Australia's Vietnam War*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

⁶ Many colleagues whom I knew opposed both wars made no secret of their support for me as an individual, with one colleague organising the faculty to attend a farewell on the occasion my second deployment.

⁷ Gehrman, R. (2015), 'The hidden reality of war in Afghanistan and Iraq: Challenges for the fiction film', in P. Drummond (ed), *London Film and Media Reader 3: The Pleasures of the Spectacle*, London: London Symposium. (forthcoming)

⁸ 'Choco' is a derogatory Australian term for non-professional militia and part-time soldiers, derived originally from George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the man* (1898). See Laugesen, A. (2005), *Diggerspeak: The language of Australians at war*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press. pp. 48-50.

⁹ Hammett, J. 2008, 'We were soldiers once...The decline of the Royal Australian Infantry Corps?', *Australian Army Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 39 – 50.

¹⁰ See Mullins, N, (2011), *Keep your head down: One commando's brutally honest account of fighting in Afghanistan*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

¹¹ As well as being the physical representation of the perfect soldier, Roberts-Smith matched public expectations for his role as a devoted father, in 2013 being named Australian Father of the year. See Smith, H. and Gehrman, R. (2014), 'Branding the muscled male body as military costume', in D. Rall (ed), *Fashion and War in Popular Culture*, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 57-71.

¹² Hammett, *op. cit.*

¹³ See for example Wadham, B. (2013), 'Brotherhood: Homosociality, Totality and Military Subjectivity', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 28 no. 76, pp. 212-235.

¹⁴ Webster was one of 15 injured soldiers who took part in a 2014 verbatim-style play with the Sydney Theatre Company on the challenges facing injured soldiers. See Neill, R. (2014), 'Two plays, *The Long Way Home* and *Black Diggers*, mark World War I Centenary', *The Australian*, 11 January 2014, viewed 20 Feb 2014, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/two-plays-the-long-way-home-and-black-diggers-mark-world-war-i-centenary/story-fn9n8gph-1226798857537#>

¹⁵ I was in Afghanistan when I read the poem 'Message from the War Zone', and for me the words still resonate. See Eleanor Nancolas, 'Message from the War Zone', *The Spectator*, 29 Nov 2008, p. 46.

¹⁶ Gehrman, R. (2014), 'Entertaining Australian troops at war in Afghanistan and Iraq', *Popular Entertainment Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1.

¹⁷ In 2013, in Melbourne alone 50,000 attended the 4.30 am Anzac Day dawn service.

¹⁸ There is considerable debate about the meaning of Anzac, and the extent to which this day of commemoration and mourning may have also been used to militarise Australian society. See Lake, M, & Reynolds, H. (eds) (2010). *What's Wrong with ANZAC?: The Militarisation of Australian History*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

¹⁹ See for example Stockings, C. (ed), (2012), *Anzac's Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, Sydney: UNSW Press.

²⁰ See McKenna, M. (2010), 'Anzac Day: How did it become Australia's national day?', in M. Lake and H. Reynolds (eds), *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History*, Sydney: New South, p. 112, and Donaldson, C. and Lake, M. (2010). 'Whatever happened to the anti-war movement?', in M. Lake and H. Reynolds (eds), *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History*, Sydney: New South, p. 91.

²¹ Crotty makes the point that the First World War returned soldiers believed that their service to the nation had given them an enhanced degree of citizenship. Crotty, M. (2007), 'The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 33, no. 2, 183-193.

²² Laugesen, A. (2014), 'Models, medals, and the use of military emblems in fashion', in D. Rall (ed), *Fashion and War in Popular Culture*, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 107-122.

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- ²³ McKenna, M., and Ward, S. (2007), ' "It was really moving, mate"; The Gallipoli pilgrimage and sentimental nationalism in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 38, no. 129, pp. 146.
- ²⁴ See Nelson, H. (1997), 'Gallipoli, Kokoda and the making of national identity', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 53, pp. 157-169.
- ²⁵ In 2011 under 3,000 took part, with just under 6,000 in the peak year of 2008. 'The economic significance of trekking on the Kokoda track, PNG in 2012', *Report to the Kokoda Track Authority March 2012*, Perth: Curtin University, p. 3,
<http://www.kokodatrackauthority.org/PicsHotel/KokodaTrack/Brochure/Kokoda%20initiative/Final%20Copy%20The%20Economic%20Significance%20of%20Trekking%20on%20the%20Kokoda%20Track.pdf>; see also Nelson, H. (2007), 'Kokoda: and two national histories', *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 77-78.
- ²⁶ See Brown, J (2014), *Anzac's Long Shadow: The Cost of Our National Obsession*. Melbourne: Redback.
- ²⁷ See Foster, K (2013), *Don't Mention the War: The Australian Defence Force, the Media and the Afghan Conflict*, Melbourne: Monash University Publishing.
- ²⁸ Milne, C. (1979), *The Path Through the Trees*, London: Eyre Methuen, p. 132.
- ²⁹ On a personal level, such associations of family and war provide me with a sense of place. It has been noted that that there is a challenge for historians when members of the public who discuss Anzac situate their family within this, merging military and family history. See Damousi, J. (2010), 'Why do we get so emotional about Anzac?', in M. Lake and H. Reynolds (eds), *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History*, Sydney: New South. p. 97.
- ³⁰ Menghetti, D. (1983), 'Heron, Alexander Robert (1888-1949)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 15 Dec 2013, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/heron-alexander-robert-6650>.
- ³¹ 'Captain Pearl Mittelheuser', Australian War Memorial, PO2783.020
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02783.020>.