



The faces of war After Afghanistan

Ben Quilty Mon 11 Nov 2013

Ben Quilty is an Australian artist and the winner of the 2011 Archibald Prize. Remembrance Day takes on a profoundly different meaning once you have seen what people in the Armed Forces risk, their plight, their lives after service, writes Ben Quilty.

In 2011, I was given the opportunity and great honour of travelling with the Australian troops involved in Operation Slipper into Afghanistan. For many years I've examined the way young men behave and exist in Western society. My deployment through the Australian War Memorial was in some ways the exclamation mark to that long road. I was intrigued to see young men facing their ultimate fear and their own mortality amidst the very confronting human creation of war.



My task was not to make comment on the validity of this war or any other war, neither was I sent to examine the intricacies of the Afghan people's plight, nor the great and ugly divide between religious belief systems.

I was there to travel with the Australian Defence Force and I was there to tell their story. I never really did imagine how sensitively human that story would be.

Last Anzac Day I begged two young soldiers to come to my own home town Anzac commemoration. Neither of the men were keen. Both had told me that the ceremony felt hollow, that their lost friends felt far away and that the day did nothing to soothe the sadness they felt on such days. I didn't give in easily, explaining that it was the greatest opportunity I had had to attend such a ceremony with people whose travels would mean they had direct experience of the true meaning of Anzac Day.



Both men had lost close friends in the most violent ways in the enormous mountains and purple valleys of Uruzgan. My little boy was as proud as I'd seen him walking amongst the town and his friends with two young veterans. The commemoration was long and the two men became increasingly restless, and as the last of the speakers took their place at the front of the silent audience, I realised that not once was the word 'Afghanistan' uttered during the entire long ceremony.

Not once were the two young men I had rallied to the event acknowledged. Not once were the 40 fallen young men from Afghanistan remembered; neither were their widows, their parents, their children remembered. I saw in a flash why no young veteran from Afghanistan is keen to attend Anzac Day. As I write this the more senior of those two young men is now in the first weeks of his fifth deployment to Afghanistan. The other man has fought his

way through the forms and bureaucracy of the Veterans Affairs and has been discharged with Depression and Post Traumatic Disorder.

Today is Remembrance Day. This day does have a profoundly different meaning to me now that I've seen what people in the Armed Forces risk, their plight, their lives after service. For me this day is not only about the fallen soldiers, but it is about the people who are left behind. It is about the children who have lost their dads forever. It is about the women who now face the rest of their lives bringing up those children alone.



It is about the parents, not much older than me, who have farewelled forever their boys, and maybe most importantly it is about the men and women who have served and survived while their friends have been killed around them.

They will carry the very heaviest burden until they are old and they are the true testament to what war will do to our societies.

The gallery accompanying this article features images from Ben Quilty's War Memorial exhibition *After Afghanistan*, which is touring the country. Ben Quilty is *an Australian artist and the winner of the 2011 Archibald Prize*.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-11/quilty-after-afghanistan/5079044>





COMMENTS

Oaktree: 11 Nov 2013 Just like the Vietnam vets, no honour in their time, and no recognition for their fallen mates.

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 I personally think the vast majority of Australians fully acknowledge the great work and sacrifice made by the men and women of Australia in Afghanistan. They certainly have behaved very honourably and deserve the right to be honoured by us.

Rusty: 11 Nov 2013 Joe, Being "honoured" doesn't pay the bills for our ex-military and their families for long term medical, employment and psychological assistance. They deserve better. Cliches always come out on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day - what about the other 363 days of the year. Suggest you read the excellent book "The Wages of War" by Richard Severo on how the military (in this book the US - documents from Valley Forge to Vietnam) are always promised much when they are needed but given little after their service has finished.

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 A series of very fair and accurate points Rusty. Our men and women also deserve all the help they need and want upon their return.

Fran: 11 Nov 2013 Australian service men and women join of their own volition and are paid to do a job.

Myca: 11 Nov 2013 Rusty I haven't read the book, maybe I should but I rather think that this is one occasion when you and I are in rare accord. Nice to know there is a common ground.

Where's Tony: 11 Nov 2013 We have always promised "Homes fit for heroes" always ended up with "Heroes fit for homes" . We should never forget and in remembering try not to repeat the folly of rushing into conflict on the word of politicians or failed diplomacy.

Rhonda: 11 Nov 2013 The difference between Vietnam and Afghanistan is that many young men were conscripted to go to war, they were not willing participants. However, having said that, both were wars which were/are unwinnable (there are no winners in war) in which Australia should not have been involved. The author here, Ben Quilty, lost my respect (which I previously had in abundance) when he fronted a group of returned soldiers speaking about PTSD and the detrimental effect medications could have on these people.

While I am sure he did so with the best of intentions, I know from personal experience caring for a family member with a mental illness, that doctors certainly DO get it wrong, but I also know they often get it right and especially that, 'one size does not fit all'. Ben's unqualified advice, may have resulted in someone 'trying to go it alone' with worse consequences.

Now, in this article, Ben says: "I begged two young soldiers to come to my own home town Anzac commemoration. Neither of the men were keen..." "I didn't give in easily..." "The commemoration was long and the two men became increasingly restless, and as the last of the speakers took their place at the front of the silent audience, I realised that not

once was the word 'Afghanistan' uttered during the entire long ceremony." Ben, however well-intentioned you may have been, you may have caused more harm than good in playing 'Good Samaritan'. I've seen friends pushing my family member into outings he's just not ready for, and it never ends well. I hope you took the organizers of this Anzac event to task over this glaring omission, rather than just choosing to go to print? Perhaps this is where your experience could be best used. Going public in this way, could cause more stress for vets, rather than 'righting a wrong'. Otherwise, stick to your painting...

Earle Qaeda: 11 Nov 2013 [Sniffle] Sadly Oaktree there wasn't much honour anywhere in the whole blessed Vietnam event. Many Australians volunteered. Many were conscripted. Why was their service ?not recognized?? Because as the class leader in our series of modern conflicts it was an unpopular occurrence, even to those who supported it, or at least supported the old maxim of ?doing ones bit.? It was an embarrassment. It took a while for the bruising on the national ego to ease & give the whole sorry mess a nice shiny fresh coat of enamel, but at last there it is. Nowadays all those participants are at last able to shuffle about thinking that their youth was given to some mythical purpose. Good luck to them I reckon. They were poorly used.

Arthur 1: 11 Nov 2013 Oaktree, Castigate the polties, name and shame them, In our recent times, I wonder How many soldiers Funerals Mr Howard attended after he lost job. He wouldn't be the only one, our polties, and the enemy's don't seem to care about soldiers after the wars, nothing new there, but is time that the polties were held to account for their miserable attitudes.

awake: 11 Nov 2013 WW1 are nearly all gone. WWII almost the same. What a tremendous debt we owe these men and women. Five minutes silence once a year. Our fathers and grandfathers died so we could live in a democracy, free to speak, free to ask the questions. I think back to that huge man with a cigarette in his mouth a beer at his side laughing with his mates at the RSL. Concorde hospital, the "Repat", the wonderful doctors and nurses. Caught four of them at Concorde watching "Days of Our Lives" my Mother laughed for a month. May they rest in peace.

Mycal: 11 Nov 2013 awake I think you will find all of WW1 are gone, remembrance is all that is left.

Sotopanna: 11 Nov 2013 Why must the young fall to honour the names of those who have gone before? Afghanistan returnees shall possibly experience the same as those who went to Vietnam, another war un-won. This nation is challenged as to how soldiers are treated, but, it is the politicians whom dispatch these good men who go with good intentions, for nefarious purposes who should be the recipients of any negativity.

Lest we forget that in our defence some are willing to sacrifice their existences at times for questionable purposes. The involvement of the Parliament, not just PM (or cabinet), in making a decision to go to war, is an imperative. A nation committed to a cause by its collective will might be more empathetic towards the soldiers mentioned I this article? These soldiers deserve more?

Alpo: 11 Nov 2013 All wars are ugly, and scary and scarring. But at least wars fought in direct defence of your land, your home, your family carry the urgency of survival. I can understand those fighters in the Middle East going to the slaughter as they shout "Allahu

Akbar". For them it's life or death, freedom or slavery. We haven't fought a war like that since WWII. Since then, our wars have been marked just by the sadness and horror of death, and pain, and the psychological nightmares of the survivors. This is not a time for celebration, it's a time for deep reflection. Thanks for your paintings, Ben.

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 I guess it is just a shame those young men from Yemen, Somali or Pakistan (etc) decided to go to another nation thousands of miles away and fight (and die) just to remain enslaved to religious indoctrinations and to try to enslave others with religious indoctrinations. At least the Afghani have a nation with more freedoms and more stability than they previously had, due to the assistance provided by the ADF to help stabilise and build up a nation ravaged by tribal war. Well done to the men and women from the ADF and all the other UN participants helping the people of Afghanistan.

LeftyRoy: 11 Nov 2013 So, Joe, according to your POV, "They" are just dupes, while "We" are heroic and ultristic. Maybe, just maybe they believed in defending their homeland. (why are you deliberately ignoring the native Afghan opposition to ISAF ?) Give the pathetic jingoism a rest.

Zing: 11 Nov 2013 It doesn't matter whether the Taliban are locals or foreign jihadists. Either way, they want to impose Islamic fascism on innocent people. And that makes them the villains according to any standard that matters. Which may explain why you seem to support them.

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 Hi LeftyRoy, Are 'they' dupes? Yes without doubt 'they' have been duped by their mullahs who have filled their heads with utter supernatural nonsense. Have 'we' been altruistic? Again, yes clearly we have been judging from the improvements in Afghanistan. Why did I not mention the pashtun opposition (from Pakistan) to the government of Afghanistan? simply because I was responding to Alpo's comments about the 'allahu akbarites' from the "middle east" (and beyond) going off to fight in foreign lands to enslave the minds and bodies of those foreigners who do not wish to be enslaved by the 'allahu akbarites'. You are of course welcome to see the stabilisation of a nation ravaged by tribal warfare as "jingoism", clearly I see things differently from you.

mike: 11 Nov 2013 You give it a rest. The terrorists he refers to were not defending their homeland, but trying to spread the most oppressive and intolerant ideology on the planet today and force others to accept it or die - by their own repeated proud admissions.

leigh of Tregewis: 11 Nov 2013 It is such a wasteful tragedy that lives are lost, and billions of dollars spent on wars. Wars based on lies, to protect the assets of the 1% at the expense of the 99%. And still too many people are duped into thinking these wars are necessary. I never heard a single Gallipoli digger approve of that war, whilst all who offered an opinion were against it.

Terry: 11 Nov 2013 I suggest you read a few letters from soldiers of WWI!. Read the newspapers, the books, anything. There are plenty of recordings of veterans. Do a bit of study (not a few googles) and you will find that the overwhelming majority of Australians not only supported the war but were enthusiastic. Whether they were correct is another thing. But making things up doesn't help your argument.

Martin: 11 Nov 2013 Some years ago I was in a demonstration in Brisbane opposing Australia's entry into the Iraq war. Australia wide some 500,000 people protested. John Howard had the gall to state that "the mob had not made up its mind" What? We had and that's why we took the time to protest. Remember that most people do not protest even when they disagree- so if 500,000 marched then more than that actually opposed the war. The government refused to listen and now we have been over there (initially in Iraq and then Afghanistan) for a decade without the people EVER being given a choice to vote on this issue since both the LNP and ALP support these wars.

If we are ever to be a REAL nation then we must stop allowing Australia to be pushed into these things. As to the veterans- no doubt war is hell. I was too young to be conscripted and forced to go to Vietnam so don't know war in my life. I didn't support your going to these wars. Being volunteers you could have left the services but you CHOSE to go to war. Why do the veterans of this war expect the populace to appreciate your sacrifice? Go talk to John Howard and the other politicians who sent you to war.

Shaun:

11 Nov 2013 Martin - How very brave of you to attack returned servicemen and women purely because their actions were at odds with your pusillanimous ideology. There's nothing worse than coward with a false sense of superiority.

rockpicker: 11 Nov 2013 Unless of course it's a blowhard with no sense of the big picture. In general I am on the soldiers side, but the supposed allies in this, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are supporters of the enemy. Remove our men from this nest of traitors. We are there in someone else's interest again and noone can feel proud when the results of our actions see as many or more civilians dead than Talibs.

Fran:

11 Nov 2013 Shaun those who volunteer for the ADF know or should know what they are getting themselves into. They do it for pay.

Mycal: 11 Nov 2013 Martin the factors resulting in why we went into Afghanistan were purely political and not uniformly supported by the Australian public. But that does not detract from the performance of our troops or the debt we owe them nor in anyway mitigate the support we must provide them when they return home. The government may have sent them but they are our troops and they serve in our name.

Aven: 11 Nov 2013 The slogan I remember was "Don't bomb Afghanistan, we remember Vietnam". The protests I marched in tried to focus our political leaders' attention on the aftermath and the consequences of military intervention. The leaders at the time chose not to listen. I wonder how many more times this will be repeated in the future.

Jag: 11 Nov 2013 No . We were in Afghanistan first , then Iraq & Afghanistan & now just Afghanistan. Sequence is actually important in a war.

Mike 1: 11 Nov 2013 A beautiful piece Ben and Thank You for the insight. Lest we forget.

sdrawkcaB: 11 Nov 2013 An interesting article. Of late I have been personally reflecting. A part of that is determining what they did to me. I have found that I, as a child, was not educated as I thought but schooled. I have found there is an enormous difference between education and schooling. I found my military service was not a reflection of

bravery and courage as the indoctrination goes but an exercise of personal stupidity as I waived my personal freedoms so some politician war monger could have yet another young person to exploit when his or her own diplomatic ineptitude caused a breakdown of rationality.

Part of this personal reflection has been a reading of history in the context of an extended conversation about the last 5500 years of civilization. In this conversation is a relentless quest for power and an observation that the default state is war and not peace. I then note the program of soft manipulation and indoctrination afforded to me has been stock in trade for a few thousand years.

On this Remembrance Day, I will pause and give a thought for the millions who have been exploited and manipulated in the name of some esteemed human virtues...just as I was. I will also reflect on the manipulators who seat themselves in our parliaments and use young people as cannon fodder so they can play their power games. I will continue to pat myself on the back for breaking the cycle of sons following their fathers into military service. I followed my father but my son did not follow me. I am proud of that.

frargo: 11 Nov 2013 Your story is in the paintings. Lost lives. But lives that can come back with a wisdom to be shared and a value for living that transcends the idiocy of politicians.

skeptic: 11 Nov 2013 sdrawkcaB Interesting reflection. I believe education is something we continually pick up daily. Schooling is some activities we briefly engaged in, whether it was coerced by parents or voluntarily. Wars were used as a means for territorial expansions, resource enrichment or stealing, religious superiority struggles, etc. Deep down, I believe it is all about wresting possession of something from someone.

I also believe that some countries/leaders wanted to keep their territory under a constant "siege" state because that way, the population would be more likely to rally behind them. The obvious examples can be found in the M.E. Let's put it this way, a military leader rose to power through conflicts, what would he be doing if there are no more conflicts? All dressed up and nowhere to go?

Young men/women joined the armed forces for various reasons. Many did so because of "patriotic" reason and some other more noble causes. However, I do know of some young men joined up because there are no other viable employment opportunities available to them. So to them, the arm forces are nothing more than a meal ticket.

A young man I knew quite well wanted to join the army. It was apparent that he was going to Afghanistan. I asked him if he knew what is going on there? I got a blank look. He had not a clue the dangers, but to him, it was the last resort as he has little education. He save the best for last...He told me that "...the money is good, and the food is excellent".

Terry: 11 Nov 2013 "Remember that most people do not protest even when they dissagree- so if 500,000 marched then more than that actually opposed the war". Remember that most people do not demonstrate even when they agree - so if 20+ million did not march then more than that actually supported the war. You may disagree - how can I possibly claim that?

Exactly the same way you do. I would like it to be so. I would like to think that those lucky enough to live in a free society would like to assist those unfortunate enough to be under the rule of dictators, theocrats and various madmen. Apparently 500,000 Australians were not prepared to make any real effort to rid the world of a known murderer who was prepared to plunge the Middle East into war. A man who fired rockets at Israel to try to provoke it to war, a man who used chemical weapons on his own people.

A man who had already started a war that lasted longer than WW2, that killed millions. But those marching were happy for him to continue, or at least not do anything to stop him. So be it. But don't claim that most Australians were in that group. If that were true that would make me despair for our country.

leigh of Tregewis: 11 Nov 2013 Good grief Terry. You'd be talking about the man who USA attacked after it decided it didn't want to be his ally anymore. And to whom Australia paid huge bribes to have him buy our wheat. And did attacking him stop the bloodshed? I would despair if most Australians thought all the lives and dollars spent in these wars was the best way to achieve a better quality of life in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars were not fought for the betterment of the inhabitants of the countries, or for our security. Don't you know that?

Terry: 11 Nov 2013 When was the USA an ally of Iraq? Making things up is naughty - someone might believe it to be true. Did you ever wonder why the Iraqi army had Russian tanks and French aircraft? And Chinese anti-air? Not important? Some company in the USA sold him some precursor chemicals years ago and that is all the proof you need. Attacking him may not have stopped all the bloodshed, but it stopped his causing bloodshed. That the Middle East is full of religious and other fanatics who glorify death is hardly the fault of the USA. They tried to stop them too, but people like you supported anyone who wanted to kill Americans.

And, as you apparently have a secret source of information: why do you think we were fighting there? Please don't say "Oil". People will laugh at you. "To create a US world empire" is nearly as bad. You could wheel out "Because George Bush looked like a chimp" I suppose. I know I supported our involvement because I knew it would free the Iraqis from a dictator. Why did you oppose it? Because "War=bad. No war=good"? A trifle simplistic don't you think? Or, as I suspect for most of those marching, because you hid behind the "It's none of our business" defence? No man is an island.

hph: 11 Nov 2013 Everyone, it seems, took a slice of the Iraqi arms pie. The Soviet Union, France, China and Chile sold Baghdad much of its off-the-shelf weaponry. West Germany, France, Britain, the United States, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and Brazil all sold the components, machines and tools --much of it material with civilian as well as military application-- that were the building blocks of the modern Iraqi war machine.

The bleak irony is that much of the technology and expertise that created those weapons was bought by Iraq in the West, sometimes by deception but often with the silent acquiescence of Western governments. Those sales continued even after Saddam's regime was accused of using chemical weapons against Iran and Iraq's own Kurdish citizens.

"This is a Frankenstein monster that the West created," said Hans Heino Kopietz, Middle East analyst with Control Risks Group. "We closed our eyes because some businesses wanted to make money and because Saddam was a useful tool against Iran." But much remains concealed behind a web of dummy companies, false documents and middlemen. The faking of end-user documents to aid Baghdad was standard procedure throughout the Iran-Iraq war, sources say. A senior Kuwaiti official, who asked not to be identified, said such certificates for U.S-made arms were regularly filled in at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Washington. "Of course, the stuff was going direct to Iraq, and everybody knew it -- your government and mine," he said.

andy:

11 Nov 2013 Wow, you've swallowed the propaganda hook line and sinker. Don't you remember how Bush et al tried to link SH to 9/11?(when it was more to do with his mates the Saudis than anything to do with SH) They then tried to tell everyone that it was about WMDs? and remember when Hans Blix wanted more time to find the WMDs - but they didn't want the truth to come out - so they started bombing before he was finished.

And then when the WMDs weren't found (cos they weren't there), they then said it was all about regime change ? talk about moving the goalposts - though Bush and his mates did fairly well out of it all (remember Cheney and Halliburton?). Thousands of people on both sides died for a bunch of lies. Oh yes, it was all about freeing Iraq from a dictator all along was it ?? wow, and gullible has been removed from the dictionary too. PS. The US was an ally when Iraq and Iran were at war - remember ? and do you remember the US govt falling over itself to be his friend?

Mycal: 11 Nov 2013 Terry the US supported Iraq when it was at war with Iran, the US trained the Taliban when USSR invaded Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan was supported by the West (at least 19 countries participated in ISAF), Iraq was supported by the "coalition of the willing" made up of just three countries (the US, the UK and us) please learn some history.

tempo:

11 Nov 2013 Hi Terry, "When was the USA an ally of Iraq?" - Throughout the war with Iran. This is fairly well established. A quick 2 secs on Google will clear it up for you. The gassing of the Kurds in Halabja happened during this time which is why there was no US response to it. I've heard your arguments before and put far more eloquently by Christopher Hitchens. He like you falls short. In the end it is the aggressor that has to justify the aggression. That all steps to avoid war were pursued. They were not.

hayward: 11 Nov 2013 Saddam, trained by the CIA and who came to lead Ba'athist Iraq, was put into power, supported, armed and equipped by the US. It was known from the start what he was like. But he was useful as the stalking horse in the war the US wanted inflicted on Iran. Saddam would brook no Saudi Wahabi-Salafi terrorists in Iraq, so that was why there were none before the US led FIASCO (read the book by Thomas E. Ricks). In spite of ?The Big Lie? (go to Wikipedia for info on the ?lie?) on ?terr'ist? still being spouted as one of the justifications by the Bush/Cheney/Howard Cabal.

Where's Tony: 11 Nov 2013 I couldn't agree more. This is exactly as I remember it. 83% of Australians opposed the Iraq war, the all seeing, all knowing Howard chose to ignore the prevailing evidence on WMD's and raced to war on George W's say so.

Is Iraq a better/safer society as a result. Is Australia a safer place to live as a result. The answer to both questions is a resounding NO.

LeftyRoy: 11 Nov 2013 Terry How did the search for Howards "People Shredder" that JW so breathlessly reported to the world that Hussein owned? Where's the WMDS? What's that? All lies? But you seem to have fallen for them. BTW - the chemicals that Saddam used, where did they originate from, who supplied the infrastructure? Good ol US of A, along with its lackeys. There is no high moral ground in the WOT, especially since the claims about Iraq have been shown to be lies.

Terry:

11 Nov 2013 Good lord, is this is nonsense still going on? There were WMDs - no doubt. They were used. the question was not whether they existed, it was whether they had been destroyed. (Many Saddam sympathisers such as Mr Pilger were overjoyed at the devastation about to be unleashed on the US troops). Trying to say they were a figment of someone's imagination is, at the very least, being deliberately misleading.

As Saddam Hussein refused to allow the weapons inspectors full access to sites and facilities, the destruction of not only the weapons but their means of production could not be verified. It was subsequently determined that all (or nearly all) of the weapons had been destroyed, but that some production facilities could have been restored quite quickly. However, Pres. Saddam wanted to bluff that he was capable of exerting influence on his region. Europe, Russia and China didn't care: they weren't paying to keep huge forces watching him.

So the USA and its allies enforced the UN resolutions that Saddam refused to comply with. What is so hard to understand? I know it may not fit the "USA is root of all evil" and "The enemy of the USA is my friend" world outlook, but facts must be accepted. As a point in issue - the chemical weapons that Saddam used: you have proof that the USA supplied these? Not some ingredients that may have been used to make them? I mean it is a long shot to blame a pool chemical shop for a terrorist bomb. but I suppose if you are desperate to blame someone

Arthur1: 11 Nov 2013 Terry, Regardless of the reasons The USA invaded Iraq, the USA suffered over 5000,dead soldiers, tens of thousands of wounded and maimed soldiers. These wounded soldiers will cost USA t \$trillions over the next fifty or so years, plus the trillions the war costs, all this plus the costs to the Iraqis.

After this huge waste of money, young soldiers, and who knows how many thousands of civilians, I for one cannot see anything except a downright miserable population of Iraqis. Certainly there has been no uplifting of these people at this time. Over time this may improve, IMPROVE won't live to see it, neither will George and Johnny, some of the maimed may see it I hope it makes them feel better.

olive: 11 Nov 2013

Nobody is defending any dictators. However, why do people have suffer? Justifying demise of people following Sadam's overturn is exactly the same as justifying demise of those during his rule.

Mycal:

12 Nov 2013 Terry the second Iraq war was illegal, that makes the invasion a war crime and, whether you like it or not your "WMD's might have existed" argument is gloss. There were no WMD's and the war was morally unjustified and predicated on lies. It left Iraq a basket case, handed Iran a strategic victory and nothing has changed since we left. The words "total strategic blunder" come to mind. What's so hard to understand is why it occurred, what were the Americans thinking!?

Clownfish: 11 Nov 2013 Mostly Russia, France and Germany. Contrary to popular wisdom, the US actually supplied very few arms to Iraq. Also, I suggest you read 'Republic of fear' before you rush to the defence of a brutal, murderous fascist like Saddam Hussein. Just because one story was apparently fabricated, does not mean that Hussein was not a particularly brutal dictator. To argue otherwise is to buy into the same logic of the likes of David Irving, that because (some of) the chambers at Auschwitz are reconstructions, the Holocaust is a lie.

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 Clownfish. As a point of order. David Irving has never claimed that the holocaust was a lie and never happened. He simply looked at the actual meticulously kept Nazi records relating to their abhorrent activities and noted that the number of human casualties was lower than the quantity suggested in mainstream military history.

hayward: 11 Nov 2013 Do not forget he famous Rummy/Saddam handshake. To use a great American phrase He is a sob but he is our sob! The Iraqi war effort was ably aided and abetted by the US with assistance from France, Germany and the UK. The US supplied biological agents, chemical precursors, helicopters, other war materiel and even satellite imagery to the Saddam regime.

hayward: 11 Nov 2013 1979 Saddam met with CIA to discuss war against Iran. 1980 start of war as Iraq invades Iran. Following Iranian success against Iraq, in 1983 President Reagan, not quite senile yet? issues a directive that the US should ensure that Iraq does not lose the war. This leads to that infamous hand shake of Donny Rumsfeld and Saddam Hussein. So the USA supplies ?dual use materiel?. chemical precursors, satellite imagery etc. Much of the materiel from out of third countries including Germany. The Iraq-Iran war ended in 1988. Strange days, for at the beginning of this conflict the US was also helping the Iranian war effort.

Martin: 11 Nov 2013 We are not responsible for every dictator or madman running some other nation in the world. If we are then we have failed. Have we yet done anything about Mugabe in Zimbabwe? How about the Saudi Arabian Royal dictators? Did we ever get involved in any of the South American dictatorships? Pinochet dropping people out of planes and stealing their children?

So why Saddam? He was sponsored by the USA to attack Iran. The English were the first to gas the Kurds of Iraq so why was Saddam doing it a worry to us? Those marching were not necessarily interested in Saddam continuing- we were more interested in NOT being involved in another Vietnam style war that we would pay for and lose. So what was achieved in Iraq? It still exists (unlike the state of South Vietnam) but the religious wars we allowed to start are still going.

will fall very soon after we leave. Even now it is just a chaotic jumble of feuding warlords and corrupt governments. As to which side MOST Australians were on- we will never know as the politicians made sure that in something as important as war and one in which we were not under threat- we would not be allowed a referendum. So much for Australian democracy- a farce allowed only when the politicians think we might agree with them

Aven:

11 Nov 2013 "I would like to think that those lucky enough to live in a free society would like to assist those unfortunate enough to be under the rule of dictators, theocrats and various madmen." - ok but wars have never been just about that. Why is Australia not intervening in Syria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe just to name a few? Would the consequences of intervening be possibly worse than not intervening (and for whom?). People who protest wars don't see the world in black and white - good guys (always us) versus the bad guys that must be kicked out.

Bahbet:

11 Nov 2013 I congratulate Ben on writing this sensitive article, and on having the courage to undertake his travels abroad and artistically journey through experiences of men at war. In modern expressionist and abstract art history the impact of wars cannot be overestimated as huge numbers of creative young men were mobilised and whole populations traumatised. The projection of war scenes via visual media impacted too, hastening the spread of modernism and the deconstruction of visual paradigms. The most famous and harrowing depiction of this is the very graphic Picasso's "Guernica". It is one of the most famous and universally irreplaceable works in the world. I wonder, as time goes by will Ben produce other large scale work with war motifs. As his last comment suggests, once known war is hard to forget.

hph: 11 Nov 2013 "The most famous and harrowing depiction of this is the very graphic Picasso's "Guernica". It is one of the most famous and universally irreplaceable works in the world. I wonder, as time goes by will Ben produce other large scale work with war motifs. As his last comment suggests, once known war is hard to forget...."

Probably Picasso's most famous work, Guernica is certainly his most powerful political statement, painted as an immediate reaction to the Nazi's devastating casual bombing practice on the Basque town of Guernica during Spanish Civil War. Guernica shows the tragedies of war and the suffering it inflicts upon individuals, particularly *innocent civilians* This work has gained a monumental status, becoming a perpetual reminder of the tragedies of war, an anti-war symbol, and an embodiment of *peace*

JoeBloggs: 11 Nov 2013 and why it is important to have anti aircraft weaponry and an effective fighter defence.

hph: 11 Nov 2013 ...killing innocent civilians is murder. Many people are calling Bush & Co. to face justice in The Hague.

Waterloo Sunset. 2014: 11 Nov 2013 Many are not. Just pointing out the vagueness of your message, if there is a message. War will not stop until there is a world democracy.

Fran: 11 Nov 2013 Bahbet another way of seeing it is voyeurism and taking advantage of other peoples suffering.

Arthur 1: 11 Nov 2013 Every year around this time, and in April, I think of the soldiers who have gave there all so we can live in relative peace. What we don't do at this time of the year, is castigate our stupid pollies. Who through ignorance, self interest, ideology, doing what some other country wants us to do. These old gray headed men continue to do what their ancestors have done for centuries, send the cream of the crop to do battle, finish the pollies job, and pay the price ,be killed, or come home and probably face a lifetime of misery. These wars are fought with great intensity, too end all to frequently with very little gained except death, maimed bodies and physical destruction, and I might add are ended by talking, when one side is too tired, and the other side always has to go home.

jazz:

11 Nov 2013 I can say we need to avoid the war happened at any situation. Because it will hurt us and be maintained in our mind with tragic feeling.

Clownfish: 11 Nov 2013 It's a terrible shame that so little is known or spoken of the actions of the ADF in Afghanistan. Many people could reel off names like Fromelles, the Somme, Villers Bretonneau, Tobruk, Kokoda, even Long Tan, but how many could even name the place, let alone the circumstances in which, say, Ben Roberts-Smith won his VC, or Martin Wallace won Australia's first Medal for Gallantry?

Dove:

11 Nov 2013 No great shame. Maybe it's time we stop perpetuating and glorifying "actions" and re-examine causes, costs and outcomes. Lest we remember.

Rashid: 11 Nov 2013 Wars are often one political groups imperatives against the other, couched in governments military uniform. They are hardly ever committed in human beings interests. It is drummed into us that to obey these orders is our national duty and honour. Young people's desire to perform these duties, to act out heroics, sends them away to wars in the name of their governments to legitimise killing and in turn to get disfigured, maimed and wounded or at worst to get killed! That does not by any stretch of imagination diminish the respect we owe to the young ones for carrying out their duties and the government orders, but to commemorate wars is to undeservedly honour the politicians follies at the soldiers expense.

sdrawkcaB: 11 Nov 2013 Quite right Rashid. There is a clear divide between those who go and those who send.

Fran: 11 Nov 2013 Rashid where is the responsibility of those who volunteer to do the wishes of the politicians. If they sign up not knowing what will be expected of them they are utterly ignorant of history.

JMJ: 11 Nov 2013 Ben, for some the brutality of war was just too much & many like my father suffered in silence. But it was only after his death that I discovered the reason as to why he never forgave or forgot his foe.

Alison Cann: 11 Nov 2013 Ben, I think you should take on a different thought level. Remembrance Day was the anniversary day of the dismissal of one of our greatest prime ministers, Gough Whitlam.

Moi: 11 Nov 2013 "... about the fallen soldiers, ... the people who are left behind ... the children who have lost their dads forever". No mention at all of the politicians who committed Australian troops to this totally needless and futile decade of squandered blood and treasure. We should use these Remembrance Day events to vilify those gutless bastards who sit in Parliament visiting death and destruction on both Afghans and Australians alike.

Clete:

11 Nov 2013 I hope I never have to rely on you for help, if I'm ever being beaten up by thugs on the street. Sometimes (and I also hope never) we might be called upon to help others that don't want to be beaten up.

Moi: 11 Nov 2013 Clete, I have no beef with legitimate armed assistance. However:
- the Iraq war was based on non-existent WMD and the concept of killing over 100,000 Iraqis to save them from Saddam is a sick joke. - the reason for the US invasion (and risibly, the continued occupation) of Afghanistan was the Taliban's refusal to hand over bin Laden. Yet the Taliban offered to hand him over if only the US followed standard extradition proceedings and provided some sort of evidence.

Most of the practices for which the Taliban were blamed were actually introduced by the Northern alliance, especially that of the treatment of women. The Taliban simply continued doing what was inherent in the culture for over a thousand years. - Vietnam was to ostensibly to stop the spread of Communism, not to help the Vietnamese - Ditto Malaysia. That's the trouble, we haven't been helping victims, we've been creating them.

justagirl: 11 Nov 2013 Thank you Ben for your honesty and sensitivity as you portray the hollowness that our most recent veterans, my husband included, feel as they continue to come to terms with their service in a generally unknown war. Their courage, dedication and humbleness astounds me and fills me with pride. Lest we forget!

blax5: 11 Nov 2013 "and has been discharged with Depression and Post Traumatic Disorder." We read the same sad stories from the US, maybe there's a way to link up? I have also read there is an Afghanistan Veterans organisation in Russia. Their experiences were the same, metal transfer cases, welded zinc coffins. The way they got in there was the same; someone thought they'd achieve something with sending the military. Maybe there's a way to link up?

the yank: 11 Nov 2013 Ben I have followed your career for some years and always 'liked' your work but these paintings are by far the best you have ever, or indeed any Australian artist, have ever done. Thanks.

Bella: 11 Nov 2013 In our small country town we don't forget our serving soldiers. This morning the mother of a soldier in Afghanistan laid flowers at the Memorial. Last year we had a soldier home on leave who was acknowledged in the service. I'm sorry your friends are having such a hard time, Ben.

Mycal: 11 Nov 2013 "As I write this the more senior of those two young men is now in the first weeks of his fifth deployment to Afghanistan." Says it all really, the longest war in

our history, fought by same men and women over and over again! How many rotations does it take to ruin their lives beyond hope of recovery? Who will care for these men and women when the war is finally over? Or do we really only remember them one day a year?

kremin: 11 Nov 2013

Mycal they got paid to do a job. My nephew is happy to go back again and again because he gets lots of perks why do you think these guys are such babies.

Judas: 11 Nov 2013 No more wars. No more wars. Especially when led by US of A. USA needs to address their own home grown problems firstly. Australia should only go to war when the aggressor is on their way to Australia. i.e. WWII/Japan. Then and only then we start by sending in the drones !

Jenny: 11 Nov 2013 Sometimes people just forget to memorize those dead and start moving on. It is hard for those who are still in grief that the people around them seem to forget the pass of their friends. It is important to remember those dead and show your respect to their life.

Tasha: 11 Nov 2013 Good experience to look deeply into a certain country. Your thoughtful words make me think once more about sacrifices made during wars that I have been forgetting about already. Thank you.

TGILES: 11 Nov 2013 I'm sorry to hear that some places do not acknowledge all returned servicemen/women, maybe a message should be passed onto the local RSL. I know that our small country town has done this for the past 5 years that I have attended the ANZAC day services.

davidlb: 11 Nov 2013 Lest we forget; those who serve both past and present, those who have not returned, and those who will not return, and those who have returned, and those who will return. Lest we forget. For this country continues to send its young to killed and be killed in faraway lands. Lest we forget. Because those who have gone to faraway lands to kill and be killed, will never forget.

philly:

12 Nov 2013 I still get annoyed when I see a journalist or historian use the clichéd phrase 'battle-hardened soldier'. The reality is that there is no such thing and such a phrase leads people to believe that a soldier can get to a certain level of experience and skill and become basically in-destructible. A more accurate phrase would be 'battle-weakened soldier' because studies have proved time and time again that the more combat a soldier experiences, the more mentally fatigued and strained he/she becomes.

We all remember the 61,000 Australian soldiers who died in the First World War. What are not so well remembered is the approximately 60,000 former service-men who died prior to 1930. It is true that a high number of these were due to the Spanish Flu epidemic. And many perished from other physical causes- lingering effects of wounds, trench fever, respiratory conditions caused by gassing injuries etc. But a very high number succumbed to PTSD- suicides, depression and alcoholism.