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## Teaching Primary School Students about War

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*Abstract: This article examines *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource* and what it teaches students. This resource, for grades 4-6 students, has as its learning outcomes: knowledge of Australia's involvement in various conflicts; students' empathising with the experiences of war; the use of a variety of sources about war; engaging with people about war and their experiences of war; and reflecting on Australia's wartime involvement in the development of identity and heritage. The article first locates the teaching approaches used in the resource within the research on history teaching and the political and public debates on what we should teach students about war. It then proceeds to examine *Australians at War* and its use of photographs, paintings and diaries to determine what is taught to students about war. The article exposes the difficulties and tensions inherent in teaching primary school students about armed conflict and the interest groups who want to shape what is taught. The article illustrates how *Australians at War* often presents a sanitised version of the horrors of war when compared to the realities portrayed on television and the internet.*

### Introduction

Teachers face the issue of teaching students about Australia's war time history. For example, Anzac Day occupies a central place in schools and what students learn about this and Australia's other war time involvements is problematic.

This article explores what one commercially produced teaching resource, *Australians at War: Primary School Resource* by Lewis and Gurry (2002) teaches primary school pupils about war and the resource's educational, political, public, historian and media contexts. The resource provides teachers with materials and suggestions for studying Australia's wartime experiences so that Australian students in grades 4-6: will know about Australia's war time involvements over the last 100 years; will empathise with the experiences of war and of individuals; will be aware of a variety of sources about war; will apply knowledge about war to individuals and their communities; will engage with individuals about their experiences of Australia's war time involvements; will develop an appreciation of significant ceremonies associated with war time heritage; and reflect on Australia's wartime history in the formation of national identity (Lewis and Gurry, 2002). The resource is structured around five learning activities. These are what is evidence, creating a time line, investigating images of war and conflict, summarising wars and conflicts and listening to people's stories (Lewis and Gurry, 2002).

This article focuses on the resource's use of photographs and images and people's stories and what they teach primary students about war. The article is guided by three

observations. Firstly, when studying the popular we should look for both containment and resistance within it, secondly individuals' respond differently to attempts to instruct them (Hall, 1981) and thirdly when teaching students about wars and a nation's involvement in them it is a mistake to view students as 'literally suckers, ready to fill their inner emptiness with whatever mythology is on hand' (Davidson, 2003, p. 80). The article is structured as follows: firstly, a discussion of the wider educational, political and public contexts surrounding teaching about war, and then an examination of *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource* and its use of photographs, images and stories and what they teach primary students about war. The article concludes with reflections on the challenges that teachers face when teaching primary students about Australia's wartime history

### **Contexts of Teaching Students about War**

The teaching of history attracts political interest and teaching about a nation's war time history is especially subjected to scrutiny (Taylor, 2013). In Australia, it is usually the conservative political parties with their attraction to the canonical, cultural transmission, commemoration and national celebration approaches that most interfere in school history curriculum while the left of centre political parties are less interventionist (Taylor, 2013). In Britain for twenty years after Thatcher and her education minister Baker initiated the UK's national curriculum there occurred a debilitating struggle over history teaching in schools (Taylor, 2013). What is needed however, is an informed debate about the nature of history and history teaching in schools based on historical understanding instead of knowledgeable ignorance (Taylor, 2013). This article contributes to this debate.

### **Educational Contexts of Teaching Students about War**

*Australians at War: Primary School Resource* and its approaches to teaching and learning need to be seen in the context of national and international debates on the teaching of students about the history of war. For example, a seminal comparative study on teaching history in Australia and Canada noted that teaching resources and teacher and student engagement are critical to successful teaching outcomes (Clark, 2008a). Students and their teachers want to engage in history in a manner that allows them to be critical, to use their imagination and to weigh up different accounts and arguments (Clark, 2008a). Students dislike over-reliance on rote learning while understanding the importance of knowing the facts about their nation's history but not at the expense of historical narratives, classroom discussions, debates and creativity (Clark, 2008a). This study (Clark, 2008a) and its emphasis on teaching resources, student engagement and learning styles finds expression in the aims and methods espoused in *Australians at War*.

The teaching and learning approaches espoused in *Australian's at War* is supported by the work of Bruno-Jofre and Schiralli (2002) in Canada. They argue for an inquiry model of history teaching that engages students in analysing sources and justifying judgements so that students are initiated into the methods of historical study while simultaneously teachers avoid being subservient to pressing political agendas. Similarly, the Malaysian scholars Salleh, Mohamad and Ambotang (2013) note that history teaching in schools should develop a wide range of problem solving skills while at the same time teaching students about national figures. For them history teaching needs to provide students with a range of historical sources and a range of perspectives which and allow students to present their findings in a variety of ways (Salleh, Mohamad and Ambotang (2013). Likewise, Fru (2015))

from Lesotho claims history teaching in schools should encourage students to understand human experiences across time and space. It should aim for students to develop historical thinking and reasoning skills by taking away ‘the boredom from history’ (Fru, 2015, p. 6).

Fallace (2010) in the United States of America notes that history teaching should move beyond mere memorisation of facts and engage students in interpretation of primary sources and the construction of original historical accounts. Steeves (1998) also in the United States observes that history teachers face the challenge of developing in students’ historical understanding and how to think historically, along with mastery of content and the development of critical thinking, writing and historical research skills. In the United Kingdom, the History Education Group (Todd, 2014) and (Harris, Downey and Burn, 2012) argue for the use of school pupils’ families and local communities when teaching history. Derelioglu and Sar (2010) in Turkey urge the use of films in teaching history in primary schools. They observe that traditional teaching methods leave primary school pupils perceiving history as boring and they are consequently inattentive in class. The use of films reduces this as films are part of students’ cultural environments and they better understand historical events and concepts ‘as if they leap from the screen’ (Derelioglu and Sar, 2010, p. 2017). *Australians at War* and its teaching philosophy, teaching methods and use of resources is thus part of a wider national and international response to the most appropriate way to engage and motivate school pupils and their teachers when teaching about Australia’s involvement in various wars and conflicts.

### **Political Contexts of Teaching Students about War**

The development and subsequent use of *Australians at War* does not occur in a value free public arena. On the contrary, teaching about Australia’s wartime history is a highly-contested activity for politicians have in mind what they would like *Australians at War* to teach. The following discussion outlines some of the contexts that surround teaching about war in Australian schools and the use of *Australians at War*. In June 2004, Prime Minister, Howard, and his Federal Minister for Education, Nelson, publicized a \$31 billion federal education program linked to a *National Framework for Values Education*. Following the terrorist bombings in London in 2005 Education Minister, Nelson, revamped the *Framework*. The values to be taught to Australian students were to be: care and compassion; doing your best, a fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; and understanding, tolerance and inclusion. To stress the values Nelson designed a blue toned poster with the values highlighted. Superimposed over these was the famous World War 1 serviceman Simpson and his donkey. Nelson declared the latter was ‘an example of what’s at the heart of our national sense of emerging identity’ (Clark, 2008b, p. 2). The poster had to be displayed prominently in schools for them to be eligible for the above funding. For Nelson, the unarmed Simpson and his donkey rescuing wounded soldiers at Gallipoli represented ‘everything that’s at the heart of what it means to be Australian’ (Clark, 2008b, p. 2). Doubts raised over the true role of Simpson and his donkey and what was being taught to children provoked heated debate by those keen to preserve the legend of Simpson (Sutton, 2013).

In his 2006 Australia Day Address Prime Minister, Howard, stated that ‘quite apart from a strong focus on Australian values...the time has also come for a root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools’ (Howard, 2006, p. 4). Howard wanted more students to study Australian history which he argued needed to move from ‘a fragmented stew of themes and issues and postmodern relativism’ (Howard, 2006, p. 4). Prime Minister, Howard’s, interventionist approach to the teaching of history in schools, involved several fronts Lowe (2012). He utilized the newly former Commonwealth

Department of Veterans' Affairs (part of the Department of Defence) to use several strategies including: refurbishment of war memorials and building of new ones; highlighting the war efforts of dogs and horses; education about important events and the creation of curriculum materials, prizes videos and textbooks for schools (Lowe, 2012).

The Department of Veterans Affairs developed a 'wealth of well-intentioned resources...that many teachers follow' (Taylor, 2008, p. 2). The focus of this article is one such resource but it is pertinent to mention some others. In August 2013, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Commemorations and Anzac Centenary Branch Director, Roger James, announced a Curriculum Sharing Project. This had pre-service and classroom teachers share curriculum materials on Australian wartime and peacekeeping history that they developed. The DVA provided up to \$500 for preservice teacher and \$1000 for classroom teacher developed materials. Eighty curriculum units on Australian wartime and peacekeeping history were collected for use by students during Anzac Centenary commemorations. Similarly, the DVA established Anzac Schools' Awards which commemorated Anzac Day. DVA suggested key commemorations as foci for students in 2018: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battles at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral; 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway by Australian prisoners of war and 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Armistice. In 2017 DVA produced *Keeping the peace: investigating Australia's contribution to global peacekeeping*. This resource for senior secondary schools investigated Australia's seven-decade involvement in peacekeeping through first hand reports of peacekeepers. Similarly, the DVA produced *World Wide Efforts: Australia's Peace Keepers* looked at personal experiences of peacekeepers and their challenges.

In October 2017, the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Dan Tehan, sent to schools and universities the 2018 DVA commemorative calendar and a book *Comradeship: stories of friendship and recreation in wartime*. The calendar examined the work of Australia's official war artists from World War 1 to the present using artworks and photographs from the official collection of the Australian War Memorial. In his accompanying letter Tehan (2017, p. 1) wrote many artists had been commissioned to interpret the experiences of Australian service personnel and their work had 'enriched our understanding of some of the most profound moments in our country's history, providing a perspective that can be found in no other media'. *Comradeship* focused on friendship and camaraderie that developed among many Australians during the depths of armed conflict. Written by Kathleen Cusack (2017) it explored life stories of Australians who 'found joy and laughter through simple pleasures like sport, music, games and conversation' (Tehan, 2017, p.1). Of note and relevant to this article is Cusack's (2017, p. 2) Note to the Reader: 'Most of the events described take place during wartime. You may feel sad after reading some of them. Teachers may wish to be sensitive to those students who have parents serving overseas in war zones'.

#### **Public, Historian and Media Contexts of Teaching Students About War.**

Teaching primary students about war and the use of *Australian at War: Primary Schools Education Resource* is further influenced by public contexts and debates that frame how Australia's wartime history is viewed. This can mean that the messages presented in the *Resource* are hotly challenged by other sources external to primary schools. Does the *Resource* thrive on clichés, stereotyping and conflict and pander to popular misconceptions (Taylor, 2008)? The journalist McKenzie (2017) observes that those who write about war should keep in mind Orwell's dictum that some regard certain facts as inadmissible. McKenzie (2017) questions the long-accepted practice of concentrating on individual wartime heroics rather than what armed conflict achieved. Comments such as these could be

an implied criticism of the approach used in the *Australians at War: Primary School Education Resource*.

Daley (2016) writing for *The Guardian* suggests that rarely is Australia's penchant for selective memory on starker display than on Anzac Day. He observes that those who question Anzac Day are too often dismissed as vaguely seditious and disrespectful of the dead. At the same time, he is firm that those who fought and died should be respectfully commemorated while we should not forget the horrors of war. Again, there are implied criticisms here of the *Resource* and its approach.

Letman (2011), a journalist in Kauai, writing in *Teaching Children War*, tells of how he confronted the issue of what his seven-year-old son learnt at school. His son arrived home before Veteran's Day with an issue of *Scholastic News* containing material about America's involvement in world-wide conflicts. Letman did not criticise his son's teacher, or school or Scholastic Publishing. What he questioned was the saturation of American society with militarism and weaponry. He asked, 'is this the best we can offer children' (Letman, 2011)? The four pages of *News* conveyed war as less than the brutal reality of what it is, leading Letman (2011) to reflect that it is not surprising that the US is full of individuals who unwittingly, if not willingly, support American global militarism. Letman (2011) on a visit to his son's school for a book fair noticed a book on the Iraq War for fourth or fifth graders. He found the first passage to basically ask how are the bombs just able to hit where the bad guys are (Letman, 2011). Letman (2011) suggested that this was just one instance of how American culture, in a subtle and benign manner, socialized children into accepting war as both patriotic and worthy of respect while simultaneously disregarding the horrible realities of war. Comments such as these are implicitly urging teachers to adopt a critical stance when using *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource*.

Professional historians also influence the wider public climate external to schools in which *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource* is used. Beaumont, professor of history at the Australian National University suggests it is time for a clearer differentiation between history and memory (Francis, 2013). She observed that students are taught a view that affirms a contemporary Australian identity (Francis, 2013). This then reinforced ideals such as endurance and mateship that support the Australian legend (Francis: 2013). Beaumont thought these ideals were still important to Australian politicians who still need volunteers for war or other important civil roles (Francis, 2013). Here again there are implied criticisms of the approach used in *Australians at War*.

Stephens from a group *Honest History* claimed (Thorpe and Jacobs, 2015) that another DVA produced resource namely *Audacity: Stories of Heroic Australians in Wartime* by Carlie Walker, senior education officer at the Australian War Memorial, ignored the consequences of war for civilians and sanitized it. The book examined Australian's honoured with medals in various wars under headings such as daring conduct, leadership, determination and exceptional courage. The Australian War Memorial replied that the book was a learning resource developed from resources in the Memorial's archives, age appropriate and aligned with the Australian curriculum.

Returned serviceman turned Governor of Tasmania, Peter Underwood, started a torrent of debate when he criticized Australia's remembrance of its wartime involvements and by implication the history recounted in *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource*. In a 2011, Anzac Day speech he detailed the horrors of war arguing Australian's should spend less time studying Simpson's donkey and more time looking at why we were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan (Killick, 2014). He described war as ugly, horrible, terrifying, lonely and painful and said fine words about the Anzac spirit should not gloss over war's horrors (Killick, 2014). Governor Underwood stressed all this was not to criticise past decision makers, but in remembrance of the dead, to help us avoid doing it again in some

other place, simply because we failed to examine alternative means of resolving conflict (Killick, 2014).

Hidden agendas associated with teaching young people about war can be attested to by the British Army's recruitment campaign that focused on working class young people (Morris, 2017). The Belonging Campaign was aimed at 16-24-year-old from the three lowest social and economic groups concentrated in the northern cities of Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Belfast and Cardiff. The UK Ministry of Defence engaged the firm Capita to devise and run the program. Capita noted it was a new and inspirational campaign that suggested new service personnel would join a brotherhood and sisterhood formed of unbreakable bonds (Morris, 2017). The campaign featured attractive 30 second films distributed on social media, television and cinema highlighting fictional scenes of young service personnel in various combat roles, supporting each other with camaraderie and humour (Morris, 2017). Karmarama, the advertising agency, reported that the campaign resulted in a dramatic double-digit increase in completed applications year on year (Morris, 2017). Army leaders denied the campaign targeted individuals from poor backgrounds in deprived areas but was aimed at all social classes. (Morris, 2017).

However, Taylor from the charity Child Soldiers International who saw the briefing document behind the campaign argues this was not the case. Taylor argued the army deliberately and strategically targeted the poorest areas with low employment because 16-year-old boys are a great target for recruitment as they are susceptible to risk-taking, into wanting to prove themselves men, desiring to establish an identity, and to belong. These are emphasised in the advertising campaign as they are lured by the romance, the glamour, the dangers (Morris, 2017). The foregoing examples and discussion attest to the fact that the use of *Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource* does not occur in a vacuum. The *Resource* itself presents one account of Australian at war. While it presents such a view this is challenged in the wider media and public debates. Teachers should be aware of this other view and some primary school students may well be. The above examples also show the views presented in the *Resource* are much closer to those of government and policy makers and attempts to critique this will not be welcomed.

### **Australians at War: Primary Schools Education Resource**

This article now looks in depth at key aspects of *Australians at War* written by Lewis and Gurry of Ryebuck Media Ltd for Beyond Productions Pty Ltd for the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs. The resource provides primary school teachers with materials and approaches to examine Australia's wartime experiences and explores themes covered in a television documentary commissioned by the DVA and the Australian War Memorial to commemorate 100 years of Australia's war involvement. Conflicts covered in the resource are the Boer War (1899-1902), World War 1 (1914-1918), World War 2 (1939-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Malay/Indonesia conflict (1962-1966), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), and the armed conflict in East Timor (1999-2002).

The resource contains classroom strategies, activities and student worksheets. Activities include time lines, video stories, and summaries of wars, home front interviews and commemorative events. The resource is organised to assist students develop an awareness of themselves as part of Australian history, to find out about individual's war experiences, to examine combat and home front experiences and to reflect on ceremonies of remembrance in their own communities (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, p.8). The resource lists seven key learning outcomes and suggests teachers use 'an inquiry approach to learning, which emphasises that students find out by working out from the evidence provided as

starting points' (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, p.7). These seven key learning outcomes inform about aspects of war but certainly not the brutal reality of many conflicts Australia has been involved in nor the harsh realities of war as seen on television or easily accessible on YouTube. This is unsurprising given the resource is aimed at primary school children.

The resource was influenced by Studies of Society and the Environment courses for upper primary school students in each Australian state (Lewis and Gurry, 2002) with guidelines provided as to what classes from grade 4-6 in were appropriate for the materials (Lewis and Gurry, 2002). The seven sets of activities that the resource is based on are what is evidence; creating a time line; investigating images of wars and conflicts; summarising wars and conflicts; listening to people's wars and stories; children on the home front and remembering and commemorating. The first two (Lewis and Gurry, 2002) do not necessarily lead to discovering much about wars at all. Students may learn much about evidence and creating a time line but very little about war. The suggested activities are so general and superficial they could apply to almost anything. In the next two sections of this article three aspects of the resource are the focus namely images, photographs and stories.

In activity 3, (Lewis and Gurry, 2002) Investigating Images of Wars and Conflict, students are given ten photographs from the Australian War Memorial's collection to sequence. The ten photographs are listed below in Table 1. They can be viewed in full detail by typing in the AMW ID at <https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search>. As an aside if students have their own electronic devices these would be an excellent way to view the photos. Even better they could be displayed by the teacher on a large screen in the classroom.

AWM CO 1858 - An Australian Flying Corps plane, 1917
AWM PO3248.061 - An Australian peacekeeper and war artist with children, Dili, East Timor, 1999
AWM HOB2087 - Soldiers in Korea carry a wounded comrade to an aid post
AWM OO6846 - Crew of HMAS Perth 1941
AWM H10324 - A sniper with a periscope rifle, Gallipoli, 1915
AWM PO1735.033 - A soldier in Mogadishu, Somalia, 1993
AWM A04948 - A trooper of the 5 <sup>th</sup> South Australian Imperial Bushmen's Contingent, South Africa, 1899-1902
AWM 026648 - RAAF pilots and plane, Milne Bay, Papua, 1942
AWM GIL/67/0483/VN - Army nurse, Hoa Long, South Vietnam, 1967
AWM ELL/51/283/ML - Soldiers on patrol in Malaya cross river

**Table 1. Photos**

Students' reactions to these will vary (recall the three observations made earlier in this article) but only three of the photographs even vaguely hint at the realities at the heart of these wars, that is death, destruction and displacement of peoples, especially children. These are the second and third photographs which suggest something of the sorrow and heartache behind the wars in East Timor and Korea. The rest of the photographs are staged, inoffensive shots of personnel and places associated with conflicts Australia was involved in. There is no hint of the brutal tragedy that lies at the heart of armed conflict.

More problematic here, in teaching students about war, is the suggestion that students be encouraged to identify different types of images used including modern film, historical photographs, archival film, extracts from feature films and to discuss how the film-maker has created the overall result (Lewis and Gurry, 2002). The resource suggests that students could question how are music and sound effects used and what about camera angles (Lewis and Gurry, 2002). This seems very removed from teaching students about war as perhaps opposed to teaching about media representations of war.



Worksheet 7 suggests that another way students can learn about war is to examine drawings and paintings (Lewis and Gurry, 2002). It suggests that not only do these give students information but they also tell us about ideas and feelings; what is the person or people shown in the image doing, where are they; what feelings do you think they might have; what do you think is the idea or message about war that the artist of each image wants to get across (Lewis and Gurry, 2002)? The resource suggests that students ‘create a caption for each image that you think best tells you what the image is saying to you about war’ (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, p. 24). The nine paintings and drawings are listed in Table 2.

AWM 2245 and AWM2303 - Drawings by Australian war artist Will Dyson in World War 1
AWM ART 22560 and AWM 127986 - A painting by Australian war artist Ivor Hele and a photograph by Australian war photographer Damien Parer, of the same event in New Guinea in 1943
AWM ART 40758 - A painting by Bruce Fletcher of a famous Australian battle, the Battle of Long Tan, from the Vietnam War
AWM 9161 and AWM 91141 - Paintings by Wendy Sharpe in East Timor, 1999
AWM 91105 and AWM 91106 - Paintings by Rick Amor in East Timor, 1999

**Table 2. Paintings and Drawings**

What is interesting in terms of the argument on teaching school children about war is that it these images and drawings that go closest to capturing some the sheer horror and brutality of war. In these images see soldiers bent over battle field graves of their fallen comrades, paying respect to buried comrades, on the battlefield leaving dead comrades behind as they move from one engagement to another, crouching amid gunfire on the battlefields of Vietnam as a lone soldier leads the fight by standing up and advancing under fire, soldiers inspecting war torn East Timor and its destroyed buildings and most poignantly, the heart rendering faces of children and their parents, and children alone in East Timor.

These images and drawings capture the brutality of the war in graphic ways. Why are they used in this resource and why do they capture the horrors of war when the photographs discussed above avoid this? Must we sanitize photographs of war and all that it involves so primary school students are not traumatized? If so why can we present the horrors of war to them in drawings and images? Here what is also interesting is that the more horrific parts of war, that is those that involve children, are captured by the most impressionistic paintings. Thus, the paintings by Wendy Sharpe noted above capture the horrors of war that involve children but the same horror is muted by being captured in an impressionistic painting. Do we have to blunt the horrors of war by the way we present it to children? Given the nature of primary school aged children teachers would obviously want to shield them from the horrors of war but then given these images and the curiosity of the young and modern technology there would be nothing stopping school pupils from finding out more about the war behind these images.

The discussion now moves to examine the resource’s use of people’s recollections of war. In Activity 5 Listening to People’s Stories the aim is to have ‘students explore people’s stories to develop knowledge and understanding of and empathy with the experience of war and conflict’ (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, 9). Worksheets 21-27 (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, pp. 42-54) contain ‘reconstructed interviews... based on real experiences, and reflect typical comments and attitudes but they have been created in this form for this resource’ (Lewis and Gurry, 2002: 9). The purist historian may well recoil from this strategy. The question to be asked is, has this been done to try and shield primary school students from the grim realities of war found in uncensored accounts by those who experienced its horrors. Secondly what do the stories tell students reading them? Table 3 list extracts from these ‘reconstructions’ which

capture some of the brutality of war but there is a winsomeness about some of the reconstructions and the language in some of them does not always ring true.

<b>Boer War (1899-1902)</b>
We also had to do some things I'm not proud of. We burned the farms... we hated burning those farms. We also hated rounding up the women and children and putting them into big camps. Lots of them died there.
<b>World War 1 (1914-1918)</b>
I went to France... the Western Front... I lost a lot of mates there to bayonet and bullet and shell. I got wounded a few times, gas once. Horrible stuff that gas.
In 1916 in France some had their lungs almost burned away by gas, but most had terrible bullet or shell wouunders... arms or legs blown off or rotten with infection. Some had big pieces of their faces torn away. I used to cry every night at the sights I saw. Some of the boys suffered terribly, calling for their mothers, a lot of them.
<b>World War 2 (1939-1945)</b>
When the Japanese came to New Guinea... was no picnic I can tell you. Most of the time we were in mud or heat or freezing cold... climbing until the muscles in our legs were aching so painfully you felt you could not go a step further.
I flew as part of a bomber crew... over Europe. This was... about the most dangerous job... with a very high casualty rate... It was hard on us but it was hard on the people in the cities we dropped bombs on too... deep down we also knew they were people just like us.
I was a sailor on HMAS Perth... [after a battel with the Japanese in the Sundra Strait] 357 of my mates died and 320 were taken prisoner... we were starved, beaten, kicked, punched, treated like animals as prisoners... back to Australia... lots of us were changed by the experience. it was hard on our families... many marriages broke up because the husband had returned a stranger, and a damaged man.
<b>Korea (1950-1953)</b>
The thing that I remember most about Korea is the cold... it was freezing... poor food, fear...
<b>Malaya (1962-1966)</b>
The most damage was done by disease... malaria... scrub typhus...it brought on a delirious fever that burned you up.
<b>Vietnam (1955-1975)</b>
In Vietnam, you lived in fear every minute... there were mines or traps, so we always had to be alert. The enemy might be ahead, or behind, or at the sides of you, so you were constantly straining to see and hear any evidence of them...we were constantly scared, alert and under mental and physical strain. Usually we did not see any enemy, but you could not relax for a second...one wrong step and you and your mates might be crippled or killed.
I remember I had to guard a wounded Viet Cong soldier in the hospital... I couldn't talk to him, but he was just an ordinary young man, like me, caught up in a war.
<b>East Timor (1999-2002)</b>
We got there and the local people were homeless and scared without much hope.

Table 3. Extracts from reconstructed stories (Lewis and Gurry, 2002, pp. 42-54)

An interesting comparison that can be made with the materials in *Australians at War* are the images used in the DVA produced 2018 Calendar sent to all schools and universities which featured Australia’s official war artists. This Calendar is evidence of the continuing efforts by governments to construct histories of Australia’s war time involvements for use by teachers in schools. Dyson, Australia’s first official war artist is quoted in the calendar as saying he would ‘never draw a line to show war except the filthy business it is (Australian Government, Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017, p. 2). The images in the calendar touch not only on aspects of Australians at war but on universal timeless themes – exhaustion, fear, violence, death and killing (Australian Government, Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). The 2018 Calendar has 21 images one for each month of the year plus nine smaller images. Eleven images especially illustrate the horrors of war with images of dead and wounded, buildings burnt out and destroyed, gunfire on land and sea, soldiers under fire, civilians affected by armed conflict, soldiers being shot and killed as they waded through water in enemy held territory, soldiers alighting from helicopters in war ravaged Vietnam. There is nothing sanitized about the picture of war here. Given a calendar hung in a school could be viewed by any pupil what does this tell us about teaching students about war? Or would schools not display the calendar or would students not look at calendars? These images include the following drawings and paintings.

AWM ART02266 - Will Dyson, 1917, <i>Stretcher bearers near Butte de Warlencourt</i> (charcoal, pencil and wash on paper)
AWM ART91107 - Rick Amor, 1999, <i>Study for ‘Urban Destruction’ (Private Cameron Simpson inspecting a burnt-out building, Dili, with graffiti on the wall)</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM ART28479 - Ivor Hele, 1943, <i>Troops in back of truck, Libya</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM ART02811 - George Lambert, 1920, <i>The Charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba, 1917</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM ART03523 - Arthur Streeton, 1918, <i>Australian burning effigy of Kaiser in square, Armistice Day</i> , (watercolour and pencil on paper)
AWM MEA 1378 - Dennis Adams, 1964, <i>HMAS Perth in the Battle of Sunda Strait</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM ART03028 - Will Longstaff, 1918, <i>Night attack by 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade on Villers-Bretonneux</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM GIL/67/0547/VN - Bruce Fletcher, 1967, <i>Distributing gifts at Binh Ba, Phuoc Tuy Province, Vietnam</i> , (oil on canvas)
AWM ART22755 - Roy Hodgkinson, 1944, <i>Scarlett Beach Landing</i> , (crayon and charcoal with wash on paper)
AWM ART 4074 - Ken McFadyen, 1968, <i>Insertion</i> , (oil on hardboard)

**Table 4. Calendar Images and Paintings**

However, what is very noticeable is the image used in the calendar for the month of August. The image is AWM G0131 Frank Crozier, 1919, *The Beach at Anzac*, (oil on canvas). While the caption that accompanies, the image notes a ‘scene of chaos, crowded with wounded men...’ the image is one of order and calm. There is not much of the sheer horror and brutality that this war embodied. It is as if the Calendar with this image can’t escape Australia’s fascination with a fictionalised and mythologised version of the Anzac campaign. There is plenty here for students to examine and critique on representation of Australians at war. Lastly the difficulty of teaching primary students about war is compounded because media reports of war are so regular and confronting. How much primary school pupils are aware of these reports is uncertain but it is likely that those in the upper grades of primary school would be familiar with some of them. Given the pervasive use of the internet by primary pupils it is likely that many can access material on the internet

showing the full horrors of war. This will show a much more graphic and vivid account of war than curriculum materials present. Two examples here serve to make this point. On Sunday June 25, 2017, Australian Broadcasting Corporation's evening news featured a searing image of a young boy fleeing a Middle East war zone with a canary in a cage. There have been many other media reports with their confronting images of children devastated by war. Perhaps none more so than those in the six minute YouTube video *Children of War- Share if you Care*. This film with its haunting song and images of children fleeing war torn Syria presents a much less sanitized picture of war, than is captured by current curriculum materials. The video can be seen at this address. Two observations are worth making on this video. It was freely available on YouTube but now appears to be age restricted. Secondly when using this with university students a warning was given as to its content to allow students to leave if they so wished. None did so. But later one student reported that she was distressed by its contents as she had attended counselling with her Gulf War veteran husband to assist him and the video brought back searing memories.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=He6xGp2tO8E>

## Conclusion

Teaching Australian primary students about using *Australians at War: Primary School Resource* is concerned with teaching students the skills of historical inquiry, the nature of sources, the nature of evidence and its limitations, historical representation and empathetic understanding. These all feature in the resource *Australians at War*. The content in the resource draws on selections from the history of one hundred years of Australia's war time involvements and includes images, photographs, paintings, written and oral sources. Given the ages of the pupils the resource is designed for it is unsurprising that a desire to protect children was exercised in content selection. Some things are too awful for young pupils to learn about. The paradox here is that pupils of the same age are today subjected to the very tragedies that we want to protect the pupils we teach from. These same things regularly appear in television news reports.

*Australians at War* illustrates the dilemmas primary teachers face when teaching the history of war and conflict. While wanting to present a faithful presentation of Australia's war involvement it is aware of the sensibilities of students, the resource's sponsor and wider educational, political and social contexts. This awareness sometimes leads to vague and general activities for students and glossing over the horror and brutality of wars that the resource covers. At other times the resource gets much closer to presenting the tragedy and awfulness that wars involve. There is no simply answer for teachers who teach primary students about war. Simply teaching about war places the teacher in a situation where they are criticized by external protagonists if they deviate from the protagonists' accepted versions of events. However, in the final analysis primary students will individually respond to teaching about war. It is wise for their teachers and others not to view them as simply passive participants in their learning and decision making as they study Australia's war time history.

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