

Wilfred Flint

"Since armies are legal, we feel that war is acceptable; in general, nobody feels that war is criminal or that accepting it is criminal attitude. In fact, we have been brainwashed. War is neither glamorous nor attractive. It is monstrous. Its very nature is one of tragedy and suffering." His Holiness, The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet

In the late 1960s, my brother fought in Vietnam as an Australian soldier. He spent thirteen months killing Vietnamese people who were identified as enemy combatants, rightly or wrongly. He was wounded by 'friendly fire' in his final weeks in the conflict. He and our family, and his digger mates and their families, bear deep psychological scars to this day as a result of the horrendous experiences of that war. As do the Vietnamese people. Fifty years on, my brother's mates who returned alive from Vietnam continue to suicide, and my brother, too, has fought suicidal ideation at difficult times since his involvement in Vietnam. It's likely that he has not ended his life, like too many of his mates, because he's felt first hand the pain of losing our youngest brother to suicide, and the pain of losing his army mates to suicide.

Trauma for participants in war does not end with the cessation of conflict. Anguish, misery, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic shock continue throughout life. And the horror continues intergenerationally. Our parents' involvement in World War II has led to three generations of traumatised Aussies in the same family.

Australia followed the United States into wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Why? Because the US wanted it that way. Australians have repeatedly gone to war in foreign countries at the behest of the US - when Australia was not threatened. It's different now, of course: we Aussies have made ourselves targets because we joined an aggressor in conflicts against foreign powers that did not view Australia adversarially before the US led conflicts - conflicts in which we should not have participated.

Humans are not the only victims of war. Unwitting casualties are flora and fauna in battle grounds - indeed, entire ecosystems are destroyed by war. Environmental destruction seems to be seldom taken into account by aggressors when the validity of war is questioned, nor when post-war costs are assessed. Consider the enormous loss of non-human life by napalm and agent orange in Vietnam, and the widespread destruction of crops, and fruit and nut trees in Afghanistan - food supplies and livelihoods of non-combatants.

Comprehensive studies undertaken by institutions around the world into the effects of war include:

Australians for War Powers Reform <https://warpowersreform.org.au/>

Brown University's Watson Institute International & Public Affairs Costs of War project
<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>

BioMed Central Ltd The intergenerational effects of war on the health of children
<https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1741-7015-12-57>

Let Australia be averse to conflict - let us be more like our Kiwi cousins. Better still, let's go all the way and be neutral like Finland, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Malta, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkmenistan, and Vatican City.

Achieving peace takes work. It involves the active pursuit of non-violence. And neutrality does not mean defencelessness - it means asserting and defending a peaceful stance.