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Never before have Australia's fighting women and men talked so candidly to the nation about war so soon after the shooting stopped. *Afghanistan: Inside Australia's War* draws on the raw experiences of our longest war – from private soldiers to Prime Ministers. In their own words and through their own extraordinary helmet-cam battle footage (much of it never seen before) Australian ground war warriors lay bare their hearts in a searing, profound 3 x 1 hour epic – not just how they fought, but why and to what end.

The contributors to the series are all members of the Australian Defence Force who served in the 12 year war, the politicians who sent them to fight or Afghans with sharp insights into Australians' contribution to the war.

Their accounts are complemented by Dan Wyllie's spare, down-to-earth narration and elegantly cut archival footage. Afghanistan would become Australia's first self-shot war and from the ADF archives of professionally and personally gathered footage come images that are poignant, dramatic and fresh. The series takes viewers inside the experiences of Australian soldiers in action, on patrol and at base.

The series puts Australia's war in Afghanistan in the context of a global war on terror. The events of 9/11, Bali, Madrid, London and Iraq – plus candid reflections of former Prime Ministers John Howard and Julia Gillard – sit up against the experiences of Australian soldiers who constantly examine the reasons why they fight. Afghan commentators like Senator Hila Achekzai and former Warlord Pacha Khan Zadran reveal the complexities of that country, the moral as well as military maze in which our soldiers fought.

As much as a war story, *Afghanistan: Inside Australia's War* is a portrait of a generation. What Australia's fighting men and women did on our behalf is chilling, fascinating and often inspiring. The way they did it – the search for solid moral foundations from which to fight this confusing war – is perhaps their most lasting legacy.

**Production details:** 3x60 mins. Essential Media and Entertainment. Writer/Director Victoria Midwinter Pitt. Executive Producer Alan Erson. ABC Commissioning Editor Matt Scully.

**Media requests:** Rachel Fergus, ABC TV Publicity, on 02 8333 5085, 0416 263 194 or [fergus.rachel@abc.net.au](mailto:fergus.rachel@abc.net.au)

**To view and images:** [abc.net.au/tvpublicity](http://abc.net.au/tvpublicity)





**AFGHANISTAN Inside Australia's War – Episode 1 'Acts of War'**  
**Tuesday 23 February at 8.30pm on ABC**

Thirty three thousand Australians from our Army, Navy and Air Force served in the war that changed the world. There are thousands of stories to be told from Australia's war in Afghanistan. This is the story of the war on the ground.

It begins on September 11, 2001 – the terrible American moment revealed from Australian points of view: Brigadier Garry Banister who was in the Pentagon on that fateful day and Prime Minister John Howard who was also in Washington. The episode shows how America and Australia were sucked into war against the Taliban government in Afghanistan – one of the poorest countries on Earth but, for hundreds of years, a graveyard for superpowers.

The film charts the war's first phase: from dramatic accounts of the Australian SAS handpicked to partner the US Marines in the first ground invasion, to the fall of Kandahar and the strategic confusion, individual heroism and massive firepower of Operation Anaconda, the biggest battle of the war.

It also reveals the troops' excitement to be fighting Australia's first major action since Vietnam: "It was like putting on the green and gold for Australia," says Signaler Martin Wallace (Retd).

SGT M (Retd) describes the culture shock of Afghanistan: "It's like a biblical experience with guns."

In Operation Anaconda, the war's biggest battle, the US unleashes the full fury of its firepower. "This was the first time that anyone had ever heard what war sounded like for real," says SFT M. "It was proper, proper war."

But even that overwhelming military might could not hammer out decisive victory; three years later many of the same Australian soldiers found themselves returning to Afghanistan, to a war that would only get deadlier.





**AFGHANISTAN Inside Australia's War – Episode 2 'Hearts and Minds'**  
**Tuesday 1 March at 8.30pm on ABC**

Episode 2 charts Australia's efforts alongside Dutch forces to secure the Afghan province of Uruzgan and support the new (and increasingly corrupt) government of Hamid Karzai by building hospitals, roads, schools and police stations.

Major Clare O'Neill is an inspiring, intensely practical engineer, part of the team charged with rebuilding Uruzgan. "I was one of those overly optimistic children who had grand ideas that I would make a difference," she recalls. But she's aware of the scale of the challenge she and her comrades face - and the risks to the locals. "There was a glimmer of hope to get the population to take a chance, take a chance with their lives."

While the engineers build, other soldiers fight the Taliban-led insurgents. But in the complex web of Afghan loyalties they struggle to distinguish friend from foe. And deadly improvised explosive device attacks on the Australians raise the stakes. "Everyone you looked at, you trust no one anymore - young, old, male and female - nobody," says CPL Tim Owens (Retd)

The moral complexities of the war hit home most profoundly when Australian soldiers face charges of manslaughter in the wake of accidental civilian deaths during combat. First Commando reservist CPL Geoff Evans, a fireman and father, was part of one of the most controversial actions of the war. "I remember watching one of my friends come running past," he recalls. "It's one of the defining images of Afghanistan for me, an Australian commando run by with a baby dying in his arms."



**AFGHANISTAN Inside Australia's War – Episode 3 'We All Have To Get Home'  
Tuesday 8 March at 8.30pm on ABC**

With the war in quagmire, the Australian Army's main fighting force, the Infantry, is sent to join a Coalition surge to break through, defeat the insurgency and train an Afghan force that could secure the country and make our exit possible.

The surge does not quell fighting: violence spikes and the Australian war intensifies, requiring extraordinary responses from the soldiers on the ground. "You move toward the gun and then you just keep moving forward and try and get rid of it – and that's what we did," is how Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith, VC, MG describes the events that led to him being awarded the Victoria Cross.

Not all the action is out on the battlefield. Corporal Kristyna Kalogjera describes losing her mate Lance Corporal Andrew Jones, a cook, within an Australian base camp. He is the first of seven Australians shot by the Afghan soldiers they are there to train.

Commanding Officer Major General John Cantwell's (Retd) concern for the men and women he leads takes its toll. "I came home from Afghanistan simply heartbroken. I couldn't stop weeping, I couldn't stop being angry."

In December 2013 Australian combat troops leave Afghanistan. The series explores the successes and failures of the war and how the War on Terror has changed our lives. It asks the men and women who fought Australia's longest war if they would ever return to fight in Afghanistan. Extraordinarily, to a man and woman, they would.

## PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

### Director – Victoria Midwinter Pitt

Writer and director Victoria Midwinter Pitt joined the ABC's documentary unit straight out of university, where she'd studied History, Politics and Law. She later did a Masters in directing at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London.

As well as working on *Four Corners*, *Enough Rope*, and *Newsnight* (BBC), Victoria has written and directed an armful of major history documentaries including *Leaky Boat* (the story of the Tampa and the Howard Government's campaign to turn back the refugee boats of 2001), *Surviving Mumbai* (the story of the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai told by the men and women who found a way to survive them), *Rampant: How a City Stopped a Plague* (the little known story of how Sydney became the first place on the planet to turn back the spread of HIV AIDS), and *Frontier* (a history of the land wars between white and indigenous Australians, told through letters and diaries of the time).

Her work specialises in telling history through the direct accounts of the people who have actually lived it.

Victoria's films have screened at the UN, on the world's major broadcast networks and film festivals, been nominated for Emmy Awards and UN Media Peace Prizes and won Australia's premier awards – Walkley and AFIs.

### Executive Producer – Alan Erson

Alan Erson is General Manager and Head of Factual at Essential Media and Entertainment in Australia. He is the EP of hundreds of non-fiction series and films including *Why Anzac with Sam Neil*, *Australia: The Story of Us*, *The Great Australian Race Riot*, *What's the Catch?*, *Kids on Speed?*, *Contact* and *Afghanistan: Inside Australia's War*.

He is an award winning writer, director and producer and has worked with broadcasters around the world including Seven Network, ABC, SBS, BBC, Discovery, National Geographic, NHK, Arte France and CBC Canada.

Previously he was Head of Factual at the ABC leading the commissioning team responsible for over 100 hours of TV and multiplatform content each year.