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# Afghanistan Diaries: 1993 - 2012

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# **Afghanistan Diaries 1993 – 2012**

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*An exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the conferral of the degree:*

Master of Philosophy

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts  
University of Wollongong

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# **Declaration**

I, Stephen Dupont, declare that this exegesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The exegesis, and two war diary bound books, has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Stephen Dupont, 3 January 2015

# Abstract

There is little discourse analysis on war diaries and their value as journalistic, historic, artistic and cultural artefacts. War diaries can be truthful, personal and raw accounts of war from the war correspondent's perspective. When designed and contextualized, they can also become works of art that explore creative and challenging ways of seeing, and so may be a new genre of journalism. Such diaries are often accurate confessions, in public interest, which can also be therapeutic to the writer under pressure, enabling reflection on professional practice. The war diary can help the photojournalist reflect on process and detect instances where practice can be altered, or maintained, to maximize safety and generate strong journalistic outcomes. Such "action research" increases the likelihood of obtaining the best images and sound, and maximizes the likelihood of realizing the best possible ethical outcome, so journalism practice may be improved. This exegesis encompasses a personal reflection on the use of the professional war diary and is submitted with two examples: *The Afghanistan Wars, 1993 – 2012* and *Why am I a Marine?* The exegesis explores how war diaries inform professional practice by enabling reflection in the production of image, print and audio texts for journalism, art, and documentary film. Both war diary works are hand-made artist books and produced as limited edition runs, aimed at private collectors and public institutions.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Context

This exegesis examines the war diary as a unique self-published artefact. The two volumes discussed, *The Afghanistan diaries, 1993 – 2012* and *Why am I a Marine?* are personal works that provide a window into the ongoing war history of Afghanistan. They are photographic and video evidence; they are reflective and personal accounts of “Fourth Estate” witnessing; and they are archives. Initially acquired through photo and video journalism, these war diaries represent a new means of print-production and, perhaps, they suggest a new form of cultural artefact. They also serve as storyboard precursors for developing concepts in documentary film, as visualization of future art gallery large format photographic exhibitions, and, as reflexivity, in imagining other forms yet to be invented.

With these two war diaries as major components, this exegesis analyzes and reflects on the question, “What constitutes a war diary?” The exegesis examines this form of journalistic practice and surveys other artists, journalists, curators, documentarians and theorists who have worked on, or written about war diaries. This 18,000-word exegesis comprises twenty-five percent of the work submitted, while the two diaries comprise seventy-five percent, as the main component of this Master of Philosophy submission.

The photographic works presented here, as artefacts, as journalism and as art, are components of *The Afghanistan diaries, 1993 – 2012* and *Why am I a Marine?*. They represent my photographic and diary practice of reporting on Afghanistan over the last twenty years. *The Afghanistan diaries, 1993 – 2012* is a chronology, showing a selection of different forms of diary practice, both visual and narrative text, and should be regarded as companions to this exegesis. Similarly, the war diary, *Why am I a Marine?* is the product of collaboration between the author, embedded with the marines, and the marines as photographic subjects. Here, the war correspondent’s journal presents a new genre of photographic project. Polaroid photographs of marines were taped inside the journal and I wrote on the adjacent page the question: “Why am I a Marine?” Each subject was allocated a page, to write an answer to this question.

What transpired was unique and uninfluenced by censorship or the possibility of it. Their words are not only personal testimonies, saying something about the war in Afghanistan (and revealing their literacy standards), but also links to the private thoughts of youthful marines. The question initiated partial access to the psychological dimension of their fears, their longing for safety and for being home with loved ones. It also testifies to their relationship with the photographer.

Initially, the diaries were about documenting facts and ideas, and so were a form of journalism but they then transported journalistic practice to new areas. These war diaries represent a shift from the non-fiction narrative of journalism, as notes and

referencing of photographs and video, of location and time, to the textual narratives of layout and design, of photography and art. Production is therefore relocated to the domains of gallery and books, which are art pieces by definition and practice.

My *Afghanistan retrospective of 2010* would not have been complete without the evolution of this diary practice. The exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography was a product of this process, and there have been related shows at the *New York Public Library* (NYPL) and other international venues. This exegesis examines how this evolution of personal diary practice was the leading component in creating such retrospective shows, and in my publishing the related books and multi-media works.

## Action research

Action research developed these Afghanistan diaries in a practice-based context. The process paved the creative and narrative pathways for the final war diaries, as submitted here, and for other work in a range of contexts, including that at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. As the Museum's 2010 Robert Gardner Photography Fellow, I explored the human condition in the detribalization of Papua New Guinea and documented the Westernization of traditional society, using photographs and artist's journals (Dupont 2013).

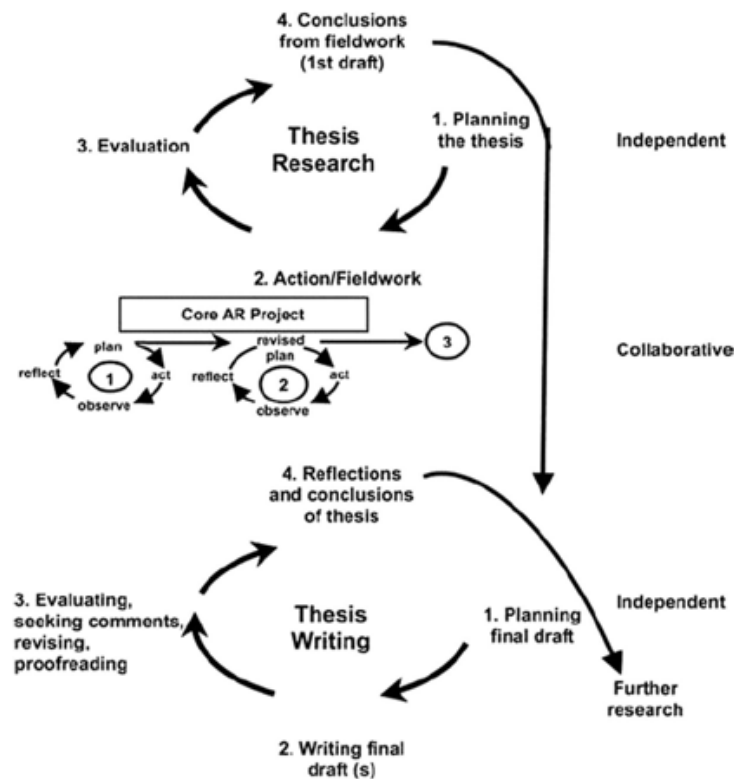
By "action research", I refer to a methodology of theoretical principles and guidelines that are incorporated into professional practice. Action research is a group of research methodologies that enable modification, improvement, development and response in an iterative process that includes photography, diary making and video production in successive stages (Dick 2000) (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005). The first stage initially involved compiling precursor diaries, followed by the final war diaries as part of this submission. The second stage involved writing this exegesis after research in a process of action and critical reflection.

Reason and Bradbury (2006, 2) say that action research is collaborative and participative as a method. It situates knowledge, skills and values within professional practice in an ongoing process.

The action research paradigm is particularly well suited to practice-based research (McNiff, 2002; Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher, 2007). Embodying as it does, the capacity to evolve theory out of doing, and involving as it does models of collaboration between researcher and research subject, it has proven itself infinitely adaptable to production-based fieldwork (Phillips 2014).

Action research is a sequence of thinking, acting, responding and reflecting that "presents research as a collaborative process of identifying and testing ideas in the field and using the results as the start of a new round of experimentation" (Phillips 2014). Cited in Phillips's paper, Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) argue a practice-based research thesis is essentially two projects: the "core action research – that is, the

candidate's fieldwork – and the thesis action research and writing – which constitutes the candidate's individual work" (p. 421)" (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher 2007). The Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher diagram is useful here, as applied in this war diary research, because it shows two distinct cyclical loops in the thesis writing:



Source: Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007, p. 421)

The first loop involves the field research, which can be individual or collaborative (and was both in this context): with planning, observing, evaluating, and making conclusions. The second loop involves the writing of the thesis: evaluating, seeking comments from my supervisor, then revising and reflecting. This process of reflection and action was ideal for working within Afghanistan, a dangerous country, requiring many ethical and safety considerations. I became the subject of the study, searching for the most workable, secure, expressive and ethical method and alternating between action and critical reflection. In the later cycles, while continuously refining the war diary method, understanding and knowledge developed from the earlier cycles. As an emergent process, while embedded in a dangerous place, action research leads to a better understanding of ethical representation. Action research is qualitative and participative – the researcher is involved and modifies the system of production.

This exegesis is, therefore, action research, involving analysis and reflection on photographs, video and diaries during Afghanistan's brutal civil war, 1993 to 1998, then later during the War on Terror, 2001 to 2012. In doing so, this exegesis cross-references and discusses other diarists as mentors, thus providing a brief history of some of the diarists of war – writers, photographers and artists. It includes two major events as central case studies, both in Afghanistan and both controversial, providing

essential ongoing discussion on the ethics of the camera's gaze.

## **The central case studies**

In 2005, I witnessed and documented the burning and desecration of Taliban corpses by members of the US Army 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. This international incident was a serious violation of the rights of prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions (ICRC 1864, 1906, 1929), as well as the U.S. military rules of engagement. In response to the incident in October, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attempted to minimize the scandal while flying back from Mongolia and to avoid a repeat of the negative publicity following the publication of images of torture at Abu Gharib prison in Iraq. His tone suggested he was going to be honest to the press. "The reality is that charges of that type are harmful", he said of the burning and desecration of Taliban corpses. "They don't represent the overwhelmingly positive behaviour of the men and women in uniform who do such a wonderful job. It's always disappointing when there are charges like that. It's particularly disappointing when they're true" (ABC 2005).

The second case study central to this exegesis occurred in 2008, when a young suicide bomber exploded his vest metres from where I was sitting in a transport vehicle. The explosion killed and maimed many Afghan police in the convoy. We were there to document the eradication of opium poppies intended for heroin production (Dupont 2008). It would have been a serious disservice to public interest and those colleagues who died or were maimed, and for me, to fail to thoroughly record the event, which I subsequently confronted through diary making. The diary making and action research was a therapeutic process, producing essential cathartic creative energy, which enabled me to mitigate symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

## **Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Aimak and Baloch**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, surrounded by deserts of Pakistan and Iran to the east, south and west, and the Hindu Kush Mountains to the north along the borders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is a tribal society of diverse peoples: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Aimak, Baloch and other smaller groups and nomads. Predominantly Islamic, its people have experienced many centuries of turmoil and change. They are self-confident, delighting in knowing that it has never been fully conquered by an invader.

Post-modern texts, like *Why am I a Marine?* are recent in the written history of Afghanistan. Most early written texts were written within the empire and military action narrative, with the earliest traceable accounts to around 500 B.C., when the area was under the Achaemenid Empire. However, as Amélie Kuhrt writes, archeological evidence indicates an earlier sophisticated urbanized culture from 3000 B.C (Kuhrt 1988, 60–76). More recently, Afghanistan's people twice repelled Britain (the first two Afghan – British wars) and later, the super-power Russia, in a brutal decade-long

invasion, resulting in possibly Russia's greatest military defeat. This was followed by civil war until the Taliban restored order, only to be disrupted again by invasion by U.S. and NATO forces.

After the revolution of the Mujahideen in 1989, I began the first of many self-funded trips, in pursuit of the beauty and tragedy of Afghanistan (Lakin 2006). Since then, I have worked as a full-time photojournalist and documentary photographer. While much of this work was published in the world's leading magazines and newspapers, the possibility of news media commissioning such assignments now, with guaranteed publication, has gone. In 2009 I returned to cover the biggest troop surge of U.S. forces since the invasion of 2001, but news agencies were not interested in the resulting material. This marked the demise of editorial opportunities, particularly in print publications, prompting other creative strategies for earning a livelihood with independent forms of storytelling, such as war diaries, blogs, video and large format art books.

The ninety-year period of photographers working within newspapers, alongside artists and journalists has ended. The collaboration began officially in 1920 when The Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) pressured metropolitan dailies to provide industrial cover for photographers as specialist journalists (Lloyd 1985, 152). This commitment no longer exists as journalistic staff numbers are reduced dramatically and one person does specialist tasks such as photography, video and copy-writing.

# **Chapter 2: War diary – personal reportage and the fourth estate**

## **The fourth estate**

For me, photography is central to the processing of war diaries; using images from field diaries, notes, photographs, contact sheets, video diaries and research – collated to form the critical backbone. Diaries provide notated information and evidence for journalistic witness purposes. They also provide memoirs and therapeutic information at times of stress or reflection. Diaries structure the personal reportage that eventually provides information to the public in new and popular forms, beyond the limitations of mass media journalism and government censorship.

A war diary compiled from a photographic album is different from a printed or a handmade book, despite its similar appearance. While blank books or notebook-style holders can contain photo albums, their resemblance to books is primarily to the form: the cover, binding and pages. The fresh blank page of the album offers countless possibilities: the structure is selected, the cover designed and the photographs organized for captioning. The work may then become a souvenir, a journal, a visual notebook, a sketchbook, a collection, or an instrument of activism to inform or influence. In the production of this one-of-a-kind object, there is complete freedom for the album maker, to express individuality spontaneously (Curtis 2011, 7).

Activism, as used throughout this exegesis, does not refer to strident political action, the common inference in textual analysis and in history. Rather, an activist photograph is shaped by the desire to publish and serve a public benefit. The image can be subtle and persuasive, or confrontational. In any case, activist photography and diary making are about informing the public, with passion and with moral vision (Bogre 2012, 12).

This exegesis asserts that war photography serves the “Fourth Estate”, journalism’s contribution to democratic functionality. In the United States of America (USA) in particular, the media is considered the fourth branch of government, holding local and international political processes, individuals and institutions to account. Poor journalism, through error or omission, obfuscates crucial information for citizens and voters, thus compromising democracy.

This twenty-first century has already been a testing time for the fourth estate concept, with decreasing civil rights and freedoms, increasing government surveillance, censorship, spin and psychologically focused public relations. Verified, accurate and effective journalism not only informs the citizenry, but more critically, it upholds values in justice, fairness and truth. Professor John Keane argues that the current overriding “media decadence” is profoundly damaging to the fourth estate

(Keane 2013).

Oiled by communicative abundance, we live in times in which there are constant power spats over who gets what, when and how. It seems as if no organisation or leader within the fields of government or social life is ever immune from political trouble. These changes have been shaped by a variety of forces, including the decline of journalism proud of its commitment to fact-based ‘objectivity’ (an ideal born of the age of representative democracy) and the rise of adversarial and ‘gotcha’ styles of commercial journalism driven by ratings, sales and hits (Keane 2010).

Appreciation of the importance of the fourth estate and the right of the public to access information freely is only possible when truthful news stories and accompanying photographic visible evidence are made available. Access to information is essential to democracy, to assist citizens make responsible, informed choices in democratic processes, rather than responding to misinformation and propaganda as was the case of the USA and its allies’ unjustified invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Pilger 2014).

## **Reinvention for survival**

John Beauchamp Jones’s 1866 war diary, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary at the Confederate States Capital* (Volumes 1 and 2), consisted of personal accounts, methodically entered on a day-by-day basis:

This diary was written with the knowledge of the President and the Secretary of War. I informed them of it by note. They did not deprecate criticism on their official conduct; for they allowed me still to execute the functions of a very important position in the Government until the end of its career (Jones 1866).

Jones records horror, pain and suffering - and inevitably these are universal. In the preface to Hiram Smith Williams’s Civil war diary about the 40th Alabama Infantry Regiment, editors Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor write:

Almost always, the war has been portrayed as a grand sweep of clashing armies, of heroic men and women, and of titanic struggles between competing moral issues (Wynne & Taylor 1993, 2, 3).

American Civil War diaries were presented as gifts, in “elegant crimson Moroccan hide-bound” volumes, to luminaries like Queen Victoria, John Stuart Mill, author of *On Liberty*, and James Robie, editor of Edinburgh’s *Caledonian Mercury* newspaper in the late 1870s. Generally, such diaries were published some time after compilation, but today’s Internet enables war diaries to be available instantaneously for ongoing editorial development, such as the selection of photographs for publication. Therefore, a modern war diary is written and published in closer proximity to the actual

documentation, as is blogging (Mark & Semaan 2009, 3–12). This new war diary form, blogging, has many nodes of editorial decision-making, many of which are intrinsically critical of those powerful interests that take nations to war, such as the USA and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the War on Terror, with its disinformation, propaganda and control of journalists, purportedly for their own safety and national security, my photojournalism was constrained and unviable. It was increasingly clear that diary making and hand-made books might be an alternative in the absence of photojournalism commissions from the mainstream news media. The war diaries evolved directly out of this realization, rescuing the photographic work from the mass media and the straight news function by creating fresh ways of publishing. Publication devolved into smaller audiences: libraries, galleries, universities, online blogging, websites and exhibitions. Essentially, industry changes created new opportunities in photojournalism. In today's pessimistic climate, photojournalists are finding new ways to witness, document and publish.

Thus, for an expressive form like a war diary, ongoing makeover is inevitable. In 2010, the photographic-agency director Neil Burgess lamented: "we have lived through so much change":

...the globalisation of the media, the move from film to digital, the invention of the internet, and the acceptance of photography as 'art'.  
A 10 × 8 print by Edward Weston – an image of a nautilus shell from the same series as one I've had as a postcard on my bathroom wall for as long as I can remember – sold at auction for more than a million dollars in April 2010. A lot of change (Burgess 2010a).

The reality of digital acquisition means the market is awash with images for public discussion of tragic events like war or the aftermath of tsunamis. In *For God's Sake, Somebody Call It!* Burgess did make the call; it's time to take photojournalism off life-support.

## Telling stories by desire

Of photography, Baudelaire wrote, "...this industry, by invading the territories of art, has become art's most mortal enemy". Baudelaire was partly right, as any new medium cannot really satisfy old standards, but the reality is that photographers must find new ways to make meaning clear and to make a living (Szarkowski 2007, 6). Further, much of the artist photographer's sense of reality and of craft are anonymous and are essentially untraceable gifts from photography itself (Szarkowski 2007, 11).

In war, photographs render suffering real to the public, bringing the politics of international human rights to the fore by the humanizing of others. Without photographs, the carnage, destruction and war crimes are often obscured by military, government and corporations like Halliburton, Blackwater, Academy and Xe. With independent photographers replaced by a war machine controlling the public discourse,

any published images are likely to be propaganda. Therefore, photojournalists have multiple roles: witnesses, as evidence gatherers, historians, artists, activists and even humanitarians (B Morris 2011, 14).

Accurate and authentic photographs have the power to affect audiences and they can be admissible in a court of law. The result of observing, describing, reporting, and then imagining, is intended for mass audiences. In *The Decisive Moment*, French photographer Cartier-Bresson's first major book, published in 1952, defined the captured "decisive moment" (Papageorge, 2011). In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag references Walter Lippmann to highlight the power of photography (Sontag 2003, 22–3):

Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable (Lippmann).

In her 2012 doctorate thesis, Naomi Busst examines how universally, photojournalists feel their work must be seen by as many people as possible. She argues that there must be avenues, with credible outcomes, for informing and inspiring people. Such Fourth Estate work, however, must adhere to ethical and professional standards, benchmarked by a public benefit and the right to information. Such a philosophical position ensures that photographs and stories are not censored, nor should they be changed or altered to fit the agendas of the mass media or the elite who own and control them (Castells 2007).

Entman's cascade activating model of framing is useful here. The model accepts that the power elite manipulates the news frame and photographic images as it sets agendas, mostly by selection of sources but also by misusing quotes, selecting certain data and images, and concealing other information. Alternatively, journalistic activism, coupled with meticulous accuracy, can be strategic in providing alternative, true and accurate information in the public interest. Framing theory proposes that the extent and rate of framing is proportional to agenda-setting aims and to inequity and power, which motivates selection (and omission) of certain narratives. In today's declining news media diversity, photojournalism must be designed so audiences make "connections among [the news narratives] so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman 2004).

A truly free and fair news media must source official information from government and multi-national corporations, while simultaneously balancing news points fairly with discourse from the public (Davis 2002, 12). This gives voice and deliberate analysis independently in democratic processes. Instead, and increasingly, news media narratives are political contests within pre-determined agenda-setting news frames (Entman 2004), many of which, after investigation, are found to be oriented in favour of transnational corporations and other commercial interests. This is particularly

the case for Afghanistan. With decreasing mainstream news agency journalism, the news message inevitably becomes influenced by politically powerful elites using techniques of strategic persuasion, leaving the alternative news media in a space where its power might now be applied to persuade the “public mood” (Barton 1997, 121).

This highlights the direct link between politics, media and crises, or pressure points, arising from agenda-setting within global political hegemonies. Protagonists who are invested in particular opinions and outcomes often promote war to resolve the crisis in a way that favours their interests (Castells 2007). War diaries (as journalism, as art and as visible evidence) can be integral to the development of interactive networks of communication, inducing new forms of mass communication that run contrary to the mainstream as a small part of an alternative solution. “Under these conditions, insurgent politics and social movements are able to intervene more decisively in the new communication space” (Castells 2007). Naturally, corporate media and mainstream politics are also investing in this new communication space.

## **The passing of the photojournalism tradition**

As discussed earlier, mass news media and communication networks are converging and the old systems are disappearing. This means that there are opportunities for transforming the institutionalized media to new communicative spaces. Audiences are crucial in this revolution, but news events must first be witnessed and then delivered to distribution by truthful and fair representation in the first instance. It is a given that photojournalism is rooted in the tradition of social documentary and this is underpinned by humanitarian ideals and a responsibility to accuracy. These ideals permeate the entire story-telling process, from witnessing to dissemination. Photojournalists therefore are morally obliged to inform the world of “situations, issues and events that other humans face and hopefully inspire people to action” (Busst 2012). Dissemination no longer depends solely on news media agencies; new and more reliable avenues of distribution are now being invented and deployed.

Thus it is better to reach a smaller audience through a form of dissemination outside of the mainstream media so that the stories can be told in a way that potentially increases the number of people who are inspired to action. However, photojournalists tend to be more comfortable with disseminating their work via journalistic outlets than through some other forums because of the institutional associations that come with those dedicated to the principles of the Fourth Estate (Busst 2012, 300–1).

In the glory days of the 1950s and 1960s, the photojournalism tradition prospered in thousands of magazines and newspapers, bringing innovations in news photography and photo essays. In the case of the Vietnam War, photojournalism tradition helped to bring the carnage to a close. W. Eugene Smith, Robert Capa, Robert

Frank and William Klein all contributed to the tradition. One of these, Robert Frank, recently turned 90. Though celebrated and revered, his comment in the *Guardian* encapsulates: “The kind of photography I did is gone. It’s old” (O’Hagan (2014). Photo-agency owner and manager, Neil Burgess agrees:

We should stop talking about photojournalists altogether. Apart from a few old dinosaurs whose contracts are so long and retirement so close that it’s cheaper to keep them on, there is no journalism organisation funding photographers to act as reporters (Burgess 2010b).

As digital photography and its dissemination via the Internet emerged, photojournalism began declining. Digital photography brought new possibilities for Internet dissemination of citizen and amateur photography. This saturation, more readily available than the paywall mainstream and uploaded via mobile telephone technologies, has changed photojournalism forever. Instagram and micro-blogging are technologies that are transforming dissemination and uploading of images via mobile devices (Wardle, Dubberley & Brown 2014). Such developments in user-generated content (UGC) challenge traditional notions of professionally wrought truth and witness (Edge 2014). Mainstream news agencies are using UGC on a daily basis, but this is problematized as: “News organizations are poor and inconsistent in labeling content as UGC and crediting the individual who captured the content” (Wardle, Dubberley & Brown 2014). Ethical questions regarding motive and the potential for propaganda are paramount, especially when images are disseminated instantly without attribution or reflection on ethical considerations. Haste is bound to affect accuracy and accountability, issues that will arise especially when witnessing war.

Mainstream agencies will argue that agency-based determinants in verification are used to underscore the credibility of video and photographs, but as the report *Amateur Footage: A Global Study Of User-Generated Content in TV and Online-News Output* suggests, this is not the case (Wardle, Dubberley & Brown 2014). There are many contexts where truth is tested, not the least of which is when a photographer is embedded with the military. Such contexts generally don’t have robust verification because the acquisition of the material is under military control. My pictures of the Americans burning dead Taliban fighters in Afghanistan is one example.

Antony Funnell from ABC Radio National (Australia), *The Media Report*, interviewed me for the *Degree South Collective War* exhibition at the Brisbane Powerhouse (Funnell, 2006).

The impact that the photographs had, and the video footage that I took, it went all over the world, it was the biggest news story for 48 hours at the time. It was very difficult to manage the story, I mean you couldn’t manage the story, it was like a wildfire. So the fact that my photographs and the repercussions of the story and the photographs was that US military policy was changed.

Psychological operations were changed. It had some direct effects on world history.

It may be possible, therefore, to assume that when the photographer is well respected and well published, the embedded context may be verification in its own right. Despite control by the military, the published work can be subversive of the war effort. Similarly, when danger is too great and prohibits journalists from working and amateur material is all that is available, news agencies must use it - as was the case for Syria and other locations.

While the innate power of some of the UGC from Syria might have pervaded the news no matter what, the limitations placed on journalists to enter the country or move around freely in this case forced even the most reluctant of journalists and editors to use UGC—because it was impossible to tell the story otherwise (Wardle, Dubberley & Brown 2014).

## **Cathartic processes after traumas of war**

Often travelling solo, the journalist finds the war diary becomes a friend, as notes of witness and record are confided to it. This process becomes cathartic and includes the collecting of objects, research materials, journalistic stories from newspapers and magazines, and the making of self-expressive artwork. Naturally, this is coupled with building an extensive photographic archive of edited work, exhibition prints and contact sheets. Additionally, sound and video recordings and, recently, blogging all interact with the war diary and become diaries in their own right.

In her thesis, *Bloodsport: Thomas Goltz and the Journalist's Diary of War*, Kylie Cardell examined how this life narrative, or diary practice, changes into pure journalistic professional practice.

In a cultural moment that values the production of personal, locally oriented narrative about experience, and that privileges the eyewitness point of view, it is not surprising that journalists should turn to genres of life narrative to represent and negotiate the exigencies of their profession (Cardell 2006, 584).

In *Expanding a Country's Borders During War: The Internet War Diary*, Gloria Mark and Bryan Semaan conducted an ethnographic study of citizen journalism and the use of war diaries on the Internet (Mark and Semaan 2009, 3–12). They found that diarists “wrote war diaries to reach out to people who were in environments not in a war as a way of sense-making, for impression management, and to be participants in the social production of news and opinions about the war” (Mark & Semaan 2009). They noted that a war diary might be a public narrative, a discourse that may subvert the otherwise toxic discourse of spin and propaganda that mainstream media generate on the path war. They also noted the use of “collaborative technologies that support communication across distance have far-reaching effects”, and that video and the

photographic images are more likely to be trusted in extending the boundaries to normal environments. Like journalism, war diaries are therefore a narrative of information for the public benefit, and a narrative of collegiality amongst other professionals.

# Chapter 3: War diary in Afghanistan – the artefact

## Professional activism

Former newspaper editor, John G Morris, published Eddie Adams' alarming photograph from the Vietnam War on the front page of the New York Times. The image was taken the moment before police officer General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan executed a prisoner, Nguyễn Văn Lém, on a Saigon street, February 1, 1968, at the start of the Tet Offensive. In critique, Susan Sontag wrote that the image was staged, that the execution would not have occurred had the cameras not been present (Sontag 2003). The decision to publish, says Morris in a CNN interview, was "to build public pressure for peace" in a war that he was "totally opposed to" (Amanpour 2014). Despite this, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, twenty years later, used the propagandist notion of "noble cause" with Adams's image, saying it depicted a necessary death of a Vietcong soldier, who may later have killed U.S. soldiers (Taylor 1998, 22).

Similar activist pressure for peace was examined in *Frontline*, David Bradbury's documentary about combat cameraman Neil Davis. The political message conveyed in Neil Davis's 16 mm film Vietnam War actuality, as continually televised, finally led to the depletion of public support for U.S. and Australian involvement. The images wore down the propagandized psyche, to the extent that people eventually protested in the streets – and violently.

As a camera man/correspondent, that is I took my own film and I wrote my own narration, my own script for the film. (Davis 1979).

Davis's close-up, humane, camera-based activism, eventually convinced audiences that public consent to the war had been manufactured by propaganda. "Younger audiences could see why Vietnam was such a divisive part of American history (Bradbury 1980)." Confronting images have this effect and so are critical to activism in public interest, and so these pictures can change the course of history:

Our political and military leaders were telling us one thing, and photographers were telling us another. I believed the photographers, and so did millions of other Americans. Their images fueled resistance to the war and to racism. They not only recorded history; they helped change the course of history. Their pictures became part of our collective consciousness and, as consciousness evolved into a shared sense of conscience, change became not only possible, but inevitable (Nachtwey 2007).

At a peak of the Vietnam War, in 1969, the *Sunday Observer* in Melbourne was "the first newspaper with a reasonably large circulation (over 100,000) to campaign vigorously against Australian involvement" (Robie 2014, 19). The newspaper

published a selection of photographs of the My Lai massacre in 1968 taken by Ronald L. Haeberle.

Between 340 and 500 unarmed civilians were murdered in the hamlets of My Lai and My Khe of Son My village on 16 March that year by US Army soldiers of Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Robie 2014).

They killed unarmed women, children and elderly villagers. Twenty-two soldiers were charged, but only Second Lieutenant William Calley was convicted. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but served only three years house arrest. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh broke the My Lai story initially. Soon after publication the activist *Sunday Observer* supplied Haeberle's photographs to the Australian Parliament as part of its anti-war campaign.

Photographs showing the actuality of war, like those of Haeberle and Adams, are also anti-war because the photographer has decided to be there and to take the photograph. "It is our responsibility to do something because we live here. It is an ethical issue of conscience," said Larry Towell, self-proclaimed activist photographer, at a panel discussion on human rights photography at New York University (Bogre 2012). While Towell spent his career focusing on human rights, he also noted that he didn't think he'd "changed anything" and that did not matter. Success in human rights reporting is "being involved in the process of change" even if one doesn't see the result (Bogre 2012). Therefore, activism is more about the means than the end: "The end is a promise that activists seldom see" (Bogre 2012, xiv). In the same book, *Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change*, John Szarkowski is quoted: "Activists seek to illuminate that invisible picture, to amplify that unheard voice, to reveal that untold story" (Bogre 2012, 10).

## **Afghanistan and activism**

In the winter of 1993, Northern Afghanistan was embroiled in an under-reported civil war. After Russia withdrew in 1989, warlords from different ethnicities and geographic regions carved out their fiefdoms. The opium trade and other illegal activities funded their operations and they deployed the immense arsenal abandoned by the retreating Russian army. Michelle Bogre began her diarist body of work at that time, using film-based 35 mm photographs and journals (Bogre 2012, 118). Peter Hopkirk, Nick Danziger and Rudyard Kipling had begun this diary practice in Afghanistan and emphasized the importance of writing everything down. Hand-written field journals were early precursors of modern digital practice and I have always used them. From edited photographs to contact sheets as visual storyboards, to 36 frame mini [still] movies – all are in chronological order and all are diaries: witnesses to emotion, time, event and place, and a means by which ordering, sequencing and activism can be imagined.

Afghanistan continued to be underreported in the early 1990s, and to be not

represented truthfully in the news media. This encouraged and inspired action in political and humanitarian terms. Most photojournalists are uncomfortable with the reporting mode of “if it bleeds, it leads” and I never contemplated this kind of voyeuristic coverage. It is often generated by a culture of corruption, a news media decadence that divides, highlighting poverty and class division in places like Afghanistan, rather than a culture that unites to help repair that war ravaged country (Piketty 2014).

In an interview by Naomi Busst for her thesis, *Telling stories to a different beat: Photojournalism as a “Way of Life”*, Ben Bohane argued:

You’ve got to come from the motivation that you’re acting as a bridge for other people who aren’t in a position to tell their story (Busst 2012, 290).

The public sees world events as presented by these images and they become central to the framing of reflection on events in further factual and creative discourse. Their value is underpinned by journalism ethics and the responsibilities that have developed within the photojournalism tradition (Slattery 2014)

Activist camera witnessing guides public discourse and provides benefits by exposing and threatening political policies of wealth accumulation for a select few. This is especially the case for Afghanistan.

In the face of poor political judgment or political inaction, it becomes a kind of intervention, assessing the damage and asking us to reassess our behavior. It puts a human face on issues which from afar can appear abstract or ideological or monumental in their global impact. What happens at ground level, far from the halls of power, happens to ordinary citizens one by one. And I understood that documentary photography has the ability to interpret events from their point of view. It gives a voice to those who otherwise would not have a voice (Nachtwey 2007).

Photojournalistic practice, with influences from the traditional school of the photo essayist and news photographer, becomes activism, delivering additional awareness to mainstream journalism and editorial practice. In turn, this reportage may prompt humanitarian responses from organizations like the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations and Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders).

Activism reinvigorates journalism with increased artistic integrity, which may also serve an ethical imperative. Artist George Gittoes’s journals, which Ann Tucker describes as “a layered assault”, are an example of this:

He regards these journals as the centre of his creative thinking and essential to his other artistic endeavours (A Tucker 2012, 529).

War diaries therefore, in the context of this less traditional journalistic but more artistic methodology, enabled photographers such as Jim Goldberg, Danny Lyon and

Peter Beard to use Polaroid film so that they could show images to their subjects immediately in an ethical response of informed consent:

...Jim Goldberg has given his sitters a voice in his art by asking them to write directly on the photograph something about themselves using their own language. The portraits are made with Polaroid materials so that he can immediately show them to his sitters and invite their participation. There are simple and direct images about horrific experiences. Goldberg uses these texts and materials to reject the myth of an objective photograph (Tucker 2012, 528).

Goldberg's activism particularly resonates with *Why am I a Marine?* as the stimulus of, and response to, instantaneous images that create a reaction from the subject. Collaboration between photographer and subject is central and enables powerful written personal statements by the subject in response to the photographer's eye. Subjects are given copies to keep, taking journalism to another realm and legitimating the collaboration between photographer and subject. This collaboration enhances the connection retroactively and ethically (Dupont 2010, 50–55). The photo-documentarian then, in this context, is redefining photography as activism, resting on a foundation of moral responsibility, which in turn relies on the philosophical link between one's professional calling and the relevant body of professional knowledge. This determines the way in which that profession's service to others is delivered (Bayles 1989).

## Contact sheets

Traditionally, photographers are reluctant to display contact sheets, perhaps because they fear having others see examples of poor photography, or worse, being exposed for staging pictures that purport to be spontaneous. An instance where debate is ongoing is one photograph, belonging to a sequence of seven images that was taken on frontline in the battle for the Spanish republic. Known famously as “the falling soldier”, the iconic image leaves a question over photographer Robert Capa's reputation. As one of the finest photojournalists of the 20th Century, Capa visited a Republican military unit based on the Cordoba front, in 1936. For most of the images seen on the contact sheets, the soldiers are posing for Capa. They are not under fire, rather they stand, wave and smile, but one image of the set, shows a falling soldier, presumably shot.

A dispute between Australian journalist and author Philip Knightley, and Capa's biographer, Richard Whelan, is worth mentioning. In his book *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam; The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*, Knightley argues the image was staged (Knightley 1975), while Whelan maintains the image is accurate and shows a Republican soldier at the moment of death:

The evidence surrounding Robert Capa's great photograph of a

Spanish Loyalist militiaman collapsing into death, the so-called Falling Soldier, continues to refute all the allegations of fakery brought against it (Whelan 2003).

In showing raw material in proofs, diaries, notes and unchosen photographs, audiences are privileged to access photographic processes. This transparency reduces untruthfulness and possibly would avoid problems such as those surrounding the Capa photograph.

Hand-drawn illustrations, collected memorabilia (posters, postcards and stamps) in a “pasted-in” war diary strengthen evidence and transparency. From 2001, my Afghanistan compilation began to include video with my narration, essentially a video diary. Tim Hetherington’s film, *Diary* is of this genre, “a highly personal and experimental film that expresses the subjective experience of my work, and was made as an attempt to locate myself after ten years of reporting. It’s a kaleidoscope of images that link our western reality to the seemingly distant worlds we see in the media.” (Hetherington, 2010). Video enables instant recording of facts, thoughts, observation and emotion. The resulting density of this narrative – image, voice and surroundings – is unsurpassed. Further, digital single lens reflex (SLR) cameras now deliver high definition (HD) progressive-scan video, each frame with potential for rendering into high-resolution photographs. By 2008, this technology had developed sufficiently for the scene at the roadside suicide bomb to be narrated to camera as a record of the extreme emotion experienced by the photojournalist in war. Stills from this report were later published in the war diary book and exhibited in galleries.

## **Why am I a Marine?**

*Why am I a Marine?* was first shown in my 2010 retrospective exhibition, *Afghanistan: The Perils of Freedom*, at the Australian Center for Photography, Sydney. The exhibition centered on the developing war diaries, which form part of this exegesis. It was chronological, a psychological journey, presenting many contact sheets and privileging the diaries and books as they sat open as large prints across entire walls, within glass cases and in discreet alcoves:

So when you enter [the gallery] there’s going to be a huge mural of [Ahmed Shah] Massoud, then the exhibition starts with the civil war, 1993-1998, these are all single photographs, then it moves into Massoud who was the former leader of the Northern Alliance. He was assassinated two days before September 11 and he was Afghanistan’s real hope of peace. And he’s now the national hero. I spent a lot of time with Massoud (Dupont 2010).

This room here is called Axe Me Biggie. It’s a series of portraits I made in 2006 of anonymous, mostly men on the streets of Kabul. It was shot in an afternoon and these are life-size mural portraits taken on Polaroid. They were taken with a traditional Afghan

photographer's backdrop, which is all crumbly and decrepit. I basically used that outdoor studio kind of feel to make these portraits (Fortescue, 2010).

*Why am I a Marine?* included collaboration between photographer and subject but, most importantly, the viewer could see the faces of these men and then read their handwriting in answer to that question, "Why am I a Marine?". The impact of the two, my photography and their often almost illiterate words makes the project powerful and raw, uncensored and uncensorable.

Adding text is another classic technique to affect viewers' perceptions of a photograph. Words can clarify, focus, or redirect perceptions of a picture's content (Tucker 2012, 528).

Such images generate isolation and disconnection. On the right-hand side of the Polaroid picture their writing is child-like, at times tormented with grammatical errors. One example reads: "I've been doing this for long enough that I'm not sure I remember anymore". Entitled *US Marine, Afghanistan*, the image is an austere reminder of post conflict mental trauma. The images are restrained and yet they reflect hardship, fatigue and depression – all precursors for PTSD.

These war diaries are evolving artefacts that have become central to the entire experience - from the raw material to the final art books and exhibition prints, films, lectures and multimedia. This diary practice has gone beyond information, memory or reflection, and has become an integral step in "action research". Research in diary practice is central to the angle in a photographic story, even when it's not necessarily headline news. Diaries are also a means by which activism can be focussed to subvert journalistic obedience and conservatism (Street 2014). Disobedience is a duty (Kohlberg 1986), a duty to resist the ideologies of the War on Terror and "other harsh realities of class rule and institutional authority, the deadly pathology that is mass obedience to unjust power is a societal sickness imposed from the top down by those atop elite-controlled institutions" (Street 2014).

Mass audiences with short attention spans, who largely consume only tabloid news, characterize today's journalism. Important issues such as Afghanistan can become trivialized and fragmented. Journalism based on lived reality as documented in diary practice reinstates importance and cohesion. This is particularly the case for material obtained in collaboration with the people of the Northern Alliance, material that commentators say helped define and change the war (Pinson 2009, 4). These photographs are painful and difficult. They pose questions that have no answers, about suffering caused needlessly. They represent their subjects fairly, subjects who collaborated and contributed unconditionally, and convey that truth accurately to the public.

## Chapter 4: Influences, mentors and history

### If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough

Robert Capa coined the phrase: "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." The quote reads like a war photographer's mantra, yet it is central to photographic authenticity. Magnum photographer Bruce Davidson added: "Photography depends on three Ps: passion, persistence, and patience" (Webb & Norris 2014, 52). Photographing in close in order to fill the frame with a short 35mm lens will also decrease blurring and increase depth of field.

In an interview with Brooke Salisbury, I said that veterans who covered the Vietnam War, Larry Burrows, Don McCullin and Tim Page, motivated me to photograph the social consequences of NATO's war in Afghanistan (Salisbury 2008). The Vietnam War era also brought combat-photo romanticism, such as Don McCullin's dark and brutal photography. McCullin however, hates being defined as a war photographer, preferring "photographer" (L Morris 2014). Like Hubert Wilkins in WWI (mentioned later in Activism – the ethical response), Don McCullin was refused official accreditation to cover the Falklands War for the *London Sunday Times*. McCullin's photographs were deemed too distressing and gruesome for the British public. British Military public affairs did not want to take any chances in having any negative press in a controversial war (French 2013).

Vietnam war combat-photo romanticism delivered innovative photography and autobiographical writing like that of Tim Page, who was described as the basis for Dennis Hopper's character in the feature-film *Apocalypse Now*. Page was also said to be a model for Michael Herr's classic book *Dispatches* (Herr 1991). Herr produced a fictional piece of literature that directly influenced younger practitioners. With a narrative of non-fiction style, *Dispatches'* diarist style was analogous to Ernest Hemingway:

When Ernest Hemingway worked as a reporter . . . his journalistic experiences were seen as an "apprenticeship" for his later work, and his writing was dismissed as "just journalism." But when he turned portions of that same material verbatim into fiction, it was heralded as literature (Cardell 2006, 585).

Contemporary influences and colleagues - like James Nachtwey, Gilles Peres and Luc Delahaye - continue to be critical. Eugene Richards' *The Gun and Knife Club*, *Atlantic Monthly Press*, 1989 influenced my first photo essay, which was a battlefield of sorts - life inside a Western-Sydney hospital-emergency room. The imagery of Robert Frank, William Klein and Josef Koudelka was also instrumental in developing

my style, while Sebastio Selgado and W. Eugene Smith influenced my choice of angles in stories and photo essays:

...Dupont's best work bears the strongest resemblance to Don McCullin, the British photographer who in the sixties and seventies brought the misery of war to Goyan intensity. "I want to be the toughest photographer in the world," McCullin told Zoom Magazine in 1971 – and for many photographers who came of age after Vietnam, he was. He was their generation's Robert Capa. But his toughness wasn't being wounded twice in battle and going back again and again; it was to stand two feet in front of someone suffering with a short 35mm lens and look them in the eye (Menasche 2008, 116).

Tim Page's *Page After Page* was also pivotal. As a photographer, he produced personal narrative while immersed in the emotional forces of the Vietnam War. Here is the early development of a committed diarist, where his first taste of combat is written with reflective emotion:

It was beyond eerie now, it had become very frightening to me, a virgin, the tension was nine months pregnant. The road was littered with the debris of war: ammo casings, combat dressings, cartridge boxes, food tins, torn clothing, unidentifiable chunks of objects, once vehicles. Then the smell hit us, the stink of putrescent flesh (Page 1998, 98).

In writing about himself, Page wanted readers to learn of war, as did Hemingway and Orwell in their coverage of the Spanish Civil War (Keeble 2001, 393 – 406). This journalism goes beyond mainstream news, with the immediacy of actuality and personal reflection building audience understanding. One particular image may be a revelation for one audience member, slowly building a general understanding:

One frame does get frozen in people's minds. Slowly, slowly, catchee monkey (Mordue 2010).

When the XPan was released I knew I could [do this] and still shoot as freely as I had with the Leica. Recently I have also been filming wide-screen, high-definition documentaries for television ... I think both [reportage and documentary film] complement each other (McFarlane 2007).

Philip Jones-Griffith, in his book *Vietnam Inc.* went into combat to uncover the soul of the U.S. military (Jones-Griffith 1971). His intention was to show U.S. soldiers in rural Vietnam interacting in a humane way with civilians in the midst of something quite inhuman. He also uncovered war crimes – an activist and an inspiration. He captured the ideal image, the moment when veracity peaks, allowing audiences to

engage with reality. This is a matter of trust, established over time in documentary or news photography, and to achieve this, the photographer must be physically in the field.

No other medium, except documentary film, can make the claim that on some level the image “happened.” The photographer may have chosen where to stand and when to push the shutter, but the documentary photograph retains some kind of unique relationship with the physical world, with time, and with history (Webb & Norris 2014, 89).

Michael Sabelli’s essay on the notion of the “other” describes Kapuściński, foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency, as spending most of his life abroad in constant contact with other cultures, other languages and perspectives:

He kept two different notebooks one for his work as a journalist, and one for his personal notes and impressions; this relates to the controversy that surrounds not his journalistic work but his literature. In recent years, Kapuściński’s books have been criticized as fiction for his use of techniques found in literature. However, do the literary techniques Kapuściński employ in his books dismiss the integrity of his discourse on otherness? Kapuściński’s literature though flawed with generalizations and fictional elements it may be still served as a strong and legitimate foundation for his discourse on otherness (Sabelli 2013).

Kapuściński’s words encapsulate my feelings about my work in Afghanistan, of Western photographer gazing upon people of a war torn country:

Others ... are the mirror in which I look at myself, and which tells me who I am. When I lived in my country I was not aware that I am a white man and that this could have significance for my fate. Only once I found myself in Africa was I immediately informed of this by the sight of its black inhabitants. Thanks to them I discovered my own skin colour, which I never would have thought about alone (Kapuściński 2008, 45).

Kapuściński employed words as facts to explore literary ideas, and yet in such texts, the facts inevitably remain the basic element that drives the writer’s thoughts into their new genre that explores the Western gaze. So while journalism captures initially these facts for news and current, fictional literature and such objects as war diaries, are designed to explore new ideas and emotion and in essence are gazing instead on the Western perspective.

## Witness and regarding the pain of others

As examined throughout this exegesis a war diary is a notebook, a written account of facts, events, thoughts and reflections, usually from the direct experience of war in the field, or soon after. These are crucial documents of recorded history, of individuals' observation, within and outside the military. War diaries provided the observed record of event, place and time. Traditionally, they were regularly updated as official records of empirical information by military units in war to be used later for improving training and tactics. These were archived for future use by military strategists and historians. They focused on administration and operations and usually avoided information about emotion and other qualitative or subjective data (Wikipedia 2014). This exegesis challenges the standard Wikipedia explanation of a war diary as an official military record created by the military.

Another genre of war diary throughout history is the unofficial, the critical and less propagandised war diary, such as the American Civil War examples provided earlier. This version of war diary is compiled subjectively by soldiers, civilian witnesses, journalists and aid workers. Some are compiled by government employees adopting the diary practice. It was diary art that made the powerful works of Dix and Goya as a visual record of war.

*Los Descartres de la Guerra* (The Disasters of War), a numbered sequence of eighty-three etchings made between 1810 and 1820 (and first published, all but three plates, in 1863, thirty-five years after his death), depicts the atrocities perpetrated by Napoleon's soldiers who invaded Spain in 1808 to quell the insurrection against the French rule. Goya's images move the viewer close to the horror. All the trappings of the spectacular have been eliminated: the landscape is an atmosphere, a darkness, barely sketched in. War is not a spectacle. And Goya's print series is not a narrative: each image, captioned with a brief phrase lamenting the wickedness of the invaders and the monstrousness of the suffering they inflicted, stands independently of the others. The cumulative effect is devastating (Sontag 2003, 39–40).

One of the earliest documentary photographers was Lewis E. Hine, an American who pioneered humanist photography (Friestad 2012) with the aim of educating for humanitarian political response. Hine was interested in showing the harsh realities of life and inhumanity. He is best known for his child labour photographs, taken in the early 1900s in the U.S.

Hine wanted his photographs to be accurate and truthful and would allow no retouching or manipulation. He carefully recorded facts and details for every photograph because "the average person believes implicitly that the photograph cannot falsify....This

unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph. It becomes necessary then, in our revelation of the truth, to see to it that the camera we depend upon contracts no bad habits.” By recording exact details, names, places and times, information he included in his captions, Hine also transformed his anonymous subjects into people (Bogre 2012, 31).

Bogre suggests that Lewis Hine pioneered the current activist practice of combining objective fact with subjective emotion - the “concerned photographer”. Cornell Capa, younger brother of photo-journalist Robert Capa used the phrase to describe photographers who demonstrated a humanitarian impulse to use photography to educate and change the world as well as to record it. It became the title of a posthumous exhibition of Cornell Capa’s work at the International Center for Photography (ICP 2009). Hine believed that, if people could see for themselves the conditions that children worked under, they would pressure legislators:

There is work that profits children, and there is work that brings profit only to employers. The object of employing children is not to train them, but to get high profits from their work (Hine 1908, quoted in Bogre 2012, 34).

After the American Civil War, depleted natural resources aligned with mechanization and agreeable market conditions, which triggered an industrial boom. As demand for labor rose, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children were used to fill the gap. Low factory wages created conditions that forced children to work in support of family income. Children under 15 years, working industrial jobs, spiked to two million in 1910. Industries paid them lower wages than adults, yet their small dexterous hands could perform tasks that adults could not.

School attendance was low, poor children were underweight, and they had stunted growth and curvature of the spine. Tuberculosis and bronchitis in coalmines and cotton mills, coupled with high accident rates due to physical and mental fatigue, created a working hell. Eventually, in 1916, Congress passed the Keating – Owens Act: establishing child-labour-law standards in respect to age, hours worked, with documentary proof of age (Curtis 2011, 270–1). Hine’s pictures had helped change the trajectory of history, by affecting change in government policy.

## **Activism as an ethical response**

Early accounts of war photography and cinematography demonstrate that the British High Command put many constraints on early Australian war cameramen because they were colonials and therefore inferior. These restrictions applied from the early battles on the Western Front in France. Although some access was agreed late in the war to Australian Hubert Wilkins, a polar explorer and innovative cinematographer, he was generally denied right of entry (Swan 1990).

Wilkins was noted for fixing a camera to a motorcycle as a means of photographing actuality in the Balkans war of 1911. He was hired by the Gaumont Film Company to film the Turkish side of the Turko-Bulgarian War of 1912 but could not convince the Turkish army of the merits of motorcycle-based filming and was denied access. Had this filming occurred, it might have rivalled the journalistic record of the Mexican revolutionary, José Doroteo Arango Arámbula, also known as Pancho Villa. Wilkins filmed Australian soldiers in France for the Australian war history team. He was later presented the Military Cross for putting down the camera to rescue wounded soldiers in the Third Battle of Ypres, an ethical, even activist decision.

During the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 70s, this activist genre of social documentation photography and cinematography, were recognised as distinct fields. The methodology requires practitioners to be patient and wait for the moment, for the entry into the story. Documentary filmmaker Fred Wiseman is quoted as saying:

If you hang around long enough, you stumble onto sequences that are funnier, more dramatic, and sadder than anything you can find, except in great novels (Bogre 2012, 6).

However, today's reality of being embedded with the military, especially since the onset of the War on Terror, brings constraints like those Hubert Wilkins endured. Being embedded with the military requires security clearance to the extreme, and while this has most often been the case for journalists, it is today at a peak. Despite the embedding, there were still elements of freedom in *Why am I a Marine?*, which brought both quantitative and qualitative data. There is record of the U.S. troop surge in 2009, record of time and place, and there is record of emotion, through direct involvement of subjects and their personal testimonies. This humanises them through displaying their thoughts. Such collaborative methods of information gathering deliver further dimensions of truth, and are therefore, by design, a form of activism with photographer as creator and subject as collaborator.

This kind of action, and reaction, was also the embedded case in my covering U.S. soldiers burning the corpses of two Taliban combatants in 2005. The resultant visible-evidence video and photographs were beamed around the world, sparking international outrage and condemnation, particularly from the Islamic sphere. Through television, newspapers, radio and most notably the Internet: the story led the international news agenda in the 24 hours preceding the report on SBS Dateline, October 19, 2005 (SBS 2005).

News of the burning of the Taliban fighters in violation of Islamic tradition came as the United States struggled to overcome its tarnished reputation after the sexual humiliation of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and allegations of mistreatment of inmates at the Guantanamo Bay 'war on terror' camp in Cuba (Source: SBS 2005).

The story's impact on restless Afghanistan, with genuine fears of revolt and

retaliation from Muslims, emphasised the importance for the U.S. Military and its Government to act. Afghan President Hamid Karzai said: “We . . . demand that an investigation into this violation be carried out very effectively and very quickly” (SBS 2005). U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld was quoted at the time: “One hates to see the adverse effect of it if it is true” (ABC 2005).

A criminal investigation was initiated and all U.S. Military psychological operations (PSY-OPS) in Afghanistan and the Middle East ceased. The investigation found the story was true. American soldiers had burned the bodies of two dead Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan and they had taunted the dead men’s colleagues, who were presumed hiding nearby. U.S. Army personnel were reprimanded and military policy changed. Cultural Awareness handbooks were printed and distributed to serving personnel.

The story was nominated in November 2006 for the Sony-sponsored Rory Peck Impact Award for Freelance Cameraman. During the event finalists’ entries were screened but, either accidentally or deliberately, the “Taliban bodies” piece was not. Instead, my relatively innocuous video of PSY-OPS soldiers blaring Fleetwood Mac from their Humvee was screened. The audience laughed and I didn’t win. Later, seething with indignation and disillusioned, I told everyone I’d been “censored”. The incident accelerated my drift from traditional news outlets and towards war diaries as published works of journalism (Linfield 2010, 40).

## Diary words in their own hand

Referring to *Why am I a Marine?* Verna Curtis wrote that words in their own hand provide authenticity to the Polaroid photographs, which were taped onto the journal pages (Curtis 2011, 271). Curtis compares *Why am I a Marine?* to Jim Goldberg’s *Guest Register* book. While they are of very different subject matter, one dealing with marines in Afghanistan, the other documenting transient hotel residents, using their photos and hand written statements inside an actual hotel guest-register book. But the ideas and motivation in both projects are similar. Referring to Goldberg, Curtis says:

The work in this album launched the “striving to understand [his] subjects and the stories they share” that now defines the photographer as an artist, and the way in which he works (Curtis 2011, 257).

In *Why am I a Marine?* photographer and subject are united as collaborating parties and so it is significant in the genre of artistic diary work, redefining form and style. Goldberg’s conceptual and creative energy has influenced me greatly. His book series *Open See* exposes inhumanities suffered by stateless people of Afghanistan in a diary-like project. The project includes people from Afghanistan, as well as other war refugees, as they move through Europe. In these volumes, Goldberg deploys his earlier practice, stemming from his *Guest Register* and *Raised By Wolves* book projects, displaying Polaroid images and photographs of refugees and displaced people, with

handwritten stories expressing their thoughts. One strong example from *Open See* is a Polaroid photograph of an Afghan man's scarred back, and then in the man's handwriting: "Taliban Torture Me" (Goldberg 2009).

Goldberg's projects, like my *Why am I a Marine?*, make public very personal and powerful messages that originate in the human condition and are potent accounts of collaboration between photographer and subject. Although some subjects and some photographers may mislead or deceive their audiences, the truth of this sort of documentation is palpable.

# Chapter 5: The ethics of the gaze

## Constant dialogue while freewheeling

The intention of this exegesis is to provide information and context for the war diaries submitted with it and to trace the development of an ethic of responsibility, which is often unwritten, yet is evident in many incarnations of the diary. Reflective awareness is necessary for ethical practice and handwritten notes or diaries initiate, reinforce and then become evidence of the nature of this awareness. It is not my intention to hold photo-documentarians up as exemplars of ethical journalism, nor is it intended to demonize others.

In this context, we are examining the common discourse between film, image, journalism and diaries. This is because there is an ethical coalition across these journalistic forms - they are converged through practice, publication sites and technology. This reality assumes that a non-fiction camera professional can identify with general journalistic ethical practice, rights and obligations, and one way to formalize this, is to reflect in diaries and notes. This conversational diary use finds common ground through an ethic of responsibility and duty of care to the subject before the lens. This principle underlies the Journalists' Code of Ethics published by the Australian Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, the Preamble of which reads in part:

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression (MEAA 1999).

There are many other international ethics codes and charters available for journalists generally, and photojournalists specifically. The UK Mediawise Trust lists over 200 (Mediawise 2014) and does not include the 578-page Reuters Handbook of Journalism (Reuters). Vincent Lavoie, in the French journal *La Revue*, attempts to lay the foundation for a moral history of press photography:

As the type of photography most directly concerned with veracity, photojournalism has always been the subject of discourses that seek to establish its ethical legitimacy. What is the source of this ethical fragility of photojournalism? What definition of photojournalism do its codes of conduct construct? (Lavoie 2010).

This ethics section aims to resolve some of the differences between these codes. Similar ethical issues face modern digital photo-documentarian work (stills and video with audio) and traditional journalism. The dispute as to who occupies the high cultural

ground: who is journalist, who is fine artist, who is exquisite filmmaker and who is commercially oriented documentary producer will become irrelevant. These roles are really one professional activity, obliging those at the point of filming in particular, to consider obtaining informed consent from the filmed subject.

When the ethics of journalists (as a collective professional group) come under scrutiny, there are a plethora of moral reasoning structures brought up in defence. Professionals adapt their moral reasoning to suit their intended audiences as well as the genre of their product, so it is prudent to briefly refer to Lawrence Kohlberg (1984).

...much of the work on the nature of moral understanding and ethical decision-making by Lawrence Kohlberg and others focuses on what people say they would do (Harrison 2004).

Kohlberg's theory of moral development brings understanding on moral reasoning, based on the situation. Some professionals never develop a full ethical realisation based on reason. They simply accept guidance, unable to reflect on their professional activities and ethical dilemmas across a range of situations. There are many levels of moral reasoning and development and, Kohlberg says, we are able to make decisions by taking the position of all participants through reflection, consultation, conversation and dialogue (Coleman 2010, 27). Journalism requires adherence to higher principles of justice and may at times require civil disobedience to achieve the kind of activism and policy change that Hine achieved for children in the U.S. factories, as discussed earlier (Kohlberg 1986). For reasons of security and safety, civil disobedience must be done cautiously, but generally, for journalism, competing claims around truth and action are mediated by applying principles of justice. Most often, the end justifies the means.

## **Attention Taliban – you cowardly dogs**

While embedded with both U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps in Afghanistan for two months in 2005, I made regular handwritten diary entries. This note taking was essential for recording factual information, ideas, photo captions, story writing, as well as for personal reflection, which was often reflective for considerations of ethics and for action research. This embedding arrangement was officially approved by the U.S. military through rigorous processes and, once approval was granted, I was accepted as part of the team. In the case of the Taliban body burning incident, my diarizing methods took the forms of handwritten journal entries and video recordings.

The actual court-admissible evidence of U.S. soldiers burning two dead enemy combatants continues to exist in still photography and video, should it be required. The diary entries made at the scene corroborated other evidence and informed the final journalism. The incident took place on 1st October, 2005 above the village of Gonbaz in Shah Wali Kot district of Kandahar province. The previous day, 30th September, the unit had been ambushed and one U.S. soldier (Staff Sgt John Doles) killed.

U.S. occupation forces of the 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment of the

173rd Army Airborne Brigade, laid out the bodies of two Taliban men on a ridge line. The Airborne Brigade unit then burnt the bodies and taunted the enemy in a manner profoundly offensive to Muslims and in breach of Geneva Conventions and rules of engagement. Here is my diary entry:

October 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 Gonbaz Village.

I go out on a patrol with Lft. Nelson and his platoon, along with Afghan Special Forces and their two French advisors. We spend the morning searching all the houses in the village for weapons or any Taliban that might still be hiding out. The local villagers are incredibly frightened and after a full morning of *eyes and ears* nothing much is achieved. I ask Nelson for permission to see the two dead insurgents up on the hill directly above us. He gives me two escorts and we walk up the rocky slope, as we approach the crest I see a group of American soldiers and I notice one soldier lighting something. As I move closer I see that he has just set fire to two corpses. I film video and shoot pictures quickly so I don't miss anything. I talk to the soldiers about the battle they'd just been in and the scene before us. I can hear broadcasts in Pashto, which I know are coming from the Psyop guys. It's all very surreal! A soldier tells me they're burning the bodies for hygiene purposes (Dupont 2005).

This was simply provocative propaganda, a deliberate defilement of Islamic burial practice, and was the idea of the army's little-known Psychological Operations unit (PSY-OPS). It was intended to provoke Taliban rebels to attack, but instead it sparked international outrage, prompting the cessation of all PSY-OPS in Afghanistan. The images provided a rare and disturbing insight into psychological warfare in the public benefit, one of the Fourth Estate roles.

In *Things Fall Apart*, colleague John Martinkus wrote:

Stephen called me in Australia from Bangkok about a week later. He had been too paranoid to reveal on the phone from Afghanistan what he had filmed. He told me quickly how he had gone on an operation in Kandahar province with US troops from the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne and a team US Army Psychological Operations specialists. He had filmed them burning the bodies of dead Taliban fighters and broadcasting defamatory messages over loudspeakers to incite the Taliban to violence. The actual statement that was read out over the loudspeakers following the burning of the bodies showed to me a conscious effort by the US Psych Ops specialists to denigrate and enrage Muslims. The statement said;

“Attention, Taliban, you are all cowardly dogs. You allowed your fighters to be laid down facing west and burned. You are too scared

to come down and retrieve their bodies. This just proves you are the lady boys we always believed you to be.”

We both knew how significant an insult this was to Islamic people and how it was just another example of the heavy handed tactical blunders the US were making in Afghanistan that was turning the population against them. We broadcast the piece on SBS Dateline on October 19, 2005 and it immediately was replayed around the world. The reaction by the US military was swift. All US Psychological Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were suspended. The personnel involved were reprimanded and removed from operations and the incident eventually led to the distribution of thousands of booklets to US troops in Afghanistan regarding the customs of Islam and how not to offend them. All US embassies in the Middle East and South Asia were put on high alert and the then US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was forced to say of the incident; ‘It’s always disappointing when there are charges like that. It’s particularly disappointing when they are true’ (Martinkus 2009, 16).

In *Photography As Activism, Images For Social Change*, Michelle Bogre quoted me on the incident:

I didn’t want to get anyone in trouble because the soldiers were really good guys and I really liked them. But what I documented was an incredible story and I thought that people could make up their mind about whether this was right or wrong. I guess it comes down to a personal reflection, but as a photographer and as a journalist I had to show what was going on (Bogre 2012, 123).

U.S. Army Central Command released a statement reinforcing the Army’s policy against desecrating the bodies of dead enemy combatants, but the commander of the responsible battalion claimed the actions were taken for reasons of hygiene. They alleged the bodies were unclaimed and decomposing, close to a village. Irrespective of the truth, the images provoked questions about decency and military conduct (Morris 2011, 15). Most significantly, the incident put a fresh context to embedding, which until then, had been understood to compromise independent journalism by placing journalists under direct control of the military unit in which they were embedded.

In a 2006 interview with the ABC’s Radio National, I stated:

My photographs, and the repercussions of the story, changed U.S. military policy. Psychological operations were changed. It had some direct effects on world history. So for me, that was incredible. It’s something that I’ve always dreamed about.

Similarly, and as discussed in earlier chapters, certain photographs taken during the Vietnam War had challenged the methods and legitimacy of U.S. and allied forces.

These images showed human rights abuses and proved that serious war crimes and illegitimate activities were occurring. Nick Ut's photograph of children fleeing a South Vietnamese napalm strike on a village near Trang Bang, Vietnam, 8th June 1972, is one case in point. In particular, a burnt naked girl and a screaming young boy, both seen running down the road, brought international pressure to end the war (Tucker 2012, 22). James Nactwey in his TED talk spoke of how photographs from the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, not only motivated him to become a photographer but it also was the defining influence:

I was a student in the '60s, a time of social upheaval and questioning, and on a personal level, an awakening sense of idealism. The war in Vietnam was raging; the Civil Rights Movement was under way; and pictures had a powerful influence on me. Our political and military leaders were telling us one thing, and photographers were telling us another. I believed the photographers, and so did millions of other Americans. Their images fueled resistance to the war and to racism. They not only recorded history; they helped change the course of history. Their pictures became part of our collective consciousness and, as consciousness evolved into a shared sense of conscience, change became not only possible, but inevitable (Nactwey 2007).

We may never know whether the Taliban were given a chance to reclaim the bodies of their dead comrades in the Gonbaz incident, or whether hygiene was a legitimate reason to burn the bodies. A reasonable person might believe that burial with lime was acceptable. The fact that a taunting statement was read in Arabic from a script, over the megaphone, is evidence enough of a conscious effort by PSY-OPS specialists to denigrate and enrage Muslims. Similarly, we may never know whether the allegations that U.S. soldiers deliberately faced the bodies towards Mecca – as a further insult for Muslims – were in fact true. The images have the power to exacerbate tensions between Afghani civilians and foreign soldiers, as well as tarnish the already fractious relations between the Islamic world and the West (Morris 2011, 15). Had the burning of dead Taliban fighters not been recorded, the breach may well have gone unnoticed. Cremation is not a Muslim custom and the Geneva Conventions stipulate that the enemy dead should be honourably buried.

You allowed your fighters to be laid down facing west and burnt. You are too scared to retrieve their bodies. This just proves you are the lady boys we always believed you to be... You attack and run away like women. You call yourself Taliban but you are a disgrace to the Muslim religion and you bring shame upon your family. Come and fight like men instead of the cowardly dogs you are! (Herold 2009)

Presumably, there are numerous actions like this, committed by military

personnel in many conflicts throughout the world.

In this way, photographers encounter a special dilemma in approaching subject matter which is different from that experienced by print journalists (Morris 2011, 15–16).

To witness, and then hold to account by publication, is the ethical response in this context – the defining role of the Fourth Estate.

## **The war diary – transcending ethical practices**

War photojournalists make narratives of life, violence and death visible and they also render visible, ethical and moral dilemmas. War photojournalists negotiate with an ethics of being there and a witnessing that is based in humanitarian accountability and therefore occupy a unique space within journalism, where the rules of reporting are occasionally re-imagined or even violated in a very “crowded hour”, a moment of extreme stress and danger (Cardell 2006, 585). The war diary has been considered subversive and troubling but, in this exegesis, it assists reflection and ethical decision-making (Coleman 2010). The war diary is therefore outside of, and disruptive of, the usual modes of self-representation and memoir.

The diary emerges as a crystallization of overlapping practices which situate it not on the margins of various domains of social practice, but, in so far as it stands at the intersection of those various cultural cross-roads, place it in the midst of cultural practices, and make it a significant indicator of the contemporary cultural climate (Cardell 2006, 585).

Contemporary war correspondent Thomas Goltz produced work on the post-Soviet Caucasus in the early 1990s. Here, he negotiated personal modes of diary and experimented with interpretation, converging journalistic ethos and practice.

An American writing from and about the war-torn Caucasus during the 1990s, Goltz wants to make visible his individual ethical and moral response to reporting war in this zone. He uses the diary strategically to re-insert the body of the journalist, in response to the idea of reporters as “perfectly neutral vessels who only see and record” (*Chechnya Diary* 11). Like Herr and Kapuscinski before him, Goltz wants to find a way to represent his experience, and that of the people he is reporting on, which is both accurate and authentic. He chooses the diary as the form of representation in which he can begin to do justice to lives on the ground in Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Georgia, while at the same time meeting his obligation to his publisher and accessing a mass market (Cardell 2006, 586).

Photojournalists deliver comprehensible images and texts about public events, for the public benefit, as mandated by professional codes of ethics that require journalistic output to represent reality, fairly and accurately, without deception. Cardell also argues that the obligation is about accountability: “because of the popular appeal of the genre as a mode for representing the ordinary, the everyday, and the authentic within the context of extraordinary events like war” (Cardell 2006).

Diarists, on the other hand, are offering something about their private lives as they write privately, often and, initially, for themselves. However, as discussed earlier, diarists in war have historically written to keep a military record and so have had a classified, semi-public role and thus enjoy access privileges. New journalism, literary journalism and similar genres, are more akin to diary writing as they centre on emotion, with less of the objectivity, journalistic skepticism, neutrality, accountability and circumspection normally required of the Fourth Estate.

For “journalists in the field, the diaries they keep may function as *aides-mémoires* for inscribing news, as data banks from which stories are drawn, or even as therapeutic practice” (Cardell 2006). When diarists polish, produce and publish, they are making different uses of the genre:

...one that invokes the discursive connection of the form with private experience. In short, they use the diary as a place for representing a self-conscious journalistic “I.” Indeed, publishing a diary can in itself be a rhetorical act. As a supplement to what has already been articulated through news media and by Goltz himself as a correspondent, a work like *Chechnya Diary* builds on popular assumptions of news media as duplicitous, but in a way that proffers an authoritative alternative. Journalists’ diaries affirm the popular logic that only certain kinds of stories are admissible in the mass media frame. Diaries also speak to a cultural discourse that privileges individual, ordinary, and private experience as the location for what is authentic and real (Cardell 2006).

The diary is, therefore, less constructed, less censored, more subjective and, arguably, similar to “new journalism”, but perhaps more authentic in representation, beyond the scope and agendas of mainstream journalism. The diarist is passionate and subjective, enriched by self-expression in the context of surrounding events and people.

# Chapter 6: Concluding on the future

## *Afghan girl*

Steve McCurry's famous photograph, "Afghan girl" was nearly passed over by the editor for the cover of *National Geographic* in 1985 (McCurry 2013). McCurry kept journals, diaries, notes and contact sheet details and, since her rediscovery by *National Geographic*, he regularly writes to her.

She remembers the moment. The photographer took her picture. She remembers her anger. The man was a stranger. She had never been photographed before. Until they met again 17 years later, she had not been photographed since (Newman 2002).

Taking photographs for publication requires an activist attitude and a subjective philosophy, which says, "It's personal" (Bogre 2012, 122). Philosophers contemplate activism, and its uncertain outcomes, from the perspective of civil engagement. I argue that activism has ethical dimensions, based on John Locke's ideas of the "fiduciary trust," explained in his *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke's work encapsulates the fluctuating power relations in all trusting relationships, and it reinforces ideas around what occurs when trust is betrayed (Nacol 2011, 580 – 595). A 'Lockean' citizen is endowed with moral expertise and is obligated to detect breaches in fiduciary trust. Such is the role of *The Fourth Estate*, as defined in professional codes of ethics.

Locke did not consider this civil engagement to be a choice, rather justice must be publically seen being done, corruption and terror exposed, moral breaches unearthed. Locke defined a "crime" as a breach or violation of natural law. An activist photojournalist therefore, in terms of the contemporary version of Locke's citizen, is engaged, vigilant for that moment when the state, or corporations, or terrorists violate fairness, equity and civil and human rights. The activist photographer captures the wrongdoing, records it, publishes it, and so the image becomes evidence of the crime, showing the issue that must be addressed (Bogre 2012, 12).

## **A 12-year-old, posing as a newspaper boy**

Two days after the assassination attempt on President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan on 27th April 2008, I was travelling with an opium eradication team in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province when a suicide bomber attacked our convoy. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which killed at least 15 and wounded 14. My diary entry reads:

That morning we set off from Jalalabad in a convoy of about eight vehicles, green Ford pickups and one small truck with 50 to 60 laborers. About 40 minutes later we came to a small town, Khogyani. The truck in front of us pulled up to the gate of a police barracks. We were at the edge of the town, the police buildings

facing fields in a desert valley below.

We stopped. The driver and the commanding officer got out, and everyone started jumping off the back of the flatbed, all the police meeting each other. Paul and I waited in the truck. We had the windows down and were smoking, talking, when I heard a huge bang. Then I saw black. I still don't know if it was smoke or if I actually blacked out.

When I could see again, I got out of the car and I ran. My instinct led me away. I heard gunfire. Some Afghans were running and I ran with them. We took cover behind a mound of dirt 30 or 40 yards away. Blood poured down my face. I didn't know how badly I was wounded, and I started asking people could they tell me if I was O.K.

Crouched with me was an Afghan cameraman and some police officers. Then I looked toward the vehicles, 20 yards from where the bomb had gone off, and I saw six or seven bodies. That's the first time I knew that people had been wounded or killed. I started to move toward the bodies, and then after 10 or 20 seconds, I thought, "Where's Paul?"

I headed back to our vehicle. Paul was still in his seat, his right side completely covered in blood, but he seemed coherent. I spoke to him, saying, "You're O.K.," and things like that. He didn't say anything. All around people were shredded like minced meat, mangled bodies missing heads, legs and arms. I didn't see many wounded. I remember one guy alive sitting among all these bodies. I think it made an impression just because he was alive in this mess. I started taking pictures. I felt I was taking pictures of evidence.

Eventually, the Americans, who were from the 173rd Airborne Brigade and incredibly hospitable, gave us a medevac flight to Bagram Air Base, outside Kabul. Paul is here, too. He's got five holes in the back of his head, two the size of golf balls. There's a bone fragment stuck inside one. They don't know if it's his or somebody else's. They think it may be pushing up against his brain, affecting his vision. I've talked to him and he seems O.K., except for the vision and not hearing from his right ear. They think he may have punctured his eardrum.

A 12-year-old, posing as a newspaper boy, exploded a suicide bomb in a dusty street in Afghanistan, killing 25 people.

The risk of a second explosion was high and crossed my mind yet I weighed up the risk over good coverage and decided that capturing the chaos and aftermath of the explosion was necessary to then be able to better tell the story more accurately and also from the

perspective of both a victim and witness (Dupont 2008).

War diary activism is guided by an intention to stimulate change. Essential in this is a self-deprecating position as part of activist intent. This is especially the case when the diarist, after a severe war event, may develop PTSD. In such a context, it could be argued that activists subsequently believe that what benefits society also benefits them, bestowing on them some sort of protection from PTSD. Accepting the danger inherent in conflict situations, in recording or in photographing, isn't so much self-sacrificing, rather it is being engaged as citizen and is therapeutic, even liberating. This was (fortunately) the case for me: in my opinion, the activism prevented the onset of PTSD.

The event has overwhelmed them and they feel disempowered. As they re-establish connections with relatives, friends and others, they need to have their experience validated and control over their own lives re-established. They need time to create a new view of the world that includes the event and their reactions to it. These are normal reactions to mental trauma and most people adjust or recover, incorporating the experience into their lives, perhaps with the help of their families, friends, workmates or counsellors. Others, for whatever reason, are unable to do that. If these symptoms prove to be long-lasting and debilitating, that person may be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD (Sykes et al 2003, 74).

While it is medically acknowledged that post-traumatic stress is likely to bring dysfunction to a journalist's professional and domestic life, even years after the event, it is rarely acknowledged that this may impact on the journalist's behaviour and decision-making in future work – especially in the ethical realm. In this context, one must always monitor oneself.

## Conclusion

This exegesis has attempted to set the context for activism, with humanistic approach, within the journalistic and artistic process of war diary making. Its context is situated in the public sphere, in the role of working for the world's *Fourth Estate*.

All monitory institutions in the business of scrutinizing power—parliaments, courts, human rights and professional organisations, civic initiatives, blogs and other web-based monitors—rely heavily on these media innovations. If the new galaxy of communicative abundance suddenly imploded, monitory democracy would not last long. Monitory democracy and computerized media networks behave as if they are an inseparable pair (Keane 2010).

Over the last hundred years, nearly every historical event has demonstrated the power of the photograph. The images of the Second Iraq War of naked and abused

Iraqi prisoners in the notorious American military prison at Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad's city centre, are case in point. They were groundbreaking in that they were in public interest in exposing the falsity of the claims to the moral high ground made by the U.S. and its allies, including justifying the use of torture. Yet those photographers were amateurs, U.S. soldiers guarding the prison and publishing their damning images voluntarily on the Internet.

The impact of still images is immediate. Their messages are delivered instantly, while those of words or moving images need time to deliver meaning. A frozen moment is a permanent record of atrocity, of recovery, of the napalm girl in Vietnam, of starved prisoners of war behind barbed wire in Bosnia, of Syrian refugees at the Turkish border, of Afghan girl, of portraits of Pol Pot's victims before their mass extermination on the walls of Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, of machetes and corpses scattered over the ground after the Rwandan Genocide.

This exegesis has established that the use of a war diary better situates the photo documentarian as an ethical witness in conflict. As Goltz found (Cardell 2006), diary-making as a way of consciously engaging with, and making visible, the contradictions presented by witnessing these events, is as relevant today as ever. We are witnessing the disproportional rise of powerful elites that control and profit from the military complex, banks and multinational corporations generally, creating continuing urgency for activist journalists to counter the elite's endless propaganda war, which is often triggered by terrorism. "Using terrorists for regime change is unacceptable – Lavrov" (Biyatov 2014).

This problem is exacerbated by the government withdrawal from public service broadcasting, necessitating journalistic counter-narratives, such as war diaries, to inform and affect mainstream news. The video diary is particularly effective as counter narrative, as demonstrated by my recording of the roadside bombing. Video diary can be used as a part of blogging, from "web log", when an individual records facts, opinions, and links to other sites as a genre of factual writing related to diary-making. On these sites, individual experience of war is faithfully represented over time and generates its own authoritative perspective – authentic, subversive, idiosyncratic and individualistic. The material is first verified by its initial publication, and again verified by other publishers and audiences who use the blog as a source of news and opinion. Blogging is testimony to the public's desire for accuracy, authenticity and truth.

At the time of finalizing this exegesis, war in Afghanistan continues unabated. U.S. President Obama recently authorized ongoing missions for military operations in 2015, in America's longest running war, "a move that ensures American troops will have a direct role in fighting in the war-ravaged country for at least another year" (Mazzetti & Schmitt 2014). "In Afghanistan, War Now Knows No Season" Rod Nordland writes:

[Taliban] attacks continued a sudden pattern of intense assaults almost every day, in another sign that the traditional fighting season

in Afghanistan, where most fighting would ordinarily have ended by November, has been prolonged this year, and is still continuing at a high tempo (Nordland 2014).

Accompanying Nordland's feature is a *Getty Images* photograph of an Afghan security official scrutinizing a charred car body after a bomb attack in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Indeed, for Afghanistan, war now knows no season, no end.

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