
Guest Editorial

“For Every Drop Shed in Anguish”

In February this year a new sculpture was dedicated in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Its purpose was described as being “a place at the Memorial for those who have experienced and witnessed the ongoing trauma that can result from military service and for visitors to the Memorial to reflect on this experience.”

The front cover of this issue shows Army veteran, Ben Farinazzo, speaking at the dedication of the memorial. Ben served in East Timor and some time later suffered PTSD being hospitalised for a period. Upon returning home he suffered a severe mountain bike accident. Over the next three years with the support of his family he overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to win two gold medals at the Invictus Games in 2018.

The commissioning of the memorial followed discussions initiated by family members of those who have served and current and former members of the Australian Defence Force about how best to recognise those who have suffered as a result of their service acknowledging that at the extreme end it can result in death by suicide.

The artist, Alex Seton, said “it was very important that we create a different kind of memorial, not a singular heroic monument but a grouping that acknowledges that there is a wider impact of mental and physical impact”.

The large group of spheres allude to the suffering that radiates out from the individual affecting their family, friends and community



“We proudly remember those who have died in war, but too often we overlook those who have survived their service with wounds or injuries or mental illness. Far too many families feel alone and unrecognized for their sacrifices in caring for a loved one who has served. Far too many have died by suicide.”

The Assistant Minister for Defence and for Veterans Affairs, the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite spoke at the dedication noting that “the rate of veteran suicide in Australia is a national tragedy, a tragedy that successive Governments failed to act upon. That’s why the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide is so important.”

The Royal Commission was set up in 2021, has held public hearings in cities throughout Australia and received over five thousand submissions.

The three Commissioners were present at the dedication and mingled with the crowd of veterans and family members present. Commissioner Brown commented “the sculpture will hopefully help members of the public reflect on what we ask of Australian Defence Force members and the sacrifices serving members, veterans and their families make in service of their country.”

A month later in March 2024 the Royal Commission held the last of 10 public hearings and the Commission will present their report in October this year.

This will be a landmark document and will influence the way we address these problems in Australia. Doubtless there will be lessons that can be learned in other countries who face the same challenges,

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“Each droplet is carved from Australian pearl marble. The marble was selected from marble rejected by the quarry owners because of its impurities. However the artist, Alex Seton, saw the imperfections as a crucial centre piece of the work with the veins of deep rust red and bandings of grey, blue and yellow embodying the scars, seen and unseen, borne by many veterans and their families.”