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## THE AUSTRALIAN


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# A tribute to victims of silent war Diggers bring home

KAREN BIRD

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By **KAREN BIRD**

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About three years ago, a committee was drawn together to begin an important conversation within the walls of the Australian War Memorial. We began with one simple question: why can't a mother, father, wife, husband, partner, brother, sister, relative, friend or stranger take a moment to reflect on the experiences and sacrifices of all the men and women who have served and fought for our country at Australia's dedicated war memorial?

The Australian War Memorial acknowledges those who were killed or died of physical wounds in the field of war. The missing conversation has always been the war that comes home. This war is, and has always been, just as vicious.

This conversation was, and is, painful. It acknowledges the physical and moral cost associated with war and conflict and military service to Australian society. This is a long-term cost, borne in the hearts and minds of our military personnel and, by association, their families, partners and friends. This cost is intergenerational and across time.

We stand here today to recognise the sufferings of war and service and we, the loved ones of these men and women, have made a place for them.

This is part of our new, more honest conversation about the long-term cost of war to this nation. We can speak now of the forgotten and the missing. We can speak to the physical and mental wellbeing of all our military and veteran communities. We speak to give them hope and acknowledge their importance to us all.

We have agreed now to create a sculpture to represent those Australians whose names have been redacted from our military history; the silenced, the forgotten, the unspoken. The men and women who have fallen outside the palatable retelling of our war and military history. Who, until this time, have had no place at Australia's dedicated war memorial.

I stand here as the proud mother of one such Australian veteran, Jesse Stephen Bird (pictured). I seek to redress this anomaly on his behalf and on behalf of all those before and after him.

We would not be here today without the incredible support of the curatorial team at the Australian War Memorial: Anthea Gunn, Laura Webster and Elise Routledge. We thank also my new friend, the sculptor Alex Seton, for the sentience and solace he has brought to our vision.

We look forward to the day we can all stand together and share in the unveiling of this sculpture, "For every drop shed in anguish". It is an acknowledgment that as a nation we care enough to never forget those who serve in all our names. And because of this, "For every drop shed in anguish" will become a welcome and long overdue addition to the national estate here at the AWM.

*This is an edited extract of a speech to be given by Karen Bird at the Australian War Memorial on Wednesday. Her son, Jesse, took his own life while suffering trauma from service in Afghanistan. The new Sufferings of War and Service sculpture has been commissioned for those who have experienced and witnessed the ongoing trauma that can result from military service; and for memorial visitors to reflect on this experience.*