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\$500 million for war memorial upgrade should go to Diggers

REMEMBER those pesky weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We went to war because of them. We went on a lie, as we often do. They didn't exist. The beloved Australian War Memorial has been given half a billion dollars by the Federal Government for a massive redevelopment to include massive representation of the Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor wars and the work of our military peacekeepers.

Brendan Nelson, the showboating director of the AWM was a member of the Howard Government which impelled Diggers because of those weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and in other useless conflicts. Perhaps those fictional weapons will finally be found and displayed in the renovated memorial. They are the most crucial symbol of Australians at war in this century. So far.

The redo will include a new entrance, new galleries and better "wayfinding", to use the AWM's jargon, and will also include "an unclassified feed from the Department of Defence" so visitors can watch contemporary soldiers at work. How is this remembrance? This smacks of recruitment and the glorification of war. For shame.

Vietnam veterans initially thought there was scant representation of that undeclared war at the AWM – long since redressed. Yes, there needs to be further representation of the service and sacrifice of veterans of subsequent undeclared wars and peacekeeping but does this require a \$500 million makeover (pictured below)? While every other cultural institution in Australia is belt-tightening, the Federal Government is throwing half a billion bucks at the AWM on top of the \$600 million (more than any other country) to commemorate the centenary of World War I.

The memorial is unique as shrine, museum and archive. It is visited by a million people a year and is a beautiful, poignant, healing and respectful sacred site. It's the whitefellas' Uluru. Anzac Hall was added in 2001 and will now be destroyed in this age of ephemeral architecture. An open letter from 80 eminent Australians opposes the redevelopment, which one signatory claims will turn the memorial into a "military theme park".

Veterans are homeless and endure devastating mental health problems from their service and they are begging for funds. Let's look after them. That's our moral duty, not glorifying the useless wars they fought. Every RSL club is a mini museum and all those clubs desperately need funds.

Didn't Brendan Nelson send Australians to war? In a recent book celebrating the memorial's daily *Last Post* ceremony, there is one photo of Charles Bean, the great historian and founder of the AWM, 19 photos of Brendan Nelson and two photos of his current and third wife. That's showboating. Is this new development a political justification of recent wars led by a former politician whose government took us into those wars? It seems more chest-beating and nationalistic than a remembrance of the sanctity of sacrifice.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial was recently dedicated in Canberra six years after ours in SA. Too little, too late. It seems a fob to the huge issue woefully ignored by the AWM – remembrance of the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Aboriginal people in the frontier wars.

Will half a billion dollars glorify war and the ambition of a dead-eyed director? Lest we forget.

■ **Peter Goers can be heard weeknights on ABC Radio Adelaide**



What's hot / what's not

HOT

Kevin Tarling – much-loved antique dealer. Vale.

■ Surely a kid can have a pasty and doughnut from a school canteen.

■ Banning gay conversion.

in the abortion debate often support the death penalty.

■ Country hospitals begging for money.

■ Federal Government funds for the Crows to take over a large part of the parklands.

NOT

Funny that people who are pro-life

Anti-vaxxers, gone to the dogs.