

David Cotterrell: mod.uk : War and medicine on the front line

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A groundbreaking contemporary exhibition which shows what life is really like on the front line and investigates the relationship between warfare and medicine has been launched at the Wellcome Trust in London.

The War and Medicine exhibition spans the disasters of the Crimean War, in the 1850s, to today's conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq

'War and Medicine' has been commissioned by the Trust and the Ministry of Defence in response to artist David Cotterrell's experiences of travelling to Afghanistan where he spent time with British soldiers observing and capturing their daily lives.

Through film and photography Mr Cotterrell has captured the drama of being on the front line, in particular the extraordinary efforts of the armed forces' medical staff and the human stories behind them.

He spent one month in Camp Bastion in Helmand province last year, his trip having been inspired by the realisation that he is part of the last generation to have living relatives who experienced the Second World War.

Mr Cotterrell, who is a Professor of Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University, explained:

"I'm hoping that the exhibition will help people question their own assumptions of what the troops do. What I've tried to do is begin to understand that there are individual human beings involved. This really highlights the bravery and compassion of those involved. I'd like people to think about war and what our soldiers are doing.

"I witnessed an evacuation from Camp Bastion in a Hercules which is extremely unusual for a civilian. I was with the injured soldier from his pick up from military theatre right through to his treatment in a medical theatre. I was invited into this panoramic environment which is rarely seen."

The resulting artwork from Mr Cotterrell's trip to theatre is two film-based pieces which are designed to show visitors to the exhibition the realities of contemporary battlefield medicine. A five-screen panoramic video shows the treatment of combat victims in Camp Bastion while 9-Liner, a three-screen video, looks at an attempt to bring those injured to the tented entrance of the desert field hospital:

"The experience of creating this exhibition had a massive impact on me," Mr Cotterrell said. "As an outsider you think you understand conflict, but you really have a limited understanding. I recognised the amazing diversity within the team; there's a huge range of backgrounds encompassed within it. It really gives you an understanding of the effects on the individuals who are there in the thick of it. It really made me think about the way that war is reported."

Excerpts from the diary Mr Cotterrell kept during his time in Afghanistan are also included in the exhibition and illustrate what he witnessed in Afghanistan. His work reveals not only the way medicine is administered in combat situations, but also the all too human stories that lie beneath the casualty statistics.

Author not known



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