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Veterans Film Targets British Army over Child Recruitment
‘ACTION MAN: BATTLEFIELD CASUALTIES’
Veterans for Peace UK film by Darren Cullen & Price James
Featuring Matt Berry
Written by Darren Cullen
Directed by Price James
Produced by Agile Films

Screening and Exhibition: 24th June – 2nd July 2015, (free entry)
Red Gallery, 1-3 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3DT
Film online at: www.battlefieldcasualties.co.uk

A series of controversial films launched today by Veterans for Peace UK highlight the realities of armed service for young soldiers. The films parody iconic Action Man toys and appear to be adverts for a new Battlefield Casualties addition to the range, but the ‘adverts’ are in fact a dark satire on the reality of life and death in and after the army; an attempt by the veterans group to put pressure on the government to raise the army recruitment age to eighteen.

The bleak but trenchant films, with a voiceover from actor and comedian Matt Berry, showcase three toy soldiers, PTSD Action Man (“with thousand-yard stare action”), Paralysed Action Man (“legs really don’t work”) and Dead Action Man (“coffin sold separately”). Veterans for Peace say the films are an attempt to draw attention to the way the British Army targets teenagers and even young children in its search for new recruits while ignoring and downplaying the often-brutal repercussions of military service in their advertising.

The UK is one of fewer than twenty countries worldwide that still recruits sixteen year olds into its armed forces. Most countries only recruit adults aged eighteen and above. Soldiers who joined the British Army at a young age are substantially more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems. Younger recruits also

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1 The Ministry of Defence child recruitment policy has been challenged at various times by the Joint Committee
have a higher risk of alcohol problems, depression and suicide than either their civilian counterparts or older military personnel.³ The Army has said that it looks to the youngest recruits to make up shortfalls in the infantry⁴ ⁵, which is by far the most dangerous part of the Army - the infantry's fatality rate in Afghanistan was seven times that in the rest of the armed forces.⁶

Veterans for Peace say the films are an attempt to show what, for many, are the real stories of military service. “Army recruitment adverts aren’t going to show a paralysed serviceman changing his colostomy bag or a veteran committing suicide in their own home,” says Daniel Campbell, an ex-Royal Engineer who joined the British Army at sixteen, “but these are some of the realities of military service. These films are an effort to show that in a hard-hitting, but honest way.”

Campbell, 27, who suffers PTSD from his time in Iraq and Afghanistan says the military’s treatment of soldiers with the condition borders on “callous indifference”, with veterans forced to rely on charities for support. “The Army still regard post-traumatic stress as a weakness rather than an injury. Soldiers are discouraged from getting a diagnosis or treatment while they’re in the forces, and once they leave they’re left to fend for themselves. The suicide rate for 16-20 year old males in the armed forces has been 82% higher than for civilians of the same age.”⁷

The films, directed by Price James (Agile Films), were written and based on artwork by the artist Darren Cullen who says the idea was inspired by the UK military’s own line of toys, HM Armed Forces⁸. “The British military’s official toy range claims to be suitable for ages five and up. I’m interested in why they think a Predator Drone playset is a suitable toy for children. I’d propose these toys are part of a long-term recruitment effort by the Ministry of Defence.”

Cullen says that the films send a strong message that young people should think twice before believing military advertising, “The Army have this ability to take war, which is broadly described throughout history as being a living hell of suffering, pain and despair, and manage to rebrand it for each new generation as an exciting and character-building adventure.”

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⁵ Recruitment of the very youngest recruits is structurally skewed towards enlistment into combat roles. Recruits aged between 16 and 16½ may only enlist for jobs in the infantry, armoured corps, artillery – which are all combat roles – and as drivers in the logistics corps. Recruits aged between 16 and 16½ may only enlist for the combat roles. British Army (Headquarters Recruiting Group: Army Recruiting And Training Division), ‘Recruiting Group Instructions’, 2013, p. 11-4-A-2.
⁶ Minors are over-represented in the intake for the infantry, where the fatality rate in Afghanistan has been seven times that in the rest of the armed forces. For sources and detail, see D Gee, ‘The Last Ambush’, op. cit., pp. 57-58.
⁸ HM Armed Forces - http://www.hmarmedforces.com/
Ben Griffin, a former SAS soldier who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan says the films address the broader effect of pro-military advertising, "It is the policy of the British Army to focus its propaganda on children and teenagers. This is not just for recruitment purposes but also to build passive support among the population for the future wars our soldiers will fight in. These films reveal some of the negative outcomes of military service, they challenge the sanitised messages projected by militarists, the myth of the prestigious war injury or the heroic death."

Veterans for Peace UK are using the film to encourage people to write to their MPs to demand the age of army recruitment be raised to eighteen, in line with almost all other developed countries. Ben Griffin says, “It isn’t widely known that along with Iran and North Korea the UK still recruits sixteen year olds into its armed forces, is this what David Cameron means by “British values”? We’re asking the Ministry of Defence to stop recruiting children in order to fill its most dangerous army jobs.”

An exhibition showing the films as well as the boxed Action Man toys and playsets featured will be on display at Red Gallery, 1-3 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3DT from 24th June – 2nd July. The films, as well as details on how to write to your MP will be available online from 24th June at www.battlefieldcasualties.co.uk

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CONTACT
To speak to Daniel Campbell, Ben Griffin or Darren Cullen regarding this story please first contact Ben Griffin 07866 559313, coord@vfpuk.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

Daniel Campbell - 27, joined the British Army at 16, he served from 2004 to 2014 in the Royal Engineers. He deployed to Iraq 2007/08 as part of 21 Engineer Regiment, Afghanistan 2011/12 as part of 33 Engineer Regiment. He also helped train the Jordanian Army on how to dispose of IEDs in 2011. He is now a member of Veterans for Peace UK


Darren Cullen - 32, Not to be confused with the graffiti artist of the same name. Darren is an artist and writer from Leeds, now based in London. He studied at Glasgow School of Art. His website is www.spellingmistakescostlives.com and on twitter @darren_cullen
**Price James** is a director of TV commercials and music videos. Specialising working with kids, he works in a variety of different media. Price’s clients include Selfridges, Kelloggs, Turkish Airlines and his long time collaborator Beth Ditto.

**Matt Berry** – 41, is an English actor, writer, comedian and musician. Berry is perhaps best known for his role as Douglas Reynholm in The IT Crowd. He is also well known for his appearances in Garth Marenghi’s Darkplace, The Mighty Boosh and Snuff Box.

**Veterans for Peace UK** - Veterans For Peace UK is a voluntary ex-services organisation of men and women who have served in every war that Britain has fought since WW2. We focus our work to:

- Educate young people on the true nature of military service and war.
- Resist war and militarism through non-violent action.
- Stand in solidarity with people resisting militarism and war.

We hope to convince people that war is not the answer to the problems of the 21st century. [www.veteransforpeace.org.uk](http://www.veteransforpeace.org.uk)

**FILM ONLINE AT:** [WWW.BATTLEFIELDCASUALTIES.CO.UK](http://WWW.BATTLEFIELDCASUALTIES.CO.UK)