Diggers welcomed home

Crowd cheers returning soldiers

“IT was a tough time,” Mrs Gilbert said. “We were able to have contact, but it’s good to get back to a bit of normality.” Mr Gilbert said he was “very surprised” by the sheer number of people who waved flags and cheered as the soldiers marched.

Mr Abbott was mobbed as he walked through the Smith St Mall to an official reception at Parliament House. “After more than a decade of inconclusive conflict, it is natural to wonder whether it was worth the effort. People will come to their own conclusions, but this is mine,” he said. “Thanks to you there are now some 26 girls’ schools in Uruzgan Province where formerly there were none. “Thanks to you there are now doctors and nurses … where formerly there were few.”

Mr Abbott said the price was high “but the cause was great and the success has been sufficient”. Army chief David Morrison said Australian troops had served with great professionalism and honour in Afghanistan. “We are part of that great narrative of the Australian soldier and service to the nation, that long, loping column stretching back across more than a century who have worn the slouch hat and the rising sun badge abroad in the service of this country,” he said.

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Members of the public applauded loudly as servicemen and women marched past dignitaries in Raintree Park. Greg Grace sat alongside daughters Indee, 7, and Kobe, 9, to watch their wife and mother, Tammy Wakeman. Mr Grace said it had been a tough time for the family. “We were able to have contact, but it’s good to get back to a bit of normality.”

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