

6-13 July
2014

**SERVING COUNTRY –
CENTENARY & BEYOND**

The History of Indigenous Australian Service men and woman

Celebrating Indigenous
contributions to Australian defence



Wominjeka Welcome



Acknowledgement

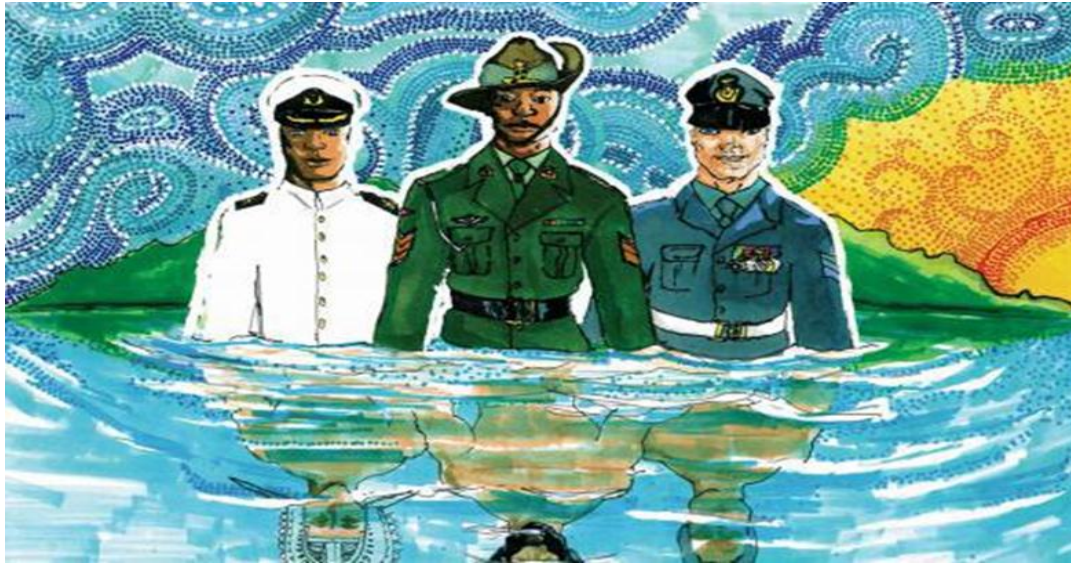
La Trobe University acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Melbourne campus is located.

We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value the unique contribution the Wurundjeri people and all Indigenous Australians make to the University and the wider Australian society.



2014 NAIDOC Week Theme

Serving Country Centenary and Beyond



Winning artist: Mr Harry Alfred Pitt, a Torres Strait Islander man

The artist's concept for the poster depicts three brothers with their land behind them and the horizon before them.

Their Elders are reflected in the water, giving the brothers the strength to overcome the challenges that may lie over the horizon.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Service

Long before they were considered citizens of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had a proud history of contributing to Australia's defence efforts.

Their assistance spanning in all areas of Army, Navy and Air force.



Often little known, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander war stories are only now being uncovered.

This year's NAIDOC theme acknowledges, celebrates and remembers all who have helped make Australia safe in the defence of our Country.

Lest we forget.

Facts and Figures

- **1 in every 20** Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people made a direct contribution to Australian WWII efforts, either as servicemen or women, or civilian labourers.
- At present, it is known that **34** Aboriginal men served at Gallipoli, **12** of whom were killed.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were serving for **87 years** in the armed forces before they were considered citizens of Australia.
- It is estimated that **27,000** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were killed in the Frontier Wars.

Facts and Figures

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have **fought** for Australia in every war **since Federation in 1901**.
- In 1944 nearly **every Torres Strait Islander man** was a **member** of the **Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion**—in proportion to population, no community in Australia contributed more to Australia's effort in World War II than the people of the Torres Strait Islands.
- The **first Japanese Prisoner of War** in Australia was **captured by Aboriginal people** after his plane crashed on Melville Island, north of Darwin in February 1942.
- **NORFORCE**, which relies heavily on the knowledge and talents of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the north of Australia today, monitors the largest area of operations of any military unit in the world.



Facts and Figures

- Despite rules against their enrolment, over **3000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women** are known to have **enlisted in World War II**—a further **400** are known to have served in **World War I**.
- Only **one** Aboriginal man ever **received land** under the **soldier settlement scheme**—returned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women were often denied the honour and rights given to other returned servicemen and women.
- There are up to **7,000** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans and war widows in the Australian community today.
- More than **800** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians **now serve** with distinction in the Australian Defence Forces.



History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country

<i>War</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Region</i>
First Boer War	1880-1881	Transvaal, South Africa
Second Boer War	1899-1902	Transvaal, South Africa
World War I	1914-1918	mainly Europe
World War II	1937-1945	Europe, SE Asia, Middle East, Africa
Occupation of Japan	1946-1951	Japan
Korean War	1950-1953	Korea
Malayan Emergency	1950-1960	Malaya
Indonesian Confrontation	1963-1966	Indonesia, Malaysia
Vietnam War	1962-1975	Vietnam
Aboriginal people are counted as Australians	1967	
First Gulf War	1990-1991	Iraq, Kuwait
Afghanistan	2001-present	Afghanistan
Second Gulf War	2003-present	Iraq
Peacekeeping	1947-present	worldwide

History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country

- They came from a section of society with few rights, low wages, and poor living conditions.
- Most Indigenous Australians could not vote and none were counted in the census.
- Once in the AIF, they were treated as equals; paid the same as other soldiers and generally accepted without prejudice.
- Sadly it took many non-Indigenous Australian lives lost until the Australian government would 'officially' allow Indigenous Australians to assist in the war and fight for the security of their country.



History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country

- Indigenous Australians in World War I served on equal terms but after the war were not in areas such as education, employment, and civil liberties.
- Aboriginal ex-servicemen and women found that discrimination remained or, indeed, had worsened during the war period.
- The repression of Indigenous Australians increased between the wars, as protection acts gave government officials greater control over Indigenous Australians.
- As late as 1928, Indigenous Australians were being massacred in reprisal raids.



History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country



Flight Sergeant **Leonard Waters**, Australia's first and **only Aboriginal fighter pilot** during World War II, seen here in his Kittyhawk 'Black Magic'.



Aboriginal soldiers from their special **all volunteer platoon** at No 9 camp, Wangaratta, Victoria, December 1940. This was the **only Aboriginal squad** in the Australian Military Forces at that time.



Lieutenant L Reg Saunders, the first Aboriginal commissioned in the Australian Army being congratulated by Lieutenant Tom Derrick VC DCM after their successful graduation from the Officers Cadet Training Unit at Seymour, Victoria, 25 November 1944.



Captain S Baldwin, Naval Officer commanding HMAS *Melville*, Headquarters Royal Australian Navy, inspecting a squad of Melville Islanders

History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country



Aborigines employed by 1st Australian Farm Company, Australian Army Service Company, mixing concrete for floors and the pipelines.

Donald Thomas and **Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit** – included 51 Aborigines – their knowledge of traditional bushcraft and fighting skills to patrol coastal areas, establish coastwatchers and fight a guerrilla war against any Japanese

Torres Strait Light Infantry – 160 men – high number of Torres Strait Islanders; **assist engineering units** in the area with construction of installations



Aboriginal stockmen were employed to drive cattle towards the Army slaughter yards from widely dispersed areas in northern Australia.

Torres Strait Light Infantry – 160 men – high number of Torres Strait Islanders; **assist engineering units** in the area with construction of installations

History of Indigenous Service Men and Women Serving Country



Left - **Mr Harry Allie** (RAAF ex-serviceman) Centre - **Mr Stephen Dodd** (Korean War veteran) Right - **Mr David Williams** (Vietnam War veteran).

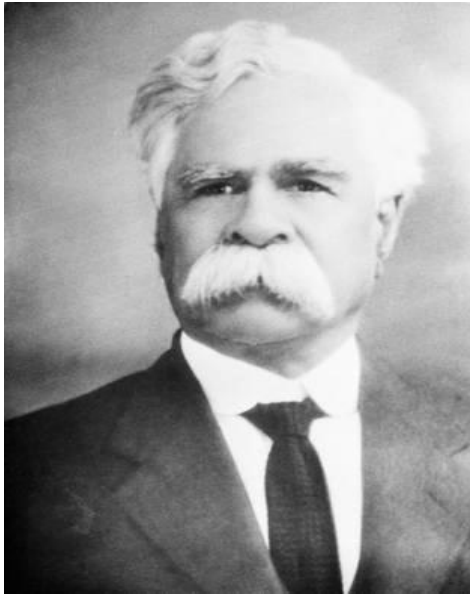


Lance Corporal **Kathleen Jean Mary Walker**, of Stradbroke Island, Queensland (later known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal). Lance Corporal Walker served 1942 to 1944. She was a communication worker with the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS).



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have also made a significant contribution to the defence of the nation through their service with the armed forces, civilian organisations such as the Women's' Land Army or worked in war time industries.

William Cooper



- Secretary of Australian Indigenous Australians' League at the onset of WWII, **argued Indigenous Australians should not fight** for White Australia.
- Loosing his son in the World War I, was bitter that Aboriginal sacrifice had **not brought any improvement in rights and conditions for Aboriginal people**.
- Demanded improvements at home before taking up “the privilege of defending the land which was taken from him by the White race without compensation or even kindness”.
- Likened conditions in White-administered Aboriginal settlements to those suffered by Jews under Hitler.
- Mortified treatment of Jews and other minorities in Nazi Germany, on 6 December 1938, Cooper and a group of other activists arrived at German Consulate in Melbourne to deliver **petition condemning “cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government of Germany.”** The protest has been referred to as “the only private protest against the Germans following Kristallnacht.”
- The German Consulate did not accept the petition.

Impact – United in War, Divided in Peace

- ***“Australian soldiers I met in the Army were not colour-conscious towards the aboriginal...native troops from practically every colony in the Empire fought and died in the struggle against tyranny and oppression, and Australian aboriginals were no exception.”***
Reg Saunders - the first Indigenous Australian to be commissioned as an officer in the 2nd AIF during World War II.
- ***After the war I went back to being just another black fellow.”***
Leonard Waters - the first Aboriginal aviator and pilot to serve in World War II.

Impact – United in War, Divided in Peace

- Upon **returning** from World War I, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers were **denied land** under the **Returned Servicemen's Settlement Scheme**, despite having fought alongside non-Indigenous servicemen.
- Although **forced to give up their land and rights**, the **women and children of the Cummeragunja mission**, located 32km from Echuca in NSW, contributed to **clothing of Australian soldiers**.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians fought** against British settlers for **146 years** on Australian soil, in what is known as the **Frontier Wars**.
- **The Sapphires** is a true story of **four Aboriginal women**: Laurel Robinson, Lois Peeler, Beverley Briggs and Naomi Myers. They **toured Vietnam in the late 1960's singing to American troops** – an extraordinary achievement for four young Aboriginal people, considering that Aboriginal people had only just received the right to vote.

Impact – United in War, Divided in Peace

- Indigenous Australians were able to enlist in the onset of WW2 and many did.
- By 1940, Australian committee expressed their concerns and did not want Indigenous people in the war.
- Sadly again as in WWI, it was not until Australian troops were inundated that Indigenous people were encouraged and or wanted to fight alongside white Australian troops.
- A major contribution to the call for Indigenous enlistment was the 1942 imminent threat of Japan invasion in the North of Australia.
- Indigenous knowledge of the land, particularly tracking skills and the Indigenous navigation of land and water supplies was perceived as valuable to Australian defence needs and strategies, should Japan land and invade from the north.

Impact – United in War, Divided in Peace

- Difficult to record the number of Indigenous men and women who have served their nation, as ethnic background was not specifically identified in service records of enlistment.
- However, it is known that Indigenous men and women served with great distinction overseas in both world wars and other conflicts, with a number receiving medals and commendations for their sacrifice and acts of bravery in the heat of battle.

Impact – United in War, Divided in Peace

- With war began to slow down, restrictions on Indigenous enlistment was re-instated
- With changing attitudes both at home and of white Australian troops who had served next to Indigenous Australians as brothers and equals, this ban was lifted in 1949
- Indigenous Australians who fought for their country came back to much the same discrimination as before

La Trobe Connection

One of our
**Melbourne
based
student**
served in the
Vietnam War



Geoff Rose served
in the Korean. Geoff
is staff member
Mark Rose's father.



Servicewoman in the
Army Services,
Corporal **Helen Annie
McDonald**.
Served 1943-1946.
Helen is the mother of
one of our **Albury-
Wodonga students**.

Thank you