

## We Acknowledge and Honour our Black diggers.

**102 years ago - 14<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – start of WW1**

**11th November 1918**, marking the end of the First World War.

**11th November marks another day in history** - 147 years ago the Victorian colonial government passed an ACT known as the “Aborigines Protection Act 1869”.

Some people may not know of the **Aboriginal war involvement**

First Boer War	1880-1881	Transvaal, South Africa
Second Boer War	1899- <b>1902</b>	
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
Aboriginals were in the		
Gulf War	2003	And are still represented

Interestingly in the Second Boer War 1899-1902

50 Aboriginal trackers, they were possible part of the Aboriginal police force.

These men were skilled in use of weaponry, as well to take orders and were trained in military fashion. They were hurried rounded up and sent across to South Africa as bullock drovers and trackers. Some weren't enlisted men.

In **1901** The Immigration Act “The White Australia” Policy was enacted.

There were **no coloureds** allowed into Australia after that time.

So these Aboriginal men, willing to die for the Country, but because they were sent overseas in a hurry and were not enlisted were not allowed to come home because of this “The White Australia” policy.

They were sent to New Zeland, not back to their families, loved ones and their Country.

We need to remember:

Before 1967– Aboriginal people were managed under the same portfolio as Australian wildlife.

They were through to be not quite humans. Not equal.

Aboriginal people were not counted as Australians citizens till after 1967.

So why would all those Aboriginals service men and woman risk their lives and be willing to die for this country, where they are not even counted as citizens.

### **Why did they join?**

Not an easy question to answer of course, time were much different back then.

But what they were hoping for was a better life *after* the war.

The young Aboriginal people would have been like every other adventurous young Australian, wanting to go out and see the world, get paid really good money, see some action and “be home before Christmas”

Don't forget 102 years ago - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were under the “Aborigines Protectors Act”.

This Act gave government control over:

- Where Aboriginal people could live,
- How they would relate to Europeans,
- Their labour and earnings,
- The "care, custody and education" of all Aboriginal children.
- They could not enter a public bar,
- They could not vote,
- They could not marry non-Aboriginal partner,
- They could not buy property,

The Act provided clothing and blankets for winter and summer - *but they were on loan only* - and the Minister of the Crown was always the owner. To dispose of them without the authority of the commandant of the mission, our people could be prosecuted for disposing of Crown property.

- They were unable to leave the mission without permission,
- They were banned from traditional activity,

They lived on missions or on reserves and were tightly controlled.



These young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fellas that joined up stood out in the crowd, they were proud *to be* Aboriginal.

They had put up with racist slurs and attitudes almost daily in their civilian life.

But to their mates in the trenches they were Mick, Ben and Harry.

The misconceptions and negative stereotypes that surely many non-Aboriginal diggers had in their minds when they joined would have quickly disappeared when they were living, eating, laughing and dying with these young Aboriginal fellas.

Today the bodies of those that fell in the battlefields of France and Belgium remain with their mates, thousands of miles away from their ancestral homes.

Probably about a third of the Indigenous soldiers who served overseas were killed in action or died of wounds or disease. Some being sent home with horrible wounds.

But the most tragic aspect of their service was not in them 'going over the top' and running at machine guns and dying

**The most tragic aspect came after they returned to their own country.**

When they came back home to Australia *they were shunned*, they were told to go back to the reserve where they come from.

Their sacrifices ignored.

Their families oppressed even further by their respective State and Federal governments with such cruel initiatives as the "Soldier Settlement Scheme", this appropriated land was not available for Aboriginal soldiers.

This scheme also affected the Aboriginal population who did not go to war, because some of the fertile land which was being given in the Soldier Settlement Scheme had previously been Aboriginal Reserve Land.

This meant that many Aboriginal people were forced to leave the land which they had lived off for decades. They had no place to go and were left without any money.

### **A second dispossession.**

These returned Aboriginal soldiers were *not* allowed to have a drink with their comrades at their local pub, not allowed in RSL clubs, not to march on Anzac day.

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 was no Government support at the time for the wounded or mentally scarred Indigenous veterans, and their children were still being removed...

The service *that* these black diggers did was to help provide momentum to the growing *Aboriginal Rights Movement* in the 1930's.

They provided *hard evidence* that they, as a people, were willing to serve Australia but, white Australia were not willing to help them get on with life.

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October 1917 the military order was issued: "Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining medical officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin."

Many men enlisting described themselves as Spanish, Italian or Maori.

1940 the Commonwealth Government barred enlistment of persons 'not substantially of European origin or descent'.

However on February 19, 1942, the Japanese launched two air raids on Darwin. The attacks resulted in the deaths of at least 243 people and led to widespread panic that Australia was on the verge of invasion.

The immediate threat to Australia led to the easing of enlistment restrictions. Essentially, because Australia needed all its available manpower, the race of enlistees suddenly did not seem important.

In 1942 the first Japanese Prisoner of War in Australia was captured by an Aboriginal after the Japanese plane crashed on Melville Island, north of Darwin. The Aboriginal snuck up behind the Japanese pilot with his tomahawk and said, 'Stick 'em up!'

In 1944 approximately 440 Torres Strait Islander men were members 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.

Torres Strait Islander men job was to patrol the Torres Strait and to provide mechanical and logistical support for ships passing through. This unit received lavish praise



from superiors and visiting officers, yet its members received less pay than non-Indigenous men serving alongside them.

Moreover, like the experience of many First World War Aboriginal men, part of their wages was quarantined by the Queensland Chief Protector and this became part of what is now referred to as 'The stolen wages'

It was only in 1982 that surviving members of the TSLIB received back-pay.

In 1946 the ban on persons 'not substantially of European origin or descent' returned in full force.



Australia's first Aboriginal officer, commissioned during the Second World War.

Reg Saunders, Received MBE in 1971.

He argued: 'Now that the danger is past I feel my race is entitled to equal opportunities with other Australians. We don't want privileges, but opportunities for advancement and fair treatment.'

Despite rules against their enrolment, over 3000 Aboriginal and 850 Torres Strait Islander men and women are known to have enlisted in World War II – possible a further 1000 have served in World War I.

More than 800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander serve with distinction in the Australian Defence Forces Today.

Yes - Indigenous soldiers, sailors and airmen have been part of Australian service history every step of the way.

### **Some were captured.**

Like Private Douglas Grant, he suffered the indignity of being separated from his fellow Australian prisoners of war **So German doctors** and anthropologists could **have studied him**.

**Then the Lovett brothers** (they weren't captured but) occupy a special place in the history, not just of Australia, but also of the Commonwealth. **Four of the brothers** served in both World War One (WWI) and World War Two (WWII).

The Lovett family who has served in the Australian Armed Forces both men and women total **21**.

In recent years, the long-forgotten service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man and woman who have made significant contributions in all wars conflicts and peace keeping operations Australia has been involved in are starting to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Yes - Indigenous Australians have played a significant part in our military history over the past 2 centuries and will do so into the future.

If we don't have a history how can we have a future?

**We acknowledge and honour our Black diggers.**

**Lest We Forget.**

