

Following the Rocky Road of the Quiet Warriors:

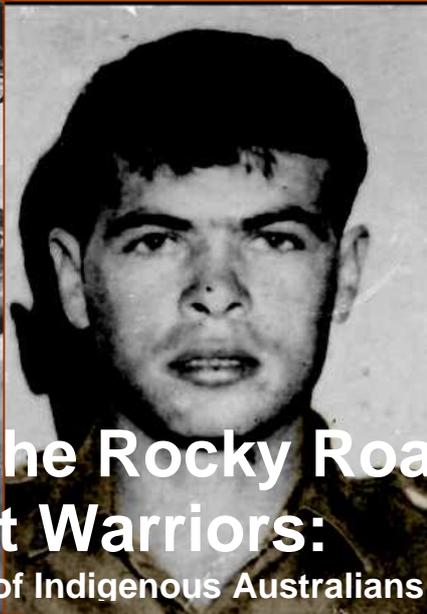
**The experiences of Indigenous Australians
in the Defence Force**

Stephanie Donaldson

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this report may contain images and references to deceased persons

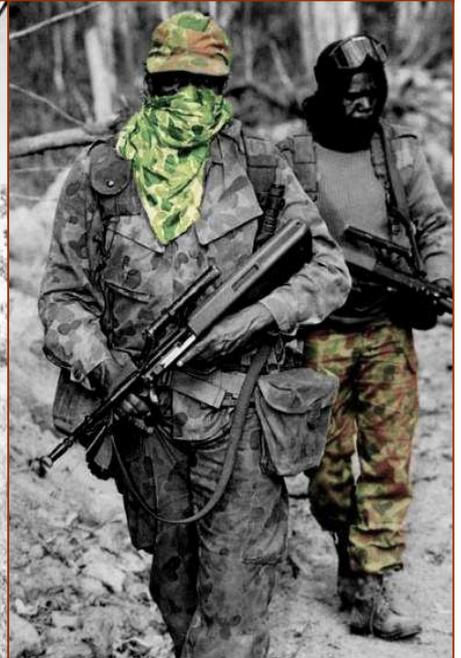
Disclaimer

I have attempted to relate all experiences and views in this report as accurately as possible from information gathered during community consultation and research. If there are any discrepancies, I apologise for my error. In cases where a community member has indicated the wish of not to have his or her name acknowledged, but has given permission to use the information provided, only surnames are used.



Following the Rocky Road of the Quiet Warriors:

The experiences of Indigenous Australians in the Defence Force



Inner cover photographs:

- From top left: Sgt Len Waters, courtesy of Australian War Memorial, *P02140.005*
Victor Bartley who served in the Vietnam War, courtesy of Victor Bartley
Richard Archibald who served in the 2nd World War, courtesy of Richard Archibald (his son)
- From middle left: Don Company, 2/13th Battalion in action at Tobruk, April 1941, photo courtesy of Garth O'Connell, accessed on website:
<http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/statuepark/620/background.html>
Aboriginal soldiers from a special platoon at Number 9 camp at Wangaratta, courtesy of AWM, *P02140.005*
Aboriginal soldiers serving at special unit in Northern Australia, courtesy of Australian Defence Force
- From bottom left: Wounded soldier at Bougainville 1945, courtesy of AWM, *092484*
Indigenous veterans at Memorial Ceremony, including Gary Oakley (right), Harry Allie (second from the right), David Williams (second from left), courtesy of Gary Oakley

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	Indigenous Australians' involvement in the defence of Australia	1
3.	Unique skills	1
4.	Why did they enlist?.....	2
5.	First hurdle – the colour bar	4
6.	Second hurdle – entrenched disadvantage.....	6
7.	Only one colour in the Defence Force	6
8.	Mateship: the strong bond	8
9.	Public attitude	9
10.	Government policies and impact on families of Indigenous servicemen	12
	Post Boer War – Aboriginal trackers denied re-entry into Australia	12
	First World War – Indigenous servicemen's allotment failed to reach their families	13
	Post First World War - Missing out on Soldier Settlement Scheme	13
	Exemption Certificates.....	13
	Post Second World War	14
	Still barred from 'soldiers' settlement scheme'.....	14
	Difficulty in getting membership for Returned and Services Leagues.....	14
	Difficulty in readjusting to the 'bad old times'	14
	Difficulty in getting employment	14
	Difficulty in keeping contact with their mates	14
	Impact on families of Indigenous servicemen	15
	Stolen generation	15
	Unawareness of entitlement	16
11.	Facing adversity with humour and dignity.....	16
12.	Quiet achievers	17
13.	Recognition and acknowledgment of Indigenous veterans' contribution.....	18
14.	Conclusion	21
15.	Acknowledgement	22
16.	Bibliography.....	23

1. Introduction

Australians are well aware that many Aboriginal people put up resistance when Europeans arrived and took over Australia. However, few Australians realise that despite the draconic and discriminatory laws and policies they are subject to under the white Australian government, many Indigenous Australians have fought alongside white Australian soldiers to defend the country. Aboriginal Australians have participated in all the war conflicts, from the First Boer War in 1880, to the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are also involved in global peacekeeping missions.

Indigenous Australians are usually subject to stereotyping and discrimination, so when they joined the defence force, were they subject to the same treatment? Are their contribution recognised? Do they receive the same entitlements and benefits as the white Australian soldiers and other defence personnel? Have there been any changes in their experiences? Community consultation and research will be focused in these areas.

2. Indigenous Australians' involvement in the defence of Australia

As early as the first Boer War, long before they were recognised as Australian citizens, Aboriginal people have already served in defending the country. Since then they have participated in every single international conflict that Australia was involved in, as shown in the table below¹:

War	Year
First Boer War	1880-1881
Second Boer War	1937-1945
Occupation Force in Japan	1946-1951
Korean War	1950-1953
Malayan Emergency	1950-1960
Indonesian Confrontation	1963-1966
Vietnam War	1962-1975
<i>Referendum</i>	<i>1967</i>
<i>Indigenous Australians counted as citizens</i>	
First Gulf War	1990-1991
Afghanistan	2001-present
Second Gulf War	2003-present
Peacekeeping	1947-present

3. Unique skills

Besides skills they would have learnt while they were in service, Indigenous Australians have played a unique role in the defence of Australia because of their intimate knowledge and their connection with the Land. Their understanding of climate and season, water, terrestrial animal behaviour and bushcraft is legendary. This is critical as Australia is such

¹ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-digger-march.html>

a vast continent, Indigenous Australian's knowledge of the coastline and waters of northern Australia is strategically advantageous to the country's national security.²

This practical knowledge of the Land did not limit to Australia.³ During the Boer War Aboriginal trackers attached to mounted infantry units were able to use their unique skills to search for and fought Boer commandos in South Africa.⁴

During the Second World War, the North Australia Observer Unit which had to monitor a region of 3.8 million square kilometres for possible Japanese movements, relied on Aboriginal guides for their field operations. A member of the unit observed, "...on most patrols they were leading us."⁵ Aboriginal units assisted in locating enemy and allies' aircraft crash sites and helped to track any survivors. In fact, the first Japanese combatant captured in Australia was taken by Matthias Ulungura, a Melville Island mission Aboriginal Australian.⁶ Their connection to the Land also enabled them to play a vital role in the search and rescue missions for crashed pilots.

4. Why did they enlist?

Since the European invasion, the lives of Indigenous Australians were dictated by laws and policies set by white Australians. They were expected to 'die out'; dispossessed; forced to abandon their culture and heritage in order to 'assimilate' into white society; they were told where to live, how they lived, who they could marry, and their families could even be taken away at a whim of the government officials.

So why did Indigenous Australians continue to enlist to help the people who suppressed them in the first place?

Many Indigenous Australians enlisted for the same reasons as non-Indigenous Australians. Some wanted adventure alongside their friends.⁷ For many Aboriginal Australians, in 1914 getting paid as well as the opportunity to travel overseas was too good to miss.⁸ As many Aboriginal people were living in missions and reserves during the two World Wars, serving in the military offered a way out of social exclusion and entrenched disadvantage. They could get better provisions in terms of clothing and food. Some were hoping for an opportunity to be treated on their merits, not race. In fact, the Army was the first equal opportunity employer for Aboriginal people where they could receive training and education which they would not have otherwise. There was another simple reason, for many Indigenous Australians, they just wanted to defend their country, their piece of Land.

Community consultations confirmed the hardships that many of the servicemen had experienced at the time prior to their joining the ADF, and also their reasons of enlistment indicated above.

² D. Ball, p. 3, *Aborigines in the Defence of Australia*

³ Harry's War

⁴ Reville, Vol 83 No 5, p. 26

⁵ D. Ball, p.5 *Aborigines in the Defence of Australia*

⁶ Indigenous Australians at War, Shrine of Remembrance

⁷ www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-digger-march.html

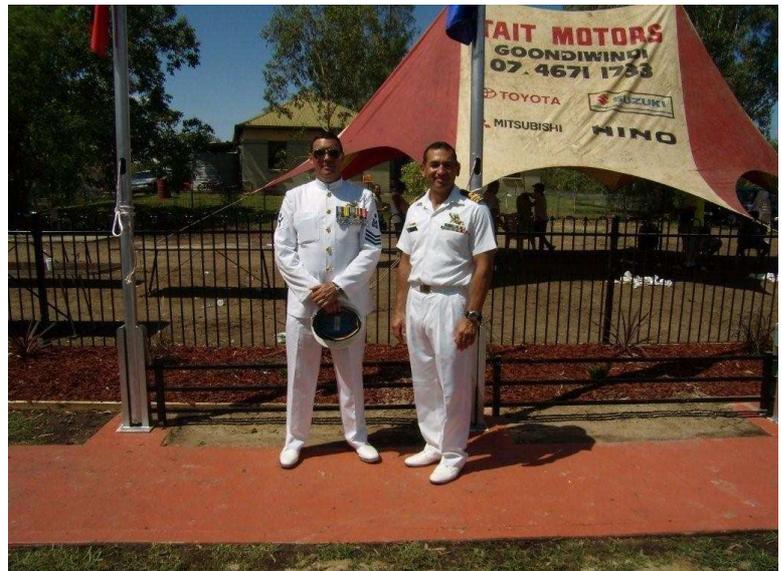
⁸ www.awm.gov.au/encyclopeida/aborigines/indigenous.asp

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

Despite the violation of human rights of Indigenous Australians under the white Australian government, Australia is still first and foremost their country, and many joined the defence force because of their loyalty and patriotism. They wanted to defend their country. This is the reason of enlistment for Roy Barker, a respected Aboriginal Elder in Lightning Bridge, who served in the Occupation Force in Japan for three years as a Private. He simply wanted to *‘do the right thing, to defend the country’*.

Mr Archibald is an Aboriginal Elder from Wollongong, who had four family members enlisted in the Second World War, and has learnt a lot about his father and his cousins’ experiences through oral history. He recalled that his father and his first cousins enlisted *“because they were told they were needed to defend their country like all the young men around that time. They lived at Burnt Bridge on the Aboriginal Mission at that time and a lot of other young Aboriginal people enlisted around the same time. They all wanted to go and be proud soldiers for their country. They also hoped that war service might help them to campaign for citizenship and equality.”*

For Gary Oakley, National President of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association Australia (ATSIVSAA, an Indigenous veterans advocacy group), and Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Australian War Memorial, who joined the Australian Defence Force (ADF) when he was fifteen and served in the Vietnam War, the reason was simply that he wanted to do something. Working in the country or farm work did not appeal to him. He also did not want to follow his father’s footsteps and work at the council. Instead, he joined the navy to be a baker and



Gary Oakley (left) and one of his fellow servicemen
(Photo courtesy of Gary Oakley)

declined the opportunity of a pastry chef apprenticeship. To his dismay, *“When I joined the navy, they did away with the bakers!”* So instead of being a cook in the navy, Gary Oakley received training in electrical engineering. By the time he left the navy, he has obtained an associate diploma of engineering; he is now an electrical engineer and mechanic by trade, even though he does not practise his trade.

Some, like Ray McMinn, Aboriginal Elder from the Mingaletta Aboriginal Community, had no choice. In 1960, it was suggested by the Magistrate that he should either join the ADF or spend nine months in a boys’ home for a couple of misdemeanours. It had resulted in Mr McMinn serving in the ADF for 28 years, he had served in the Vietnam War as well as in submarines for seven years during the 28 year period.

Jane Madden's⁹ grandfather served in the Merchant Navy during the Second World War. He worked on a troop ship: the Katoomba; hospital ships and salvage ships; dredges and went to Papua New Guinea. She recalled that he was not conscripted, but joined the service for his own personal reason. "*He was very unhappy and it gave him a sense of worth and belonging,*" Ms Madden said.

Victor Bartley, an Aboriginal Vietnam War veteran who now lives in Bourke, had three of his thirteen siblings taken from his mother by the Child Protection Board. It was not until some years later that he was reunited with his siblings. He recalled that life in the country in the 1960's was not pleasant. He was arrested by police for things that he did not do. After four of his mates, two white Australians and two Aboriginal people, signed up for the Army, he decided to join them and got out of the country.



Victor Bartley
Photo courtesy of Victor Bartley

5. First hurdle – the colour bar

The exact number of Indigenous Australians joining the Defence Force is not known. This is particularly so for the First World War when only Australians of European descents could enlist to serve in the defence. Many Indigenous Australians got around this hurdle by denying their heritage, posing as Maori, for some others, their colour might be "light enough" for them to pass as Europeans. Ethnicity is not recorded on personnel files. When the government suffered heavy losses at the war front, the rules were relaxed and the recruiting officers did not care about the colour of a man's skin. Originally it was estimated that about 500 Indigenous Australians participated in First World War I, but, according to Gary Oakley, the Australian War Memorial is updating their database, and the number is closer to 1000 and still counting.



A recruiting interview
Courtesy of *The Black Diggers*, R. Hall

There were even more Indigenous people joining the defence force to defend their country in the Second World War despite the colour bar. On 4 September 1939, just one day after Australia entered into the Second World War, 50 Northern Territory Indigenous Australians, including Charles Mene, Victor Blanco and Timothy Hughes (a South Australian Aboriginal person) enlisted. However, the Army still did not have a clear policy on Indigenous Australian enlistment and some First World War veterans were turned away when they went to enlist in the Second World War.¹⁰ The cartoon on the left by Norm Rice which appeared in the *Bulletin* on 18 September 1942 is ironic as, even though Indigenous

⁹ Jane Madden is a contact who has kindly agreed to share the experiences of her grandfather.

¹⁰ Indigenous Australians at war exhibition, Shrine of Remembrance

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

Australians met the enlistment criteria of being natural born Australians, they were officially barred from enlistment because they were non-Europeans. Despite this obstacle Indigenous Australians still found other ways to join and fight in the war. When Australia faced a real threat from Japan in 1941, the rule was relaxed again and many Indigenous Australians enlisted during this time. It was estimated that about 3000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders served in the military in the Second World War.¹¹ There are at least 3,000 more Indigenous Australians who worked for the military as labourers and contributed in the war effort.

The policy barring Aboriginal Australians from enlisting did not change until after the 1967 referendum when Indigenous peoples were finally recognised as Australian citizens. In fact, prior to the 1967 referendum, Indigenous people were not even considered as people as they came under the Flora and Fauna Act.¹² According to Victor Bartley, when he tried to register for the National Service in 1966, he received a notice from the Defence Force stating that he was exempt from service under the Flora and Fauna Act. He still has a good laugh when he thinks about it, wondering whether he was counted as a flower or a kangaroo.¹³ As mentioned before, he signed up for the army to join his mates in 1968, this time, following his mates' advice, he did not tick the box indicating his aboriginality. As shown on his record of service below, his nationality was indicated as British (Please note: for privacy purpose, all other details are not shown):

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES RECORD OF SERVICE 216
AF-8102 (Advised) Registered Aug. 1966

NOMINATED NEXT OF KIN			Surname (BLOCK LETTERS) BARTELEY		Army No. 218834
Name Mr	Relationship	Address	Other Names Victor Edward		Decorations and Medals
Additional Nominations			Unit RAAOC CENTRE (T/S)		
Name Mrs S. ...	Relationship	Address 120 ...	Corps RAAOC	Page	Serial 2012/4
PARTICULARS ON ENLISTMENT			Marital Status M	Date ...	Med. PES ...
Date of Birth 11 Jul 47	Place of Birth Quilpie QLD.	Nationality British	P U L I I E E M S		Colour Perception
Religion RC	Occupation Sheep Str. Labourer	Civil Qualifications	Restrictions on Employment		
Height	Weight (lbs)	Hair	PREVIOUS SERVICE		
Eye	Distinguishing Marks		CHILDREN		
PREVIOUS SERVICE			CHILDREN		
Details and Service Number			Sex	Date of Birth	Sex
		

Ray McMinn advised that he did not declare his Aboriginality until he has learnt the result of the 1967 Referendum. He recalled he was serving in a submarine over in England, when he heard the result, he went to the commanding officer of the submarine and, for the first time, declared his Aboriginality in the Defence Force.

¹¹ Indigenous Australians at War, John Mormon
¹² <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2007/s1933845.htm>
¹³ HACC/DVA Profile and radio interview notes

This is the reason why it is so difficult for the government and historians to find out the exact number of Indigenous Australians who had served in the defence of the country. If they declared their Aboriginality, they were not allowed to enlist. Whether they got in or not depended on the recruiting officer who might make the decision based on the darkness of their skin colour. They might be accepted if their skin was light enough, or turned away if their colour was too dark. It also depended on whether the country needed more defence personnel at the time.

6. Second hurdle – entrenched disadvantage

Today, there is no law to stop Indigenous Australians from joining the defence force to serve the country. They can join ADF just like anyone else. However, they face a different hurdle this time. To qualify for enlistment, they have to meet the standard requirement in terms of health, education, psychological assessment and criminal checks etc. As many Aboriginal Australians live in areas of social disadvantage, for example, in the remote communities in far north Queensland, the Northern Territory or North Western Australia, they may be at the right age to enlist but their poor socio-economic status have impacted on their health, wellbeing and education. They do not have the required educational standards to enlist. Similarly, many young Aboriginal men and women from remote parts of Australia have a criminal record that may disbar them from military service. This is often a reflection of the circumstances in which they live, for example, they may be unable to pay minor fines, or jailed because of minor offences etc., rather than any serious criminal behaviour. However, it can eliminate them from eligibility to military service all the same

7. Only one colour in the Defence Force

The general consensus of all Indigenous veterans consulted is that once they got past the recruitment process, whether they served in the Army, the Navy or the Air Force, their skin colour was no impediment and racism ceased to exist. This was especially so at the war front where they fought alongside their non-Indigenous comrades, endured the same hardships and supported each other. Friendships were forged in the trenches of Gallipoli and the Western Front, at the jungle in Borneo and Vietnam.

According to Mr Roy Barker, who had served at the Occupation Force in Japan for nearly three years, all Indigenous people from ordinary rank were called 'Darkie'. Maori servicemen were called 'Darkie'. He was called 'Darkie Barker'. However, he thought that the name had no derogatory connotation except referred to the colour of their skin. He had never experienced any problem during his service and is proud of his pristine record. '*There was never a mark against me in my three years of service*', he said. He contributed this to the fact that while many other white Australian servicemen were conscripted, Indigenous servicemen enlisted voluntarily because they were patriotic and they wanted to defend the country.

For Victor Bartley, there was no racial barrier in the Army: '*There was no such thing as Indigenous and non-Indigenous soldiers. We were one colour and that was green. The experiences I had with my fellow soldiers were more than good and I will always treasure the memories.*'

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors



David Williams
Photo courtesy of Creative Spirits

It was the same for David Williams, President of NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association, who joined the military in 1965 and left in 1993, and found that his Aboriginality was never an issue. He had served in Borneo, Malaysia and Vietnam and had earned all his awards and promotions on merits, as he said, “*colour did not come into the equation.*”

During the whole time of David Williams’ service, in the military and then later part of his service in submarines, he found that the Defence Force treatment to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous servicemen were the same. They were all treated according to their ability, and would only feel the pressure if they did not perform their job well.



Harry Allie
Photo courtesy of Creative Spirits

Harry Allie, Secretary of the NSW Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association, was a Warrant Officer with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and had served for 23 years from 1966 to 1989. During his entire service within Australia, he did not encounter any racism or discrimination. Amongst his awards was the British Empire medal. He is proud of the fact that he was judged in his role as an airman on his merit and promoted accordingly.

Gary Oakley’s experience further confirmed that racism and discrimination rarely existed in the Defence Force. The only incident he recalled was when he first

joined the ADF as a junior recruit at fifteen years of age. “*A couple of guys from Queensland were a bit of redneck, and they carried on a bit, surprisingly, the other guys in my unit beat it out of them. They said there is no time for this kind of rubbish, and after that, these guys became our friends.*” While he was serving in the Vietnam War, no one cared about his skin colour. “*If you could do your job, you were just another serviceman.*” He pointed out that there are many photographs in the Australian War Memorial collection, showing Indigenous soldiers or sailors amongst other non-Indigenous servicemen. “*These guys are just one of the troops. As a sailor, you were just another sailor. There was no animosity; you were just taken for what you are.*”

Lisa Jackson Pulver, a proud Wiradjuri woman who is currently serving in the Air Force Reserve as Squadron Leader, voiced the same opinion at the ANZAC Memorial at Hyde Park on 28 May 2010, during a ceremony honouring the Indigenous war veterans, “*In the early days, Defence provided our women and men the life of service responsibility, commitment and camaraderie, with little or no room for racism, despite the prejudice and discrimination endemic in Australia’s social and political history. For many of the younger*

women and men of our services, there is only one skin that matters when you service – the uniform of your service.”¹⁴

Garth O’Connell, National Secretary of ATSIVSAA, has joined the ADF since 1995. He has served as an Infantry Section Commander with the rank of Corporal on peacekeeping operations in the Solomon Islands. The mission is known as ‘Operation Anode’ and is still ongoing. His non-Aboriginal mates in the Army have always considered him their comrade. He said, *“There is no separation in any way, shape or form.”* To illustrate that colour is no barrier in the Army, Garth O’Connell advised that while he was on ‘Operation Anode’, he was the leader of eight fully trained Infantry combat riflemen and combat medics, all Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds. His team includes: *“ ‘Cheeky’ who is a Muslim of Syrian and Lebanese background; ‘Dan’, a Greek-Cypriot; ‘Peds’ who is French-Canadian; ‘Evan’ and ‘Conno’ both being of Irish/Scottish/British background and ‘Dave’, a Buddhist of Vietnamese parents who escaped to Australia after the Vietnam war.”* They were all Australians with different skin colours, but according to Garth O’Connell, there has always been ‘a green skin policy’ in the Infantry, no matter their ethnicity, they are just the one common colour – green.



Garth O’Connell
Photo courtesy of ADF and Garth O’Connell

The only negative experience that Garth O’Connell has had was with the American soldiers while he was on exchange in the USA with the US Army in 1998. An American soldier made a racist remark about Garth O’Connell and one of his fellow soldiers, a Korean Australian. Another American soldier laughed at the remark. All Australian soldiers took offence and resolved in ‘physically handling’ the two American soldiers whilst they were all in the back of the truck. A quick investigation of the incident conducted by his unit found that the Australian servicemen were *“in the right morally”*, but they were cautioned *“to try and not punch out the next red-neck Yank who makes racist remarks ... but to alert the Headquarters first.”*

8. ‘Mateship’: the strong bond

All Indigenous veterans treasured the ‘mateship’ with their fellow servicemen. They all found the camaraderie and bond formed during their years of service was strong and enduring.

Harry Allie has always enjoyed a good relationship with all his fellow servicemen regardless of their rank. In fact, he claimed that the mateship formed in those early days is still as strong as ever. He still feels the strong bond with his old mates and colleagues at the many reunions that he attends.

¹⁴ Reville, Vol 83 No. 5, p. 28

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

In fact, many Indigenous veterans remembered instances of support from their non-Indigenous comrades when they faced discrimination from the general public.

Ray McMinn recalled that when he went to a pub in Queensland with his non-Indigenous shipmates and was asked to leave by the publican, all shipmates left with him.

His experience is not unique as similar encounters were recalled by Gary Oakley. While he was serving on a submarine and at Cairns, a group decided to go to a nightclub. He and the other Aboriginal serviceman were denied entry while the non-Indigenous servicemen were admitted. When they queried this, they were told, *'you are not allowed in here'*. The three non-Indigenous servicemen went inside, and told the twenty or so submariners in there that their two Aboriginal mates were denied entry. *"So all the guys just walked out. That was what the Defence Force was about. They were making a stand, you can't stop one of our sailors coming in, they were our friends."*

Mr Archibald has learnt from oral histories told by some of the elders of his family that the Archibalds were very popular with everyone, especially F R Archibald who was always playing pranks on the other soldiers. *"They were all good mates and the war seemed to diminish racial differences, and it brought them close together."*

Harry Allie confided that he and his friends had a unique way to combat racism. When they went out for drinks in Adelaide, he was the one to pay for the drinks last. When the publican refused to serve him because of his Aboriginality, they were ready to leave by then, as they already had their few drinks. Harry Allie had always been confident that his non-Indigenous friends *"would take things up for him"* and he was by no means on his own.

Garth O'Connell has found that, after his peacekeeping deployment, the attitudes of his non-Indigenous mates to him have not changed at all, rather the bond has strengthened. He was of the view that, *"Through our shared hardships, teamwork and conditions we had a better appreciation of each other's different ethnic and cultural background."*

An Indigenous serviceman from New Zealand, introduced by Harry Allie, provided a different perspective about Aboriginal soldiers.¹⁵ He confirmed that once in the Army, they all received the same treatment. The indigenous servicemen from Australia and New Zealand respected each other and the bond was strong. They might be able to 'stir each other up' but no one else was allowed to do so. Furthermore, they would 'band' together to face their adversaries.

¹⁵ Unnamed in respect of his wishes.

In a poem written by Sapper Bert Beros in the Second World War, a tribute to his fellow Aboriginal soldier, Private West, the respect and admiration that a non-Indigenous serviceman has for his fellow Indigenous comrade was evident:

Poem: The Coloured Digger¹⁶

He came and joined the colours, when the War God's anvil rang,
He took up modern weapons to replace his boomerang,
He waited for no call-up, he didn't need a push,
He came in from the stations, and the townships of the bush.

He helped when help was wanting, just because he wasn't deaf;
He is right amongst the columns of the fighting A.I.F.
He is always there when wanted, with his Owen gun or Bren,
He is in the forward area, the place where men are men.

He proved he's still a warrior, in action not afraid,
He faced the blasting red hot fire from mortar and grenade;
He didn't mind when food was low, or we were getting thin,
He didn't growl or worry then, he'd cheer us with his grin.

He'd heard us talk democracy--, They preach it to his face--
Yet knows that in our Federal House there's no one of his race.
He feels we push his kinsmen out, where cities do not reach,
And Parliament has yet to hear the Abo's maiden speech.
One day he'll leave the Army, then join the League he shall,
And he hopes we'll give a better deal to the Aboriginal.

9. Public Attitude

While Indigenous servicemen were respected and treated as comrades by their fellow servicemen, their treatment from the general public was a different story. Discrimination from the public was common, both during the war and when Indigenous servicemen returned home from the war. This was the experiences of many Indigenous servicemen prior to and after the Vietnam War.

Roy Barker's experience might be the exception as he recalls that, during the Japanese bombing of Darwin when the country was under threat, public opinion of Indigenous soldiers contributing to the defence of the country was favourable. His experience of the general public was good, as everyone felt they had to be united to repel the enemy.

Public attitudes have changed since Garth O'Connell has joined the ADF so he has not encountered any problems personally, but he has been told by several older Indigenous ex-servicemen and women who have served in the Second World War, Korean War, Malayan Emergency, Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War that it was very different for them and there has always been an appreciable difference in attitudes towards Indigenous servicemen between the general public and those in the military.

¹⁶ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-digger-march.html#ixzz1I2mapveH>

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

Mr Archibald did not think public attitude had changed at all when his father and first cousins joined the service and *'they were treated badly and ridiculed.'* He attributed this to government policies at the time, which governed every aspect of Aboriginal people and had a huge effect on attitudes of the general public, Aboriginal people were viewed as *'bone lazy, backward and second class citizens.'*

In Victor Bartley's opinion, the general public has never been fully aware of the contribution and commitments of Indigenous Australians to the country and this influenced their opinion of Indigenous people.

Through oral history and talking to other families who also had relatives in the Second World War, Mr Archibald also found that Indigenous soldiers did not get much mention at all while they were fighting overseas. He echoed Mr Bartley's view that not many people were aware of the fact that Indigenous people fought in the war. He did not think that public attitudes towards Indigenous soldiers change after the war. Apart from a few families of the soldiers who they served with, his relatives were treated no different from before they went to war.

Ray McMinn shared the same view, that the general public was ignorant of the fact that there were Aboriginal servicemen in every war since the Boer War, and certainly the public had never realised their contribution.

Gary Oakley also agreed that there was no public awareness of Indigenous Australians serving in the Defence Force prior to the Vietnam War. In the country areas, Indigenous people were still subject to stereotyping and were often seen as a bunch of lazy layabouts. Gary Oakley attributed the general public attitude prior to the Vietnam War to the fact that Aboriginal people were looking for their rights, including citizenship and land rights, which might be the cause of agitation amongst some people in the general public. Although some people were in favour of equal rights for Aboriginal people, it seemed the people who opposed them had received all the media attention and as a result, there was a lot of agitation and mixed feelings amongst the public.

As Gary Oakley said, *'Once you get out of the uniform, you are second rate citizen.'* He recalled a time when he was invited to a wedding of his mate's daughter in Western Australia. He was refused a drink at the bar and was told, *"We don't serve your kind in here"*. Argument ensued and he was nearly thrown out until they found out he was with the bridal party who was having the reception in the hotel. *"They apologised to me, but it [discrimination] is out there. It just depends on where you are, because some places in North Queensland, West Australia, and South Australia, and Central Australia outside Alice Springs, there is a real racist atmosphere and people were brought up that way, it's just how it is."*

After serving their country at the war front, from the Boer War to even after the Vietnam War, many Indigenous servicemen found, upon their return to the country, they were barred from joining the Returned and Services League. After they had served the country, and treated on equal footings as their fellow non-Indigenous comrades during service, they had returned to find that nothing had changed, they were treated as second class citizens and had to face discrimination all over again.

It was common occurrence for Indigenous servicemen to be denied service in clubs and pubs.

For many Indigenous ex-servicemen, the adjustment from being treated as equal, to living back on the fringe and treated as second class citizens was difficult.

However, it was even worse for Vietnam veterans, as they had to face public hostility. For all Indigenous Vietnam veterans consulted, their memory of the general public's attitude to their involvement in Vietnam was not a pleasant one. Due to anti-war sentiment at the time, all Vietnam veterans were frowned on by the general public. There was no acknowledgement of Vietnam veterans' contribution to the country and no support of any kind for any physical or mental problems they might have experienced as a result of the war. The first welcome home parade for Vietnam veterans was held in 1987, many years after their return to Australia.

Gary Oakley recalled that he walked into an anti-war rally when he returned from Vietnam at seventeen years of age and was still in his uniform. The police had to quickly put him into a police truck for his own protection. He was very well aware that, all Vietnam veterans, regardless of their race or ethnicity, would be in trouble under the same circumstances, and it had nothing to do with his Aboriginality.

In fact, all Indigenous Vietnam veterans realised they were not targeted and scorn because of their race, rather, it reflected the adverse public opinion at the time of the government's involvement in the Vietnam War. They knew their non-Indigenous comrades had also experienced the same problems. Even so, being spit on or having red paint thrown at them, or being called child killers, must have been a bitter memory for all Vietnam War veterans, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. On one hand, they understood the public was protesting against the government, but on the other hand, they questioned why the public had shown their hostility to the servicemen at all.

10. Government policies and impact on families of Indigenous servicemen

Post Boer War – Aboriginal trackers denied re-entry into Australia

It is well known that Indigenous servicemen faced discrimination when they returned home from the war front, but for some Aboriginal people who served in the Boer War, it was doubtful that they even made their way back to the country. It has recently come to light that, of the 22,000 Australians fought in the Boer War and survived, 50 Aboriginal trackers were denied re-entry into Australia because they fell under the new Immigration Protection Act which did not permit coloured people into the country. During the time of the Boer War, as no coloured people were allowed to serve in the armed forces, the Aboriginal Australians were sent to the war front as bullock drovers and trackers, but because they were not enlisted, they were left over at their own device. Dr Kerwin, an Aboriginal Professor from Griffith University, has spent the last four years trying to find out what happened to those trackers, whether they were left behind in South Africa or whether, without the support of the Australian Government, they were able to find their own way home.¹⁷

¹⁷ ABC World Today 31/5/2010, www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2010/s2913714.htm

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

First World War – Indigenous servicemen's allotment failed to reach their families

During the First World War, many Indigenous Australians had allotments taken out of their pay for their mothers or wives while they were fighting for their country.¹⁸ But according to Gary Oakley who has come across to records of letters and stories, there were cases that the money never reached their families. “*The wives would write to their husbands, ‘where is the money?’ The husbands would write back, ‘but I’m sending it home’. It was the government taking it and did not pass it on.*” He was certain that such incidents occur in the First World War but it had changed since then. ‘*Things have changed. If you were fighting in Vietnam, and you made an allotment to your home to your wife or to your mother, she would get it in the bank the day you were paid.*’

Post First World War - Missing out on ‘Soldier Settlement Scheme’

After the First World War, many non-Indigenous soldiers received land under the “soldier settlement” scheme, returned servicemen could go into a ballot to receive a block of farm land, but Aboriginal soldiers missed out.¹⁹ They were not permitted to go in the ballot. What was worse, they found that the best land in Aboriginal reserves were often confiscated and carved up for soldier settlement blocks.²⁰

Exemption Certificates

Despite their war service, Indigenous servicemen found their treatment by the government upon their return after the First World War was no better than before. They were the least honoured and compensated. Their contribution was not acknowledged, the only concession might be the grant of Exemption Certificates.²¹ Under the Queensland’s Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (later Aborigines Protection Act), Exemption Certificates could be granted to an Aboriginal person who would then be allowed to receive white award wages instead of partial rate, which was about two-thirds of white award wages.²² However, this was not automatically issued to all returned Aboriginal servicemen

In 1943 the law was amended so that Aboriginal Australians who carried an Exemption Certificate were allowed to drink alcohol. To many Indigenous servicemen, this was degrading. Reg Saunders, an outstanding Aboriginal soldier who was commissioned as an officer, simply refused to carry an Exemption Certificate with him.²³ Being a proven leader in the military, respected by many in the community, he said, “*I reckon it’s degrading to ...proof that I’m permitted to have a glass of beer.*”²⁴ Reg Saunders usually went to those places that recognised and accepted him, but many other Indigenous servicemen would have been forced to carry an Exemption Certificate in order to be permitted to drink.

¹⁸ *Too Dark for The Light Horse*, page 10

¹⁹ The Standard, 11 November 2009, page 9

²⁰ Babana News, February 2009, page 3

²¹ *Too Dark For The Light Horse*, page 10

²² *Too Dark for The Light Horse*, page 10

²³ Gordon, H. *The Embarrassing Australian*, page 12

²⁴ Gordon, H. *The Embarrassing Australian*, p.139

Post Second World War

There was not much change in the experiences of Aboriginal servicemen who served in the Second World War, they came back to face much the same discrimination as before. After enjoying the relative freedom, equal opportunity and equality in service, on their return they were dispatched back to where they lived before, and in the process, many lost touch with their friends, did not have access to any support and had difficulty settling back into their restricted life at the missions and reserves. They still could not own any land, an entitlement offered to non-Indigenous returned servicemen.

Still barred from soldier settlement scheme

Roy Barker described the ban of Aboriginal ex-servicemen to participate in the ballot as 'devastating'. Just in Brewarrina, he knew there were fifteen or sixteen Aboriginal Australians who joined the war. He recalled a few returned Aboriginal soldiers went to Bourke where a big parcel of land was being divided for ex soldiers, but their hope of getting some land was dashed - being Aboriginal, they could not even go in the ballot. The reason cited by the authority was that they did not have experience on the land, '*a land that we live on for years*', he said.

Difficulty in getting membership for Returned and Services Leagues

Roy Barker recalled they also required special permission to join the Returned and Services League. He joined the war because of his love for the country, out of the people he knew who went to war, four were killed while in service, his family did not receive any support or pension; he also knew there were families struggling for their livelihood, as far as he was concerned, the system has let them down. He has never joined the Anzac march in the last five to eight years, as he thought "*it was not right for him to march.*"

Difficulty in readjusting to the 'bad old times'

Garth O'Connell knew of '*many of our Indigenous ANZAC men and women who returned from war they had a tremendously hard time re-adjusting to the 'bad old times' of civilian Australia. For the vast majority of Indigenous men and women who joined the military, it was their first equal pay, equal conditions and merit based 'level playing field' that they had not had at all in their civilian lives before the war. This is especially true for those in the First and Second World Wars.*'

Difficulty in getting employment

Again, Reg Saunders' experience was a good illustration, after his discharge, there was no job offer from either the government or private firms, he had to do odd jobs for a builder.²⁵

Difficulty in keeping contact with their mates

Mr Archibald has also learnt from his family's oral history, as soon as the war was over and when his relatives returned, they had to go back to live on the Aboriginal reserves and

²⁵ H. Gordon, p. 138, *The Embarrassing Australian*

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

missions and faced discrimination again. Even though his father formed strong bonds with his comrades during the war and had lots of friends, because he had to go back to live on the reserve upon his return to the country, it was difficult for him to keep in contact with them.

Impact on families of Indigenous servicemen

Mr Archibald could not find any record that his family has received any support from the government. He advised, *“While the relatives were overseas fighting, the families just stayed and lived on reserves and missions, their lives dictated by the mission and station managers. On their return, they did not get the recognition like non-Aboriginal soldiers and were not provided with support or compensation of any sort.”*

While Jane Madden’s grandfather was serving overseas, her grandmother did not receive any financial support and had to work as a seamstress and supported by both families. Ms Madden recalled that when his grandfather returned from service, there was no acknowledgement of his contribution. He was badly affected by the war but there was no support. He was on a disability pension till he passed in his 50s. There was no financial assistance offered to the family for his funeral, not even the RSL recognised him even though he had been a member for a number of years. Ms Madden’s family all had to ‘chip in’ to give him a Salvation Army service.

Mr Archibald, through researching his family history, has found a lot more information about his first cousin, Private F R Archibald. He enlisted in May 1940, after training at Greta and Palestine, he joined his unit in Egypt in January 1941 and served in the Battle of Bardia, He then followed action in the battles of Tobruk and Benghazi, before heading to Greece and Crete. He and twelve other soldiers were cut off by the German army during the evacuation in Greece and eventually made their way to the coast where a fishing boat took them back to Crete. They were under heavy bombardment during their evacuation from Crete. They were then sent to fight in Papua New Guinea where he was killed on 24 November 1942 along the Kokoda Trail. Private F R Archibald was buried at Bomana War Cemetery in Papua New Guinea along with his fallen fellow soldiers. Traditionally when Aboriginal people pass on, they are buried in the country of their ancestors. When this could not be done, ceremonies had to be carried out to enable the person’s spirit to return to its birth place from where it can later be reborn. The government’s disregard and/or ignorance of Aboriginal culture has caused the Archibald family great sorrow and grief as they have not been able to obtain financial support to perform the necessary Aboriginal traditional rites to bring Private Archibald’s estranged spirit home. To this date, the family is still continuing their struggle to achieve this.

Stolen Generation

Worse of all, some Aboriginal veterans, upon their return, would find that while they were away fighting for their country, their children were taken away. Harry Allie advised that there were many instances in places like the Central Coast and Kempsey.

Gary Oakley also confirmed that some Indigenous servicemen serving in Vietnam were of the stolen generation themselves. Children were still being taken away from Indigenous families in the 1960s. Even though by this time, allotments by Aboriginal servicemen in Vietnam would reach their families, there were still instances that the wife of an

Aboriginal soldier might get reported because she was on her own raising her children. If someone from the community complained, “*she has three kids, she is black and she lives on the outskirts of town and she might have trouble looking after he kids.*” As a result, the returned servicemen might find that their children were taken away while they were serving the country.

The failure to give Indigenous servicemen their full entitlements during the Second World War might primarily be due to the prevailing attitudes at the time and, in particular, the belief that the pay and conditions for Indigenous servicemen after the war should not be ‘upset’ by providing more generous pay and conditions.²⁶

Unawareness of entitlement

All currently serving Indigenous servicemen these days receive their full entitlements. In fact, since the end of the Second World War, Indigenous service men and women have been entitled to similar benefits and entitlements as non-Indigenous servicemen. However, not many Indigenous servicemen knew about this at the time.

Gary Oakley was of the view that many Indigenous Australians missed out on their entitlements because, upon their return to the country, most of them went back to their communities in the country, where they did not have the opportunity to access benefits from government agencies like the Veterans Affairs. For many Aboriginal veterans, particularly in the remote communities, where medical problems such as eye infections/diseases, hearts and lungs conditions are prevalent, it was critical for them to access government support and benefits but they were simply unable to do so.

For many Indigenous veterans, they did not even know their entitlements or that support was available. As Mr Oakley said, “*Indigenous servicemen and servicewomen are the quiet achievers, they joined the service, served their country and then they went back to their communities and disappeared, and they were not aware of their rights.*”

Gary Oakley further advised that he himself has no problem getting his health care and benefits for medical conditions he has sustained as a result of his service.

To compound the problem, Indigenous veterans are reluctant to put their names on lists. It is difficult for the government to locate them. Gary Oakley attributed this as the result of 200 years of oppressive history, “*Indigenous servicemen were worried that if they put their names on the list, the government would come and get them, take their kids. It will take a lot more to change their attitude and trust the government.*”

11. Facing adversity with humour and dignity

For many Indigenous veterans, they just quietly went about performing their duties in spite of the prejudice and discrimination they faced.

For Reg Saunders, “*his armour is a quiet philosophy, and he wears it with dignity. The jibes, the slights, the setbacks he has suffered in civilian life has never hurt him, because he has achieved a degree of tolerance which is denied to most white men...when he is*

²⁶ R. Hall, p. 25, *The Black Diggers*

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

*insulted...he feels genuinely sorry for the offender.”*²⁷ On one occasion when he was denied a drink at a wine saloon at Sydney’s Central Station, he just grinned and said, “*I’m not an Aboriginal, I’m an Indonesian student.*” Ironically, he got his drink then.²⁸

Harry Allie advised that one must have self confidence to combat adversity. Racism can come in different guises, and if a person is not self confident, constant discrimination can take a toll and create insecurities. Whenever he and David Williams go around to schools to speak to school children, he always stresses the importance of self confidence. “*If you are confident enough, you can look somebody in the eye, and if they disagree with you, that’s fine.*”

12. Quiet achievers

Similar to non Indigenous servicemen, Indigenous servicemen generally were anonymous people, being part of the armed units, quietly performing their required duties serving the country. However, there were some Indigenous servicemen who were decorated for outstanding actions. Private William Rawlings, 29th Battalion, was awarded Military Medal for ‘rare bravery in the performance of his duty’ in July 1917.²⁹

Len Waters was the only known Australian Aboriginal fighter pilot of the Second World War. He joined the RAAF on 24 August 1942 and was trained as a flight mechanic.

Private timothy Hughes, a South Australian,, one of the famous ‘Tobruk Rats’, was awarded the Military Medal for coolness and bravery while fighting at Papua New Guinea.

Reg Saunders, as mentioned before, was commissioned as an officer in the armed forces and commanded 200 white troops in Korea.

Herbert Murray was the inspiration behind a character in the recently released film ‘Beneath Hill 60’. He was born in Framlingham, and was only able to enlist and joined the 2nd Australian Tunnelling company in May 1917 when Aboriginal ‘half-castes’ were allowed into the army.³⁰ With his other comrades, he had to live in cramped and perilous conditions underground to dig tunnels and place mines underneath German trenches.

The Lovett family held the record of having the most family members serving in the armed forces anywhere in the Commonwealth. Five Lovett brothers went to the First World War and five signed up for the Second World War, extraordinarily, four of them already fought in the First World War. All in all, 20 members of the Lovett family have served Australia in war and peacekeeping missions.³¹ The office of Veterans Affairs in Canberra is located at Lovett Towers, a building honouring the Lovetts.

Indigenous women also played an important role in the defence of Australia. In Northern Australia, isolated RAAF outposts were supported by Indigenous women.

²⁷ H. Gordon, p.18, *The Embarrassing Australian*

²⁸ H. Gordon, p. 19, *The Embarrassing Australian*

²⁹ ‘Indigenous Australians at War’, J. Moremon

³⁰ Warrnambool Extra, 21 April 2010, p.4

³¹ <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/national/brave-family-spurned-by-land-they-served/2007/05/27/1180205078964.html>

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) joined the Australian Women's Army Service in 1942 after her two brothers were captured by the Japanese in Singapore. She served as a signaller in Brisbane and later was a strong advocate of Aboriginal rights.³²

13. Recognition and acknowledgement of Indigenous veterans' contribution

Attitudes from both the government and non-Aboriginal community have gradually improved over time.

The experiences of Indigenous servicemen have changed considerably in recent years.

Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister of Australia, had made a public speech of apology to the whole country and said sorry to all Indigenous Australians, admitting the past wrong that has been done to them.

Many historians have conducted research on the contribution and experiences of the Indigenous servicemen. For example, *Aboriginal Ex-Servicemen of Central Australia* compiled by George Bray (an Elder of the Arrente people of Central Australia), listed the many Aboriginal people of Central Australia who served in the Australian Defence Force in the two Great Wars and also subsequent campaigns and conflicts; and documented some of their experiences. *Fighting for Country* was a booklet compiled by Peter Bakker, Indigenous military historian, showing photographs and information about many of the Indigenous Australians from South West Victoria, who had served in the two Great Wars and other conflicts.

The Aboriginal War Memorial Plaque on Cannon Hill in Warrnambool, Victoria was unveiled on 1 November 2010, to acknowledge the contribution and sacrifice of the region's Indigenous veterans.³³ Peter Bakker recognised this as a practical and tangible step towards true reconciliation. As Gunditjimara Aboriginal Co-operative's Marcus Clarke said, "*The Aboriginal contribution has been a missing voice from the Australian military legend and psyche for many decades. We hope this new memorial can give that voice back to them.*"³⁴

Organisations such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association, both the National office and the NSW branch, have been actively promoting awareness and advocate for Indigenous veterans, ensuring that they are able to claim for and access their entitlements. They have been working closely with other ex-service organisations such as the Returned Services League, the Vietnam Veterans Association and the Department of Veterans Affairs to seek out Indigenous veterans to ensure they are receiving their appropriate entitlements as a result of their service. David Williams, State President, not only travels around NSW, but also to Queensland, to ensure Indigenous veterans and their families are familiar with their entitlements. Harry Allie, State Secretary shares his workload and also organises the annual Indigenous veterans ceremony in Hyde Park.

³² Too Dark for the Light Horse, p.17

³³ The Koori Mail, 17 November 2010, page 11

³⁴ The Standard, 2 November 2010, page 5

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

Another volunteer group in South Australia has been tracking down Indigenous veterans of the Australian Armed Forces to ensure that Indigenous veterans claim their entitlements. The group is led by Marj Tripp, the first Aboriginal woman to join the Women's Royal Australian Navy in 1962 and funded by the RSL.

A non-profit organisation, Honouring Indigenous War Graves Inc. was established in June 2005 in Western Australia by John Schnaars, Indigenous Vietnam veteran, with the primary objective of "*honouring the service and sacrifices of indigenous veterans*" in *Western Australia*". In five years the organisation has enabled the acknowledgement of over 100 indigenous veterans throughout the state.

Australia's first Coloured Diggers March was held in Redfern, Sydney on Anzac Day, 25 April 2007 attended by hundreds of Indigenous veterans and their descendants. The aim was to draw attention to Indigenous veterans' history and contribution.

The Federal Government is working on a Register of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander war veterans since 2007.³⁵

As Gary Oakley said, "*The government is trying to amend the wrongs of the past and, be it Labor or Liberal, both are actively promoting awareness of Indigenous servicemen's contribution to Australia.*"

Government agencies and many organisations now have the Welcome to Country ceremonies to acknowledge Aboriginal custodians of the Land.

There are Aboriginal War Memorials and Memorial Plaques in different States and Territories honouring Aboriginal servicemen.

Gary Oakely advised that nowadays the Australian War Memorial requires all main galleries in the Memorial must have some Aboriginal content to reflect the contribution of Indigenous people and servicemen.

Furthermore, the Veterans Affairs now has an Aboriginal liaison person whose primary role is to promote awareness in the communities of their entitlements.

A leaflet from the Veterans Affairs entitled '*You served your country, Veteran's Affairs would like to help you*' provided by Harry Allie supports Gary Oakley's advice. The leaflet (as shown in the following page) lists out different benefits that an Indigenous serviceman may be entitled to, including disability pension, service pension and health care. It also mentions counselling services available for both veterans and their families.

³⁵ 'Indigenous war effort "not recognised"', The Age, 24 April 2009

Can Veterans' Affairs help your family?

As well as helping veterans, DVA provides benefits and services to their families.

The widows or widowers of veterans whose death is caused by or related to their service may be eligible for a pension and/or health care.

Partners of veterans may qualify for the partner service pension from the age of 50, or younger if they have a dependent child or if the veteran receives disability pension at the special rate (TPI).

Eligible veterans can also get help to pay for their children's education.



DVA Support for ADF Indigenous Personnel

Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, whose injury or illness can be linked to their service, may be eligible for rehabilitation or compensation, and transition management assistance if they are likely to be medically discharged. The Veterans' Vocational Rehabilitation Service can also assist when moving to civilian employment.

For more information contact DVA on the number listed below.

Who to talk to

Veterans' Affairs Network

1300 55 1918

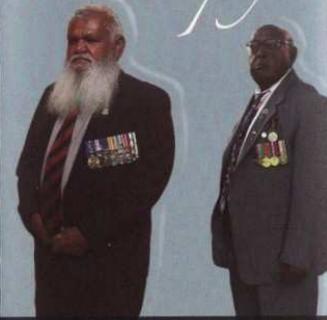
www.dva.gov.au

You can also talk to the people who gave you this brochure and they will help you contact DVA.

"you
**SERVED
YOUR
COUNTRY**

VETERANS' AFFAIRS
WOULD LIKE TO

help you



Cover: Geoff Stone (Aboriginal Vietnam Veteran),
Wanda Aidi, Torres Strait Islander WWII Veteran



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

You served your country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have served in all wars, conflicts and peace operations.

Like all other Australian veterans, Indigenous veterans and their dependants are entitled to claim the full range of Repatriation benefits, including treatment and pensions.

Can Veterans' Affairs help you?

If you fought for your country you can apply for benefits and services from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). Benefits and services may also be available to your family.



Left: Waters, World War II Aboriginal fighter pilot
Photo: Australian War Memorial Photographs (Courtesy: A. Dickford)

What you might be able to get

Disability Pension

If you have an illness or injury that was caused by or is related to your service, you may be entitled to a disability pension.

Service Pension

A service pension provides a fortnightly income for people with limited means, like Centrelink's age and disability support pensions. A service pension can be paid to veterans on the grounds of age or invalidity, and to eligible partners, widows and widowers.

To be eligible for service pension a veteran must have qualifying service (which broadly means that they incurred danger from hostile enemy forces). The age service pension is paid 5 years earlier (i.e. 60 for a male veteran) than the age pension paid by Centrelink, recognising that the intangible effects of war may result in premature ageing and/or loss of earning power.

Health Care

Some veterans can access free health care services such as medical and hospital treatment, dental care, physiotherapy, podiatry, community nursing care and medicines.

DVA can also help to cover the cost of travelling away from home to receive health care.

Put your mind At Ease

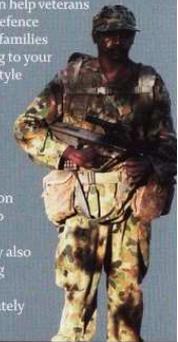
Many Australians have trouble with stress, depression and other mental health problems. DVA provides information and support to help you look after your mental health.

Visit www.at-ease.dva.gov.au to find out about mental health problems in the veteran community, and how to look after yourself and your family.

VVCS—Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service can help veterans and members of the defence community and their families with problems relating to your service, as well as lifestyle issues that affect your health and wellbeing.

Office of Australian War Graves

The Office provides official commemoration for those veterans who meet the eligibility criteria. The Office may also be contacted regarding permission to use the Service badge for privately arranged memorials.



Nowadays Australian Defence Force has a zero tolerance policy for racism. They have a unit to recruit Indigenous Australians into the ADF.

Following the rocky road of the quiet warriors

Many Indigenous Australians, instead of enlisting for the ADF, join the military through enlistment in the 'Regional Force Surveillance Units' of the Army. There are three of these units:

- North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) which is based in Darwin;
- The Pilbarra Regiment, based in Western Australia; and
- 51 Far North Queensland Regiment (FNQR), based in Far North Queensland

These units, especially NORFORCE and 51 FNQR, have very high levels of Indigenous enlistment. The purpose of these units is to provide surveillance over the coast and hinterland of north Australia. To perform this role the units enlist recruits who live in the area and have intimate knowledge of the landscape. .

As detailed local knowledge is so important in these units, the Army has waived the full requirements for enlistment and accepts Indigenous recruits who may not otherwise meet the health, psychological screening, education and criminal record screening applied to recruits elsewhere. However, they cannot transfer to other Army units without first meeting the full recruiting standards. Local Indigenous people strongly support these units.

14. Conclusion

Indigenous Australians have served in all the wars and conflicts that Australia has involved in, and also in peacekeeping mission around the world. Yet, for many years, their service was not recognised or acknowledged. Many people are not aware of their involvement at all.

'Protecting Country' is now the official slogan of the Indigenous Recruitment campaign in the Australian Defence Force.³⁶ But Indigenous Australians have been doing that since the Boer War.

John Lovett said, "*We have young people in the community who have no idea about the role their people have played in the defence of this country. They would benefit from the dignity this knowledge would give them.*"³⁷

Due to strong efforts at individual, armed forces and government levels, publications by historians about Indigenous servicemen, and websites showing information about their involvement, the contribution of Indigenous Australians is finally being acknowledged.

However, there are still Indigenous veterans out there who are not aware of their entitlements, and who may still suffer the effects of the war and require financial and wellbeing support. Many are still facing social injustice or living in poverty as a result of the neglect of government upon their return from service.

As Gary Oakley said, '*things have changed, in the last thirty years things have changed for the better, it has been a long rocky road and there is still a long way to go.*'

³⁶ Indigenous Australians At War exhibition, Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne

³⁷ Indigenous Australians At War exhibition, Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne

15. Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the following community members for their participation in my project. I wish to sincerely thank them for their generosity in giving me the time and providing information and their views regarding the subject. I acknowledge that they are the custodians of the information and still own the intellectual property/copyright of any material they have provided to me.

Harry Allie

Mr Archibald

Peter Bakker

Roy Barker

Victor Bartley

Robert A. Hall

Jane Madden

Ray McMinn

Gary Oakley

Garth O'Connell

David Williams

I also wish to thank Ms Laurel Russ, Manager, Aboriginal Unit, NSW Ombudsman for her help in conducting the interview with Mr Archibald for me. Without her help, I would not be able to obtain the information from Mr Archibald.

Finally, a note of thanks to Mr Steve Kinmond, Deputy Ombudsman for putting me in touch with Mr Roy Barker; and Mr Alistair Ferguson for putting me in touch with Mr Victor Bartley. Thank you.

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