BLACK DIGGERS

Introductory Research

The Dark Warrior

I am from the people which Australians forgot
Yet when they searched for their identity
I knew who I was
I gave respect to their law and religion
And yet they denied me of mine

For many years I worked alongside of them
But they failed to recognize me

I cried when they destroyed my land
But they never saw my tears
I played football and sport with them and they
Idolized me but after the game they forgot who I was

When invaders threatened this land I wore a slouch hat
And fought alongside of them
When the war was over and we held freedom in our hands
They denied me citizenship, they denied me war entitlements

I have never felt anger towards them
Only disappointment

In the passing of my life, my soul will rest with my people
And my children will grow with their children
Please let us not make the same mistake twice

Respect is the finest adornment of mankind
Surely then in my passing when you count my gifts
You will recognize respect

Proudly I was a warrior and protector of my people
I fought with an unbiased opinion for all Australians

I was an Aboriginal soldier for Australia
Poem by Victor Churchill Dale

Source: https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-coloured-digger-march#ixzz4jNL2FbfK

Introduction to Tom Wright's play 'Black Diggers'

*A small component of the comparative text analysis requires you to be aware of the time-period and events surrounding the construction of the text. Wright's **Black Diggers** primarily focuses on Australia during World War I and the indigenous experience. Unfortunately, not many official records have been obtained from this time period which is reflected in Wright's text.*

*Within this collection of articles and activities are resources that you can use to attempt to comprehend the time period Wright attempts to explore and become the basis for comparisons between the Australian Indigenous experience and the American slavery experience depicted in the **The Longest Memory**.*

→ Read the foreword and introduction to the play

Note-Taking on Historical and Social Context:

Using: https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/anzac-day-coloured-digger-march#axzz4jN139mUH

The play has its 60 scenes divided into five core parts, you will need to take notes surrounding these five sections:

- **Pre-Nation:** the experience of indigenous people prior to World War 1. Focus on the late 1800s up till 1914.
- **Enlistment:** the process of Indigenous men signing up
- **The Threat of War**: the experiences of the men on the frontline/serving for our country
- **The Return**: How the men were treated upon their return, did their lives improve or worsen?
- **Legacy**: how the men have been treated currently- are they being recognized? How? When?

These are notes, not essays so please use dot points, short-hand and only supply useful information. One page per section is more than enough here. This is for your record to allow you to establish context to the experiences we will read about.

Viewing & Note-Take:

Fortunately, both the writer and director are public figures. I recommend viewing these clips below:

Black Diggers Post Evening Show Discussion, Arts Centre Melbourne:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=NQjcg7pYQnc

Black Diggers Transforming Stories: Creating memorable experiences, State Library Queensland:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK0gT2Prcjs&t=629s

Black Diggers Post School Matinee Discussion, Arts Centre Melbourne:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLwqeVP2Njo&feature=player_embedded

Living Black: S18 Ep7 – Diggers Memorial, SBS Living Black
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZWpJEKi3aM

Key Notes:

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

Indigenous soldiers remembered: the research behind Black Diggers

January 24, 2014 12.56pm AEDT

Url: https://theconversation.com/indigenous-soldiers-remembered-the-research-behind-black-diggers-21056

In August 2012, I was invited by the Sydney Festival to work with Wesley Enoch, Artistic Director of Queensland Theatre Company, to assist in developing Black Diggers, currently playing as part of the 2014 Sydney Festival.

This major theatre project set out to explore Indigenous military service in the first world war, and reflect upon the remarkable absence of those stories from our national history and mythologising of that conflict.

Unknown soldiers

Black Diggers premiered at the Sydney Festival last weekend – and initial inspiration came from the discovery by festival director Lieven Bertels, that a young Aboriginal soldier, Private Rufus Rigney from Raukkan in South Australia, was buried in the memorial cemetery near Bertels' home town in Belgium.

How did this young man come to be buried on the other side of the world, fighting for a nation that refused to acknowledge him as a citizen?

It was our job to try to find this out, and also to find a way of translating this and other experiences into theatre.

Remarkably, these stories are not more widely known, despite the efforts and enthusiasm of researchers such as Rod Pratt, David Huggonson, Philipa Scarlett, Doreen Kartinyeri, Gary Oakley and Garth O'Connell, among many others.

Beyond service records held as part of the collection of the National Archives of Australia, the photographic collection of the Australian War Memorial, a small number of scholarly works, and the occasional family history, the significant military service of Indigenous soldiers in the first world war remains a shameful gap in the Australian historical record.

Our research for Black Diggers primarily comprised of painstaking trawls through archival collections, and long conversations and consultations with various cultural and institutional experts. As a result of this process, we encountered the stories of many Indigenous soldiers, but in most instances the stories were only fragmentary – incomplete accounts of small parts of the lives of these men.

Clearly, the research for this theatre project has only begun to scratch the surface of this subject. But the stories that did emerge to form the basis of the script for Black Diggers by Tom Wright are compelling and deeply moving.

Australia, 1914

When the first world war broke out in 1914, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not considered citizens of Australia, but were rather the wards of the local "Protector of Aborigines".

They were paid low wages, were often forced to live on reserves and mission stations, could not enter a public bar, vote, marry non-Aboriginal partners or buy property. They were actively discriminated against – and yet when war was declared, many Indigenous men wanted to join up and fight for Australia.

The Defence Act of 1903 (amended in 1909) prevented those who were not of "substantially European descent" from being able to enlist in any of the armed forces. Many Indigenous men who tried to enlist were rejected on the grounds of race, but others managed to slip through the net.

In 1917, following the defeat of a conscription referendum, those restrictions were slightly eased. A new order stated that:

Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force [AIF] provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin.
Despite the difficulties, it seems that at least 1,000 Indigenous soldiers managed to join the AIF, out of a total of only 80,000 Indigenous people thought to be living in Australia at the time.

Some did so despite being rejected several times for being insufficiently white. Some lied about their age, name or parentage, and some were granted formal permission from their local Protector of Aborigines to serve.

Once past the initial barriers to enlistment, these soldiers fully integrated into the AIF. While almost exclusively of low ranks, the black diggers were paid the same as other soldiers, underwent the same training, and experienced the same hardships.

An unrecognised contribution

As Gary Oakley of the Australian War Memorial has noted on several occasions: "The Army was Australia's first equal-opportunity employer". In their civilian life they had to endure constant racist slurs and attitudes. But in the trenches, any negative stereotypes about many Aboriginal diggers quickly disappeared as they lived, ate, laughed and died with these young men.

Indigenous diggers fought in every significant engagement of the war – from Gallipoli, to Palestine, to the Western Front. They served as infantrymen, machine gunners, light artillery and as lighthorsemen. They won the respect of their fellow soldiers, and won many bravery awards and commendations.

Many were wounded, some were captured, and dozens were killed. But the most tragic aspect of their service was not that they offered their lives for a country that did not recognise them as citizens, but came after they returned to Australia.

When they came back home they were shunned, their sacrifices ignored and their families oppressed even further by the government. Very few Indigenous diggers were given the land grants offered to returned soldiers, and in many cases the land for grants to war veterans was taken away from

Indigenous communities whose men had fought overseas. War pensions and back-pay were frequently denied, and very few Indigenous diggers were welcomed at their local RSL – except sometimes on ANZAC Day.

Black diggers today

Even though their small number seems relatively insignificant compared to the 416,809 men who enlisted in the AIF to fight in the first world war, the significance of the black diggers to modern Aboriginal history is immense.

In recent years, the long-forgotten service of these men has started to be acknowledged and celebrated. The Ipswich re-burial in April 2012 of Trooper Horace Dalton, 11th Lighthorse Regiment, with full military honours and traditional ceremony, is a welcome example of this shift.

Today the bodies of Indigenous Australians who fell in the battlefields of France, Belgium, Turkey and Palestine remain buried thousands of miles away from their ancestral homes.

Their brave spirits deserve the honour of remembrance – lest we forget again.

David Williams
Honorary Associate, Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney

Key Notes:

Black Anzac: the life and death of an Aboriginal man who fought for king and country

Url: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/23/black-diggers-are-hailed-on-anzac-day-but-the-indigenous-great-war-was-in-australia

Paul Daley, 23rd April 2017

But back to that little watercourse on the Atherton tablelands, where in 1887 the boy survived to become Douglas Grant and his people's creek was renamed not to commemorate those murdered but the very act of murdering them. Douglas Grant's life draws together the competing historical elements of the Australian national narrative. As an Indigenous person, he was removed from his family with extreme violence, served in the 1st Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and became a prisoner of war in Berlin. He was later an Aboriginal rights activist and semi-vagrant in Sydney and Melbourne.

Through him or, at least, through the boy Poppin Jerri – we have a way in to the story of the first big conflicts, the Frontier Wars, that raged across this continent after the initial east coast European contact in 1770 and the invasion in 1788. For what happened to Poppin Jerri's people at Butchers Creek was replicated in an unknown number of battles, skirmishes, guerrilla attacks and reprisals as the pastoral and mining frontier crept further north and west. These conflicts killed countless – because uncounted – Indigenous people. The deaths of police, soldiers, settlers, shepherds and convict labourers are more quantifiable; they were quantified because those doing the counting thought these deaths mattered.

Counting the uncountable

It is conservatively estimated that there were 20,000 violent deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally from 1788 until Coniston in the Northern Territory in 1928. This figure is used consistently by historians such as Henry Reynolds and John Connor, who have been at the vanguard of promoting cultural awareness about frontier war since the 1980s. Sceptical historians have contested this figure, though not that of 2,000 non-Indigenous combatants and bystanders (a ratio of some 10 to one).

More recent academic research indicates, however, that the fatalities figure might have been at least three times higher than 20,000. Indeed, the evidence suggests the true black–white ratio of frontier war deaths in Australia might have been 44 to one. Historians Raymond Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen have concluded that in Queensland alone at least 65,180 Indigenous people were killed from the 1820s to the early 1900s. Considering Evans and Ørsted-Jensen focus just on Queensland, their findings have implications for the number of Indigenous Australians killed continent-wide.

If Evans and Ørsted-Jensen are to be taken seriously (and on the basis of their research, first made public at the 2014 Australian Historical Association conference, they ought to be) that is another reason why Australia should engage in a mature discussion about the conflicts that raged across the frontier and perhaps cost some 65,000 lives in Queensland alone – more than the 61,000 Australian deaths in World War I, the conflict that has so embedded itself in Australian consciousness. If settler Australia is ever to deal properly with frontier conflict and its continuing legacy, that body-count comparison would be a good place to start.

Evans and Ørsted-Jensen scoured the remaining records of the Queensland Native Police Force and studied the prevalence of "black police" barracks from 1859 to 1898 to determine the approximate number of patrols, contacts and killings, based on reported body counts:

> *[W]e arrive at the sobering total of 41,040 Aborigines killed during 3,420 official frontier dispersals across almost 40 years of conflict. This mortality figure ... is a mathematical and statistical projection, produced by cautiously sampling the fragmentary evidence left to us about the severe degree of destruction accompanying the long project of land dispossession in colonial Queensland. It is not and can never be a precisely accurate figure, nor is it a confidently absolute or maximal one. That number will never be known ... Furthermore, let us be entirely clear about what we are claiming here. The 41,040 death rate does not represent anywhere near a full quotient of those who fell on the Queensland frontier. It is merely a native police statistic that does not even cover, at this point, official dispersal activities across the prior decade of 1849-59. These may well have accounted for another 3,000–4,000 deaths.*

The 41,040 number also excludes actions against Indigenous people carried out not by police but by settlers. The authors calculate that these incidents accounted for 43% of the total number of clashes or approximately 2,580 clashes, giving a total of 6,000 clashes, police and settler. Evans and Ørsted-Jensen conclude that their body counts for native police and settlers "amount to no less than 61,680 in 6,000 attacks". They add another estimated minimum of 3,500 Indigenous and 1,500 settler deaths for the 1850s to "arrive at an aggregate of 66,680 killed" between the 1820s and early 1900s.

Evans and Ørsted-Jensen's research confronts the received view that the Australian wars that matter – or even the only ones that happened – are the ones that were fought overseas. The authors know their research makes some of us feel uncomfortable. Massacre denialism among some Australians and the mainstream media has driven the authors towards conservative calculations. Still, they want "to return to history the full ledger of those who, long ago, died protecting their sovereignty, their cultures, their homelands and their peoples but whose deaths were more often hidden than acknowledged by a society that made furtiveness its watch-word".

The Evans–Ørsted-Jensen research bears directly on the themes of this collection of essays. Of course war is important, as one of the many influences on making Australians what we are, but this is not war as most of us have known it in the last century. Because the research indicates a frontier conflict death rate in Queensland alone that eclipses Australian fatalities in World War I, the authors effectively argue that the Great War was never the greatest war in Australian history. They quote with approval Henry Reynolds, who says what happened on the domestic frontier "was clearly one of the few significant wars in Australian history and arguably the single most important one. For Indigenous Australia, it was their Great War".

The silence

In his 1968 Boyer Lectures, anthropologist WEH Stanner called it the "great Australian silence". He was referring to the failure of a number of books to substantively address Australian Indigenous history, including frontier violence:

> *It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.*

There has been lumbering progress since Stanner's lectures almost half a century ago, not least among historians, even of the centre right. Writers of novels, narrative non-fiction, popular history, plays and screenplays have increasingly addressed the extreme violence meted out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on the colonial frontier and later, down to Coniston in 1928, which remained for some people until quite recently, a part of living memory.

Rival tribesmen would be enlisted and militarised to slaughter other blacks

Indigenous Australia's enduring culture of oral history (often reflected in music, visual art and dance) records the violence of the frontier (and corroborates what happened) in no less detail than the written words of the white perpetrators. In One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity, John Harris recounts the description by early anthropologist EM Curr of the colonial violence involving Indigenous people and invaders. Curr said it would usually take up to a decade after a settler's occupation of land before traditional owners were let back in as visitors or to hunt nearby, during which time "the squatter's party and the tribe live in a state of warfare". Settlers would shoot "down a savage now and then when opportunity offers, and calling in the aid of black police from time to time to avenge in a wholesale way the killing or frightening of stock off the run by the tribe". More cattle would be speared, more Indigenous men shot down. "In revenge", Curr said, "a shepherd or stockman is speared". The violence would escalate with the introduction of the "black police", officially the native police, a tragic, little-explored phenomenon among white historians of frontier justice, whereby rival tribesmen would be enlisted and militarised to slaughter other blacks. Curr explained how these men would be "enlisted, mounted, armed, liberally supplied with ball cartridges and despatched to the spot under the sub-inspector of police".

> *Hot for blood, the black troopers are laid on the trail of the tribe; then follow the careful tracking, the surprise, the shooting at a distance safe from spears, the deaths of many of the males, the capture of the women, who know that if they abstain from flight they will be spared; the gratified lust of the savage, and the sub-inspector's report that the tribe has been "dispersed", for such is the official term used to convey the occurrence of these proceedings.*
>
> *When the tribe has gone through several repetitions of this experience and the chief part of its young men been butchered, the women, the remnant of the men and such children as the black troopers have not troubled themselves to shoot, are let in or allowed to come to the settler's homestead and the war is at an end. Finally a shameful disease is introduced and finishes what the rifle began.*

The stories about the massacring (and other terrible abuses) of Indigenous people are easy to find in the archives of major cultural institutions in Australia and Great Britain. The personal journals, diaries, letters, memoirs and, indeed, the published works of colonial and post-federation officials, troops, police, farmers, miners and pioneering frontiersmen (and women) are replete with accounts of battles with – and all too often reprisal massacres of – "natives" who are invariably referred to as "marauding", "troublesome" or "threatening". Through the National Library of Australia's Trove, very old government records and digitised newspapers can easily be found. They recount in detail the violence described by Curr. Little probing is needed to uncover biographies of the white men – such as Mounted Constable George Murray, former Light Horseman and Gallipoli hero, overseer of the murder of 31 Aboriginal men, women and children at Coniston – responsible for the slaughter.

Sometimes the blacks were simply hunted for sport or for "trophying". Little imagination is required to decipher this malignant euphemism. The body parts – especially skulls – of Indigenous people were highly sought after in early Australia. Indigenous body parts are still being surrendered to organisations, such as the repatriation unit of the National Museum of Australia, that are mandated to return them, where possible, to their country. In recent years the museum has housed body parts of as many as 600 individuals; other state museums have their own collections that cannot, for various reasons (including a lack of detail about precise provenance) be returned to country.

There is ample proof that some Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were hunted and killed merely so that parts of their bodies could be kept as curios. Bodies left at massacre sites became part of the collections of museums, medical research institutions and universities. Meanwhile, the bodies of Indigenous people who died in institutions were, barely cold, stolen and sold or given to other institutions.

The head of Onyong, the Ngambri chief, was turned into a sugar bowl and kept for years at a Tuggeranong homestead near Canberra. Other bodies were ransacked from sacred burial sites by men like George Murray Black, a farmer from Gippsland, who supplied countless skeletons to the Australian Institute of Anatomy, the University of Melbourne Medical School and many institutions in Europe.

Early newspapers offer concurring accounts (chilling in their candour and boastful detail) of the organised killings of black men, women and children on the frontier. In the journals and diaries of the frontiersmen, meanwhile, what is disquieting is the detachment of the perpetrators, the purpose that bleeds into their words as they describe the killing, the sense that they are involved merely in the extermination of subhumans.

None more so than the memoir of Korah Halcombe Wills (1828–96), a former mayor of Bowen and Mackay in Queensland, who reminisced at the end of his life about dispersing Aboriginal people in the mid-1860s. His account makes difficult reading, as he boasts of massacring Aboriginal people and chopping a man into pieces to keep as trophies. (Wills was a butcher by trade and later a publican.) He found this work to be "a horrible repulsive thing" but he persisted because "I was not going to be done out of any pet specimens of humanity". He stuffed the body parts into his saddlebags to take home.

Wills fancied a live trophy as well, so "from out of one of these mobs of blacks I selected a little girl with the intention of civilising, and one of my friends thought he would select a boy for the same purpose". Wills recalled that:

My little protégée of a girl ... rode on the front of my saddle [to Bowen] and crying nearly all the way ... I took compassion on her and decided to take her home and bring her up with my own children, which I did, and even sent her to school with my own.

The child died. This saddened Wills, though not as much as the death of a favourite horse.

The archives contain a story, too, of children stolen at the sites of Indigenous mass murders, from Appin in 1816 – during this operation Governor Lachlan Macquarie ordered that his troops "select and secure" 18 children, aged between four and six, for his "native institution at Parramatta" – to Boonjie, soon to become Butchers Creek in 1887, and well beyond to the stolen generations of the 20th century.

Which brings us back to Poppin Jerri, the little boy who survived the Butchers Creek massacre to grow up as Douglas Grant, an Aboriginal man who spoke with a Scottish burr, thanks to his adoptive parents and his education at Sydney's Scots College. Grant was conscious of his colour while growing up but, raised in a white adoptive family – although he never inherited and he ended up on the street – he lost all contact with his culture. Grant enlisted in the AIF in mid-1916, just as Australian casualties on the Western Front were mounting. He was among 400 to 1,000 Indigenous men accepted as volunteers, despite the regulations that recruits were to be of "substantially European descent".

Belated recognition?

The Australian War Memorial embraces the war service of Indigenous Australians who bypassed the racist regulations and fought overseas for Australia. Men like Douglas Grant have been used to support a theme that, in the army, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men experienced equality for the first time, although they were not treated as equals in civilian Australia, where most could not vote, were paid less than non-Indigenous workers, had been evicted from traditional lands, and were not yet counted as citizens. After demobilisation, though, many of these men returned home to find that their children, along with their wages, had been taken by the so-called protectors. Settler blocks for white veterans – blocks denied to the "black diggers" – were sometimes carved out of ancestral lands. Many returned servicemen's clubs would not admit black veterans, and some black returned men were also denied appropriate repatriation and medical support.

The War Memorial holds that Grant, whose life was partly the inspiration for the Wesley Enoch play Black Diggers, is an exemplar of such positive experience. But that is far from true. Grant was adopted into a white European-Australian family, raised with a commensurate sense of entitlement and accepted, due to his adoptive parentage, as a citizen. It was not until he attempted to enlist that racism stung him. He was initially rejected because of his colour.

In May 1917, when he was wounded at Bullecourt and captured, his colour once again determined his fate. He was imprisoned in Berlin with the black soldiers of the Empire – mostly men from Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The Germans, no less attracted than the British to the voodoo "science" of eugenics and phrenology (whereby a man's intelligence and personality could supposedly be determined by his head shape) measured Grant's skull and fashioned a replica in alabaster. Grant, whose broad nose, distinctive brow and shiny skin distinguished him from all other prisoners, was given the run of the city. It was assumed, correctly, that he would be too conspicuous to attempt escape. This must have had an upside for Grant, a cultured man who loved music, art (he won competitions in Australia and was a fine draftsman) and, most of all, museums.

After the war, Grant returned to Australia disenchanted. He was in and out of work, often homeless and battling with alcoholism. He advocated for the rights of "black diggers" and he became, especially after Coniston in 1928, a vociferous campaigner for Indigenous rights generally, highlighting the history of massacres across the country and urging greater protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. He died in 1951 at La Perouse, on the northern headland of Botany Bay, land continuously occupied by the Kameygal for tens of thousands of years.

Black diggers, the coloured warriors of the 1st AIF, make quite a story for the War Memorial. But the memorial, its council heavy with former military personnel and writers of traditional military history, refuses to countenance telling the story of the warriors who died at the hands of soldiers, settlers, militias and black police after invasion in 1788. The memorial has, I believe, occasionally used the black diggers narrative as a fig leaf to distract from its intransigence on the Frontier Wars.

Many people officially associated with the memorial deny that frontier conflict was 'war'

Some years ago, when I put questions to the memorial on its refusal to commemorate frontier conflict, the response directed me to its detailed stories about Indigenous service personnel from all other Australian wars. The Australian defence force also uses the history of Indigenous service – in uniform – to attract new Indigenous recruits. Many people officially associated with the memorial deny that frontier conflict was "war", even though numerous settlers, as well as British commanders like Governor Macquarie, called it such.

The Australian War Memorial Act 1980 clearly allows the memorial to tell the combat story of military forces of the crown raised in Australia before and after the establishment of the commonwealth, but it chooses not to do so. Opponents of frontier war "recognition" by the memorial – the current director, Brendan Nelson, included – argue that no Australian-raised army units waged war against black people. Prominent historians say this is wrong and point to, among other units, the Military Mounted Police, raised by the British army in Sydney in 1825, which participated in numerous attacks on Indigenous people, including at Slaughterhouse Creek in 1838.

And then, of course, there are the infamous black police – military units raised solely from men who were born and bred on this continent and whose antecedents can be traced back tens of thousands of years. They were the police involved in massacres like that in 1887 when Boonjie became Butchers Creek and Poppin Jerri became Douglas Grant.

Narcha to his Ngadjon people (Barry Clarke to the killers) lived on after the massacre until 1903, surviving, it is said, another mass murder at Butchers Creek. Upon his death, he was mummified in a traditional manner and remained, unburied, with his rainforest people. In 1904–05 a German-born Darwinian anthropologist, Hermann Klaatsch, travelled the Atherton Tablelands to "attack the problem of the origin of Australian blacks, and of their import in relation to the whole development of mankind".

He stole Narcha and several other mummified adults and children. Klaatsch shipped Narcha to Berlin, where he was displayed prominently in a glass case at the Museum of Ethnology in the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. There is every chance that the distinctive captive Douglas Grant, once Poppin Jerri, free to roam Berlin, saw Narcha there behind glass, having been separated from him at a massacre at Butchers Creek 30 years earlier. If so, this reunion held a tragic poignancy. For Narcha, it is said, was in all likelihood Poppin Jerri's father.

This essay is taken from The Honest History Book, edited by David Stephens and Alison Broinowski and published by NewSouth

Key Notes:

Black Diggers: challenging Anzac myths

Hundreds of Indigenous servicemen fought for the British empire in the first world war – but are forgotten by many. A new play aims to challenge the cultural caricature of the Anzac digger

Url: https://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/jan/14/black-diggers-challenging-anzac-myths
Paul Daley, 14th January 2014

A century after the first world war, Australia has come to eulogise its Anzac diggers for their supposedly unique capacity for mateship, resilience, egalitarianism and sacrifice.

In the broad Australian consciousness, they have also been defined as white and of European Christian extraction – the son or grandson of pioneers, or perhaps even a migrant from the old country. But like so much about the clichéd Australian Anzac, this entrenched cultural caricature overlooks the extraordinary experiences of minorities who fought as Australian sons of the empire – not least those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Now a new play about their experiences is opening at the Sydney festival. Directed by Wesley Enoch and written by Tom Wright, Black Diggers draws on both traditional archival materials – letters and diaries – of Indigenous soldiers, and a rich vein of oral histories about the servicemen told through the generations.

According to the Australian War Memorial, more than 400 Indigenous Australians fought for the British empire in the first world war. This is probably a conservative estimate: thanks to curious Commonwealth rules about who was eligible to fight – Indigenous volunteers had to prove to recruiting officers that they were, despite appearances, of "substantially European descent" in order to be considered for enlistment – the actual number of Indigenous men who served in that war will remain the source of conjecture.

In late 1914 and 1915, when the first of some 420,000 Australians signed up – 39% of the males aged 18 to 44 from a total population of 4m – Indigenous applicants were often rejected. Then, after the tragic folly of Gallipoli in which 7,600 Australians were killed came the catastrophe of the European western front where 50,000 more perished. As domestic Australian support for the war waned, recruitment officers became colourblind.

Ironically for the Aborigines – their land stolen and people massacred after British colonisation in 1788, refused recognition as Australian citizens, voting rights or control of their earnings – it became possible to find emancipation of sorts by joining the 1st Australian Imperial Force and fighting under the British flag against the Germans and Turks.

As domestic Australian support for the war waned, recruitment officers became colourblind. Photograph: PR

Wesley Enoch, director of Black Diggers, says the stories of Indigenous servicemen in the 1st AIF have been mythologised within their own communities much like those of the other Anzacs.

"Some of these stories are now almost 100 years old but these soldiers have become lion-like heroes to their people, like golden-haired boys – so it will be very interesting to see how [Black Diggers] shifts and changes attitudes," says Enoch, who is of Murri descent.

"The general myth-making in Australia around world war one and especially Gallipoli is enormous, and the fact that Aboriginal people were at Gallipoli at that time and that we are now writing that experience into the broader public narrative is a very big thing for us."

Nine Indigenous actors will explore the experiences of those black servicemen, playing more than 100 characters, each a composite comprising the experiences of some of the men who actually served.

"On one level the experience of the black digger bears more similarity to his white comrade than a point of difference," says writer Tom Wright.

The stories of Indigenous servicemen in the 1st AIF have been mythologised within their own communities much like those of the other Anzacs. Photograph: PR

"Nine-tenths of the things that they went through are things that all AIF members went through. The cultural shock and the literal shock of war was shared by all of them – but you could make the generalisation that for many of these black servicemen in the first world war it was the first time that the colour of their skin had actually started to fade away."

Many Indigenous servicemen recorded, 40 or 50 years later, that the war made them suddenly no longer just black, explains Wright: "'The same bloke back in my home town who would once cross the street or chuck me out of the pub, was shaking my hand and looking after me because they needed me'."

That was really the big cultural realisation for Indigenous soldiers, he says. "Suddenly they felt needed and suddenly they felt like they had status within their own country."

But that egalitarianism rarely extended post-war. Some Indigenous servicemen returned to discover that their ancestral lands had been carved up and given as settlement blocks to white ex-soldiers. Many, once they returned to the jurisdiction of the protectors, were denied their back pay and other entitlements – including access to re-settlement land.

There was no universal experience for the black digger. "You could be one of the blokes who came off a mission in Western Victoria and you would go home and suddenly discover that a lot of the land that your family has been farming since the arrival of the white man has been taken away to give to soldier settlements ... or you could be a soldier who arrived back in northern NSW and you could suddenly find that you're not welcome in the RSL even though you've got your medals on," Wright says. "By the same

token, at a town over the hill the RSL could be acting as an advocate for the Aboriginal community and making sure they get equal rights."

Black Diggers is a timely production for 2014, which marks the centenary of the first world war. Coming after significant scholarly research on the plight of Aborigines in the conflict, it gives audiences the opportunity to reflect on the way in which Australia has stereotyped its Anzac story in recent decades.

One of the characters is based on Aboriginal Douglas Grant, who was orphaned as a boy and adopted by Robert Grant, a Scottish taxidermist and anthropologist who worked for the Australian Museum, and raised with his other son Henry in Sydney.

Douglas Grant's natural parents died either in a tribal battle or in a massacre committed by white pastoral settlers (recent evidence strongly suggests the latter) near the Bellenden Ker Ranges in Queensland when he was a boy. Grant was well educated, spoke – like his father and brother – with a Scottish accent, and worked before the war as a draughtsman.

He enlisted in the 34th Battalion in 1916 and was wounded and captured during the 1st battle of Bullecourt in April 1917. The Germans imprisoned him for the rest of the war in Berlin, where he was kept with other dark-skinned soldiers of the empire, from India and Africa.

Acting as a go-between for the Red Cross and other prisoners, Grant became such a curiosity to the German authorities that the sculptor Rudolph Markoeser carved his bust in ebony.

He was also something of a celebrity on his return to Australia, with his own radio show in Lithgow for a while, and often spoke publicly on a diverse range of subjects, including Shakespeare. But he didn't cope with the transition back to civilian life, drinking heavily and living the later part of his life at the Callan Park mental asylum (where he also worked as a clerk) and the Salvation Army's men's quarters. He died in 1951.

"He was a fascinating human being, but when he returned to Australia, Douglas Grant really failed to find his place," Enoch says. "You are left with the impression that he was very disappointed with what he thought was going to happen in his life and what actually eventuated."

Key Notes:

Black Diggers: the untold story of our Indigenous soldiers

Andrew Stephens

Published: April 3 2015 - 11:45PM

In the trenches, it didn't matter what colour you were. A bullet was a bullet, a mate was a mate and the enemy was precisely that. What was important was the courage and loyalty of the diggers by your side.

When Wesley Enoch started investigating Indigenous soldiers' stories a few years ago, the Australian War Memorial listed about 400 of their names. By the time rehearsals started a year ago for Enoch's new play about Aboriginal diggers, the number had doubled. Now, there are more than 1300 recorded names.

"It just keeps growing," says the theatre director. "But when I started to do the research, I quickly realised there were a whole lot of untold stories about these indigenous soldiers."

He's not one to keep quiet about such things. With *Black Diggers*, those stories are now entering the public consciousness.

As the play tours the country, diggers regularly approach the cast at the stage door with more tales and memories that enrich and expand the history. But against all preconceptions, the stories in *Black Diggers* are not centred on racism, discrimination or exploitation: rather, we hear in moving ways about comradeship and the roots of the reconciliation movement, deeply flavoured with the power of human relationships.

Amid an overwhelming barrage of exhibitions, commemorations and written works about World War 1 that began last year to mark the centenary of the war's beginning, there has been a lot of emotional wrangling associated with the stirring up of this pivotal, violent period of history. Some stories, though, put a new and surprising face to official histories: *Black Diggers* is such a tale.

Enoch found during the research (done with *Black Diggers* writer Tom Wright) that few stories or records about indigenous involvement in the armed services were told from an Aboriginal point of view. "A lot are mediated through the armed forces or through other diggers writing about Aboriginal soldiers," he says. "There are few first-hand accounts."

After about two years of research, more than 14,000 pages had been written. "We realised we couldn't make the piece of theatre we wanted to as we were being held back by the minutiae of each story," Enoch says. Wright was brought in to help, with his own research and sense of history, and they created an amalgam of all the most crucial episodes.

"It was a prism through which to see all these stories and not be held back by the truth of any one story. So in a sense, we then tell a bigger truth."

When soldiers were recruited for the 1914-18 war, they had to be "substantially European", a term that was vague enough for recruiters and medical officers to make up their own minds about what that

meant. It worked both ways: some thought a willing body was all that mattered, others brought their prejudices to bear.

Enoch says Indigenous soldiers didn't always get through the recruiting process – many would have been rejected, but because of the "substantially European" rule, there were no records of who was indigenous and who wasn't. "Everyone got treated exactly the same once they were recruited," he says.

As a result, the research has involved many different texts, publications and anecdotal evidence in what Enoch describes as a wonderful piecing-together of history. Once collated, they broke it down to five broad themes: the frontier wars in this country before we went to World War 1; what the experience of an indigenous person was during that time; the recruiting phase for WWI; seeing battle and then the return to Australia.

The nine cast members, mostly young Indigenous actors, bring these themes together in various vignettes exploring the tensions, emotion and drama of the period, but what is most striking is that despite the occasional outburst of racism, soldiers were united as brothers (the research has only turned up one indigenous servicewoman from the period).

Enoch has included in the play a story that was once recorded in the Returned Soldiers League's *Reveille* magazine. On a transport ship, during meal time, a white soldier approached an indigenous man and tried to pick a fight, saying he refused to eat with a black man. All the other white soldiers rounded on the racist, putting him in his place.

As Enoch has found from the soldiers he has spoken to, they considered racism a weak link. "They say 'I am a soldier, we work together as a unit'. It was about self-preservation, you couldn't afford it."

Why though, would indigenous people volunteer to become soldiers in a country where they had been treated so appallingly? "We think for the same reasons a non-indigenous man in the city would enlist," says Enoch. "For adventure, status but also out of a sense of duty." Many had grown up in missions or on government reserves, so there was also an element of hoping to escape oppression and to enact a prized warrior spirit.

Recruiting officers probably often turned a blind eye to skin colour thanks to an incentive scheme in which they got rewards per number of recruits. "Some did not care who they recruited."

The onus was on medical officers to prove a potential recruit was "substantially European" and Enoch noticed, while scouring records, that the especially stringent officers would reject a man because he was "too dark", "had flat feet" or, simply, was "not right".

"But as soon as they got through that process their Aboriginal identity had nothing to do with their service from then on," he says. "No official documentation separates them in any way, shape or form. The armed forces now say they were the first equal opportunity employer."

The return home was more traumatic because indigenous soldiers, having lived in an atmosphere of equality and having faced battle and fought for this country, expected their new freedoms to continue. Turning this into a staged narrative, says Enoch, seems to be what most affects audiences.

He also sees the roots of the modern reconciliation movement in this period, when returned indigenous soldiers received strong support from their non-indigenous comrades.

"If you were prepared to die side by side then you were prepared to live side by side," Enoch says. "The white diggers were quite active in promulgating ideas of Aboriginal sufferance and rights."

It wasn't until after World War 2, though, that the indigenous rights movement really began to take off and Enoch is excited that one of the assumptions he is challenging in *Black Diggers* is that we are only recently progressive on these rights – the play illustrates how, in certain quarters, there was great distaste for racism and oppression of indigenous people back then.

He also likes the idea of reinforcing how more than a century ago this country was culturally diverse thanks to a whole range of migrants who had arrived during the Gold Rush. "We have somehow forgotten that we have always been a multicultural nation," he says. "Somehow through the Anzac mythology we have created a very homogenous view of who we are or who we were. It is great, 100 years on, to challenge that."

***Black Diggers* is at the Victorian Arts Centre April 22-26. An exhibition about the play's historical foundations is at the Smorgon Family Plaza, Arts Centre, April 20-May 17. artscentremelbourne.com.au**

This story was found at: ***http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/black-diggers-the-untold-story-of-our-indigenous-soldiers-20150328-1m9pme.html***

Key Notes:

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

____

ABC NEWS

Play Black Diggers to shed new light on Anzac history of Indigenous Australians

By national arts reporter Anne Maria Nicholson

Updated Tue 17 Dec 2013, 11:31pm

The Aboriginal actors holding hands and laughingly singing the quaint song Hokey Pokey are bonding just as their fighting ancestors did during World War I and II.

PHOTO: Three generations of actor Eliah Watego's family fought for the Australian Army. (ABC News: Anne Maria Nicholson)

"I've never worked with an all-male cast before. They are nine strong Aboriginal men and the sense of a bond around the story is really exciting," says director Wesley Enoch during a break in rehearsals of Black Diggers at the Queensland Theatre Company.

Mr Enoch, with playwright Tom Wright, has been developing the play for the Sydney and Brisbane Festivals as part of Australia's commemoration next year of the centenary of WWI.

Mr Enoch hand-picked the actors, and it was not until they were contracted that some of them discovered they had ancestors who were diggers.

"Looking at the script you wonder why, what would push you into it?" asks Brisbane actor Eliah Watego, who had three generations of his family fight for the Australian Army.

"But we've talked about the reasons. They lived on missions and had no money. All of it went to the protectors.

"They weren't even allowed to be citizens and this was a chance to make money and prove that you were someone who deserved to be in Australia.

"When you were over there, you were treated as equals, which is something a lot of them didn't feel. It was ridiculous."

What the young actors struggle with is the way their forebears were treated on return to Australia.

"Some of them got their medals taken away. The money that they were paid was taken away," Watego said.

"I'm playing a character called Reg and his arc follows that. And he has a lot of white friends and they all have jobs but he's broke and he's got no money."

Mr Enoch spoke with many descendents of the diggers, including those at the South Australian community of Raukkan where the local church is decorated with stained glass windows commemorating 21 Indigenous soldiers who served.

"Our myth-making as a country is such that we often like to forget our Aboriginal history. So when you tell a story like this, people say: 'What? There were Aboriginal people at Gallipoli?'," he said.

He uncovered many sad tales of mistreatment of the diggers who had equality in the Army but none on their return.

"There are plenty of stories of the protector taking the children away from the mother because father had gone off to war. The protector then confiscated all the money earned and saved and put it in the protector's bank account," he said.

Another descendent who helped with the project is Jackie Huggins, whose grandfather was wounded in Belgium during WWI, and whose father was a prisoner of the Japanese and forced to work on the Burma railway during WWII.

"I quite often would feel really angry but also anxious about it," she said.

"But also a searching question about why did they do this when we weren't even citizens of this country? What did they owe to this country? Or what did this country owe to them?"

Some of these questions may be answered when the show has its world premiere in January.

> Our myth-making as a country is such that we often like to forget our Aboriginal history. So when you tell a story like this, people say, 'What? There were Aboriginal people at Gallipoli?'
>
> Director Wesley Enoch

Black Diggers runs at the Sydney Opera House January 18-26 and the Brisbane Festival next September.

Topics: theatre, arts-and-entertainment, aboriginal, indigenous-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander, community-and-society, world-war-1, history, brisbane-4000, sydney-2000

First posted Tue 17 Dec 2013, 11:04pm

The Guardian

Black diggers are hailed on Anzac Day. But the Indigenous 'Great War' was in Australia

Frontier wars almost certainly claimed more Indigenous lives than the Australian death toll in the first world war. If settler Australia is ever to deal properly with the legacy of frontier conflict, that comparison would be a good place to start

Paul Daley

Sun 23 Apr 2017 08.24 AEST

I know the spirits are out here. And when the wind starts to howl across the plain in great booming gusts, it might just be the sound of them crying.

I've visited many massacre sites in Australia. But usually I've been in the company of a local Indigenous custodian, someone who rubbed their scent on my face and hands and chanted to warn the spirits that this white man comes in peace. While it feels like I'm anything but alone, I'm by myself in the long grass that is blowing sideways.

All around, the fields shimmer in kaleidoscopic gold, russet, black and India green as the sun strobes through the storm clouds scudding across the sky. The rain arrives horizontally in icy needles, stinging my bare legs and arms as I plod around looking for the creek I'm assured is here somewhere. I'm vigilant for the prolific black snakes. It's a spring Saturday in Queensland.

Names are important

In contemplating the creek, I'd had in my mind a treacherous torrent running through a great black ravine, so imbued is this place with malevolence, right down to its name, Butchers Creek. But it's scarcely a creek at all - more a gentle furrow padded with grass and lichen through which a stream trickles.

A little ramshackle goldmining town once sprang up near the creek but it has long ago ceased to be. The town was named Boonjie, an Indigenous word, after the creek whose banks had been a meeting place for countless thousands of years for a tribe of the Ngadjon rainforest people. The Ngadjon were a physically diminutive mob, perhaps because they thrived mainly on native plants and nuts in a place where protein, mostly tree kangaroo, was tough to bag. Thanks to the rainforest canopy that sheltered them they were also lighter skinned than the tribal people of the coastal plains and continental centre.

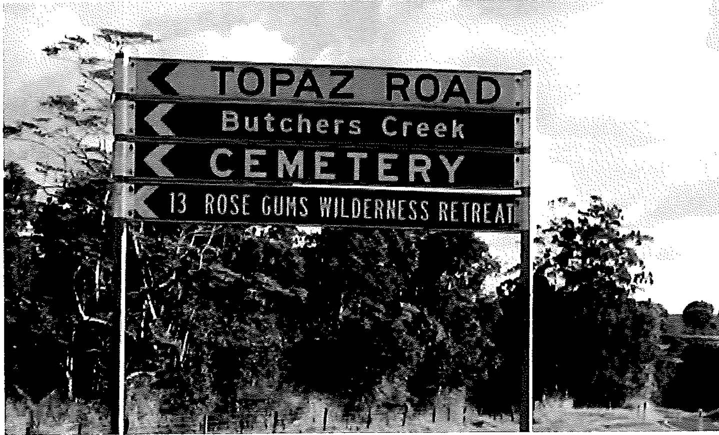
In 1887 white miners and "black police" (Indigenous recruits from elsewhere who had little compunction about killing other Aboriginal people at the behest of white so-called settlers) massacred a big group of Ngadjon camped near Boonjie. This was a reprisal for the murder of a Swedish goldminer, Frank Paaske.

Among the tablelands mining and pastoral community there was much pioneer boasting (some of it apocryphal) about the massacre. One settler, Fred Brown, detailed a "dispersal", including the stake-out of the Aboriginal camp overnight. He told of shooting a man with his "old Schneider rifle" ("makes a bigger hole leaving the body than on entering it") and of "protecting" a Ngadjon boy who survived. By some accounts the child's name was Poppin Jerri. The child was apparently snatched from the hands of a black tracker about to dash the child's brains out against a tree. A few days later the little boy was given to a Scottish-born zoologist, Robert Grant, and his wife, Elizabeth. Grant worked for the Australian Museum in Sydney. The Grants took the boy home with them and raised him - apparently on equal terms with Henry, their natural child.

This hints at a story that Australian history has scarcely addressed: the widespread theft of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families on the colonial and post-federation frontier. (Shirleene Robinson's book Something Like Slavery? tells some of the story and is an invaluable exception.)

Many black children were stolen before the forced removal of Aboriginal children became a mainstay of assimilationist policy in the 20th century. At least one Indigenous man - an elder known to his people as Narcha but named by the miners as Barry Clarke because he had worked for a successful miner and pioneer, George Clarke - was also spared. Narcha had five wives and many children. Still, the child went to the Grants, who had been working in the area on a field trip, because Elizabeth had apparently wished "to get a little black boy". The "little black boy" was renamed Douglas Grant and sent to school in Sydney.

Meanwhile, the killers replaced the name Boonjie with Butchers Creek. Today the name Butchers Creek applies to the creek itself and to the small, largely non-Indigenous community around it, with its modest hall and school. The renaming of Boonjie is disquieting enough. But dozens, perhaps hundreds, of places across the continent have been named or renamed, not to conceal but to commemorate terrible acts of violence against Indigenous people.



A signpost to Butchers Creek in far north Queensland. Photograph: Paul Daley for the Guardian

There is a Skull Creek in each of Gippsland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. There's a Massacre Bay in Victoria, a Massacre Waterfall in Borroloola, a Slaughterhouse Creek in New South Wales and another Butchers Creek in Victoria. There were massacres in each of them. Twelve places in Queensland (where colonial and post-federation violence against Indigenous people was most pronounced) are named Skeleton Creek but official records fail to reveal how many of these names commemorate massacres.

But back to that little watercourse on the Atherton tablelands, where in 1887 the boy survived to become Douglas Grant and his people's creek was renamed not to commemorate those murdered but the very act of murdering them. Douglas Grant's life draws together the competing historical elements of the Australian national narrative. As an Indigenous person, he was removed from his family with extreme violence, served in the 1st Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and became a prisoner of war in Berlin. He was later an Aboriginal rights activist and semi-vagrant in Sydney and Melbourne.

Through him or, at least, through the boy Poppin Jerri - we have a way in to the story of the first big conflicts, the Frontier Wars, that raged across this continent after the initial east coast European contact in 1770 and the invasion in 1788. For what happened to Poppin Jerri's people at Butchers Creek was replicated in an unknown number of battles, skirmishes, guerrilla attacks and reprisals as the pastoral and mining frontier crept further north and west. These conflicts killed countless - because uncounted - Indigenous people. The deaths of police, soldiers, settlers, shepherds and convict labourers are more quantifiable; they were quantified because those doing the counting thought these deaths mattered.

Counting the uncountable

It is conservatively estimated that there were 20,000 violent deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally from 1788 until Coniston in the Northern Territory in 1928. This figure is used consistently by historians such as Henry Reynolds and John Connor, who have been at the vanguard of promoting cultural awareness about frontier war since the 1980s. Sceptical historians have contested this figure, though not that of 2,000 non-Indigenous combatants and bystanders (a ratio of some 10 to one).

More recent academic research indicates, however, that the fatalities figure might have been at least three times higher than 20,000. Indeed, the evidence suggests the true black-white ratio of frontier war deaths in Australia might have been 44 to one. Historians Raymond Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen have concluded that in Queensland alone at least 65,180 Indigenous people were killed from the 1820s to the early 1900s. Considering Evans and Ørsted-Jensen focus just on Queensland, their findings have implications for the number of Indigenous Australians killed continent-wide.

Ernie Raymont, a Mumu-Ngajdon elder, at Boonjie, close to where the Butchers Creek massacre took place in 1887. Photograph: Tarpaulin Productions 2015

If Evans and Ørsted-Jensen are to be taken seriously (and on the basis of their research, first made public at the 2014 Australian Historical Association conference, they ought to be) that is another reason why Australia should engage in a mature discussion about the conflicts that raged across the frontier and perhaps cost some 65,000 lives in Queensland alone - more than the 61,000 Australian deaths in World War I, the conflict that has so embedded itself in Australian consciousness. If settler Australia is ever to deal properly with frontier conflict and its continuing legacy, that body-count comparison would be a good place to start.

Evans and Ørsted-Jensen scoured the remaining records of the Queensland Native Police Force and studied the prevalence of "black police" barracks from 1859 to 1898 to determine the approximate number of patrols, contacts and killings, based on reported body counts:

[W]e arrive at the sobering total of 41,040 Aborigines killed during 3,420 official frontier dispersals across almost 40 years of conflict. This mortality figure ... is a mathematical and statistical projection, produced by cautiously sampling the fragmentary evidence left to us about the severe degree of destruction accompanying the long project of land dispossession in colonial Queensland. It is not and can never be a precisely accurate figure, nor is it a confidently absolute or maximal one. That number will never be known ... Furthermore, let us be entirely clear about what we are claiming here. The 41,040 death rate does not represent anywhere near a full quotient of those who fell on the Queensland frontier. It is merely a native police statistic that does not even cover, at this point, official dispersal activities across the prior decade of 1849-59. These may well have accounted for another 3,000-4,000 deaths.

The 41,040 number also excludes actions against Indigenous people carried out not by police but by settlers. The authors calculate that these incidents accounted for 43% of the total number of clashes or approximately 2,580 clashes, giving a total of 6,000 clashes, police and settler. Evans and Ørsted-Jensen conclude that their body counts for native police and settlers "amount to no less than 61,680 in 6,000 attacks". They add another estimated minimum of 3,500 Indigenous and 1,500 settler deaths for the 1850s to "arrive at an aggregate of 66,680 killed" between the 1820s and early 1900s.

Evans and Ørsted-Jensen's research confronts the received view that the Australian wars that matter - or even the only ones that happened - are the ones that were fought overseas. The authors know their research makes some of us feel uncomfortable. Massacre denialism among some Australians and the mainstream media has driven the authors towards conservative calculations. Still, they want "to return to history the full ledger of those who, long ago, died protecting their sovereignty, their cultures, their homelands and their peoples but whose deaths were more often hidden than acknowledged by a society that made furtiveness its watch-word".

The Evans-Ørsted-Jensen research bears directly on the themes of this collection of essays. Of course war is important, as one of the many influences on making Australians what we are, but this is not war as most of us have known it in the last century. Because the research indicates a frontier conflict death rate in Queensland alone that eclipses Australian fatalities in World War I, the authors effectively argue that the Great War was never the greatest war in Australian history. They quote with approval Henry Reynolds, who says what happened on the domestic frontier "was clearly one of the few significant wars in Australian history and arguably the single most important one. For Indigenous Australia, it was their Great War".

A modest memorial close to the site of the 17 April 1816 Appin massacre. The memorial reads: 'We will remember them.' It is the site of an annual commemoration ceremony. Photograph: Paul Daley for the Guardian

The silence

In his 1968 Boyer Lectures, anthropologist WEH Stanner called it the "great Australian silence". He was referring to the failure of a number of books to substantively address Australian Indigenous history, including frontier violence:

It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.

There has been lumbering progress since Stanner's lectures almost half a century ago, not least among historians, even of the centre right. Writers of novels, narrative non-fiction, popular history, plays and screenplays have increasingly addressed the extreme violence meted out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on the colonial frontier and later, down to Coniston in 1928, which remained for some people until quite recently, a part of living memory.

Indigenous Australia's enduring culture of oral history (often reflected in music, visual art and dance) records the violence of the frontier (and corroborates what happened) in no less detail than the written words of the white perpetrators. In One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity, John Harris recounts the description by early anthropologist EM Curr of the colonial violence involving Indigenous people and invaders. Curr said it would usually take up to a decade after a settler's occupation of land before traditional owners were let back in as visitors or to hunt nearby, during which time "the squatter's party and the tribe live in a state of warfare". Settlers would shoot "down a savage now and then when opportunity offers, and calling in the aid of black police from time to time to avenge in a wholesale way the killing or frightening of stock off the run by the tribe". More cattle would be speared, more Indigenous men shot down. "In revenge", Curr said, "a shepherd or stockman is speared". The violence would escalate with the introduction of the "black police", officially the native police, a tragic, little-explored phenomenon among white historians of frontier justice,

whereby rival tribesmen would be enlisted and militarised to slaughter other blacks. Curr explained how these men would be "enlisted, mounted, armed, liberally supplied with ball cartridges and despatched to the spot under the sub-inspector of police".

Hot for blood, the black troopers are laid on the trail of the tribe; then follow the careful tracking, the surprise, the shooting at a distance safe from spears, the deaths of many of the males, the capture of the women, who know that if they abstain from flight they will be spared; the gratified lust of the savage, and the sub-inspector's report that the tribe has been "dispersed", for such is the official term used to convey the occurrence of these proceedings.

When the tribe has gone through several repetitions of this experience and the chief part of its young men been butchered, the women, the remnant of the men and such children as the black troopers have not troubled themselves to shoot, are let in or allowed to come to the settler's homestead and the war is at an end. Finally a shameful disease is introduced and finishes what the rifle began.

The stories about the massacring (and other terrible abuses) of Indigenous people are easy to find in the archives of major cultural institutions in Australia and Great Britain. The personal journals, diaries, letters, memoirs and, indeed, the published works of colonial and post-federation officials, troops, police, farmers, miners and pioneering frontiersmen (and women) are replete with accounts of battles with - and all too often reprisal massacres of - "natives" who are invariably referred to as "marauding", "troublesome" or "threatening". Through the National Library of Australia's Trove, very old government records and digitised newspapers can easily be found. They recount in detail the violence described by Curr. Little probing is needed to uncover biographies of the white men - such as Mounted Constable George Murray, former Light Horseman and Gallipoli hero, overseer of the murder of 31 Aboriginal men, women and children at Coniston - responsible for the slaughter.

Sometimes the blacks were simply hunted for sport or for "trophying". Little imagination is required to decipher this malignant euphemism. The body parts - especially skulls - of Indigenous people were highly sought after in early Australia. Indigenous body parts are still being surrendered to organisations, such as the repatriation unit of the National Museum of Australia, that are mandated to return them, where possible, to their country. In recent years the museum has housed body parts of as many as 600 individuals; other state museums have their own collections that cannot, for various reasons (including a lack of detail about precise provenance) be returned to country.

There is ample proof that some Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were hunted and killed merely so that parts of their bodies could be kept as curios. Bodies left at massacre sites became part of the collections of museums, medical research institutions and universities. Meanwhile, the bodies of Indigenous people who died in institutions were, barely cold, stolen and sold or given to other institutions.

The head of Onyong, the Ngambri chief, was turned into a sugar bowl and kept for years at a Tuggeranong homestead near Canberra. Other bodies were ransacked from sacred burial sites by men like George Murray Black, a farmer from Gippsland, who supplied countless skeletons to the Australian Institute of Anatomy, the University of Melbourne Medical School and many institutions in Europe.

Early newspapers offer concurring accounts (chilling in their candour and boastful detail) of the organised killings of black men, women and children on the frontier. In the journals and diaries of the frontiersmen, meanwhile, what is disquieting is the detachment of the

perpetrators, the purpose that bleeds into their words as they describe the killing, the sense that they are involved merely in the extermination of subhumans.

None more so than the memoir of Korah Halcombe Wills (1828-96), a former mayor of Bowen and Mackay in Queensland, who reminisced at the end of his life about dispersing Aboriginal people in the mid-1860s. His account makes difficult reading, as he boasts of massacring Aboriginal people and chopping a man into pieces to keep as trophies. (Wills was a butcher by trade and later a publican.) He found this work to be "a horrible repulsive thing" but he persisted because "I was not going to be done out of any pet specimens of humanity". He stuffed the body parts into his saddlebags to take home.

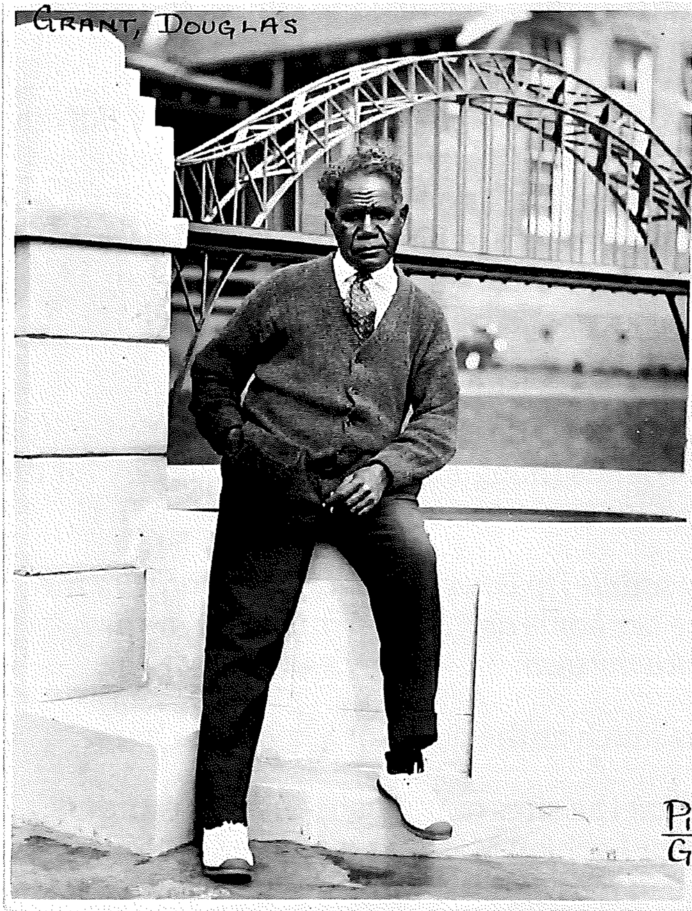
Wills fancied a live trophy as well, so "from out of one of these mobs of blacks I selected a little girl with the intention of civilising, and one of my friends thought he would select a boy for the same purpose". Wills recalled that:

My little protégée of a girl ... rode on the front of my saddle [to Bowen] and crying nearly all the way ... I took compassion on her and decided to take her home and bring her up with my own children, which I did, and even sent her to school with my own.

The child died. This saddened Wills, though not as much as the death of a favourite horse.

The archives contain a story, too, of children stolen at the sites of Indigenous mass murders, from Appin in 1816 - during this operation Governor Lachlan Macquarie ordered that his troops "select and secure" 18 children, aged between four and six, for his "native institution at Parramatta" - to Boonjie, soon to become Butchers Creek in 1887, and well beyond to the stolen generations of the 20th century.

Which brings us back to Poppin Jerri, the little boy who survived the Butchers Creek massacre to grow up as Douglas Grant, an Aboriginal man who spoke with a Scottish burr, thanks to his adoptive parents and his education at Sydney's Scots College. Grant was conscious of his colour while growing up but, raised in a white adoptive family - although he never inherited and he ended up on the street - he lost all contact with his culture. Grant enlisted in the AIF in mid-1916, just as Australian casualties on the Western Front were mounting. He was among 400 to 1,000 Indigenous men accepted as volunteers, despite the regulations that recruits were to be of "substantially European descent".



Douglas Grant, draughtsman and soldier, with his ornamental pond and Sydney Harbour Bridge, between 1932 and 1940. Photograph: Sam Hood-State Library of NSW

Belated recognition?

The Australian War Memorial embraces the war service of Indigenous Australians who bypassed the racist regulations and fought overseas for Australia. Men like Douglas Grant have been used to support a theme that, in the army, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men experienced equality for the first time, although they were not treated as equals in civilian Australia, where most could not vote, were paid less than non-Indigenous workers, had been evicted from traditional lands, and were not yet counted as citizens. After demobilisation, though, many of these men returned home to find that their children, along with their wages, had been taken by the so-called protectors. Settler blocks for white veterans - blocks denied to the "black diggers" - were sometimes carved out of ancestral lands. Many returned servicemen's clubs would not admit black veterans, and some black returned men were also denied appropriate repatriation and medical support.

The War Memorial holds that Grant, whose life was partly the inspiration for the Wesley Enoch play Black Diggers, is an exemplar of such positive experience. But that is far from true. Grant was adopted into a white European-Australian family, raised with a commensurate sense of entitlement and accepted, due to his adoptive parentage, as a citizen. It was not until he attempted to enlist that racism stung him. He was initially rejected because of his colour.

In May 1917, when he was wounded at Bullecourt and captured, his colour once again determined his fate. He was imprisoned in Berlin with the black soldiers of the Empire - mostly men from Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The Germans, no less attracted than the British to the voodoo "science" of eugenics and phrenology (whereby a man's intelligence and personality could supposedly be determined by his head shape) measured Grant's skull and fashioned a replica in alabaster. Grant, whose broad nose, distinctive brow and shiny skin distinguished him from all other prisoners, was given the run of the city. It was assumed,

correctly, that he would be too conspicuous to attempt escape. This must have had an upside for Grant, a cultured man who loved music, art (he won competitions in Australia and was a fine draftsman) and, most of all, museums.

After the war, Grant returned to Australia disenchanted. He was in and out of work, often homeless and battling with alcoholism. He advocated for the rights of "black diggers" and he became, especially after Coniston in 1928, a vociferous campaigner for Indigenous rights generally, highlighting the history of massacres across the country and urging greater protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. He died in 1951 at La Perouse, on the northern headland of Botany Bay, land continuously occupied by the Kameygal for tens of thousands of years.

Black diggers, the coloured warriors of the 1st AIF, make quite a story for the War Memorial. But the memorial, its council heavy with former military personnel and writers of traditional military history, refuses to countenance telling the story of the warriors who died at the hands of soldiers, settlers, militias and black police after invasion in 1788. The memorial has, I believe, occasionally used the black diggers narrative as a fig leaf to distract from its intransigence on the Frontier Wars.

Some years ago, when I put questions to the memorial on its refusal to commemorate frontier conflict, the response directed me to its detailed stories about Indigenous service personnel from all other Australian wars. The Australian defence force also uses the history of Indigenous service - in uniform - to attract new Indigenous recruits. Many people officially associated with the memorial deny that frontier conflict was "war", even though numerous settlers, as well as British commanders like Governor Macquarie, called it such.

The Australian War Memorial Act 1980 clearly allows the memorial to tell the combat story of military forces of the crown raised in Australia before and after the establishment of the commonwealth, but it chooses not to do so. Opponents of frontier war "recognition" by the memorial - the current director, Brendan Nelson, included - argue that no Australian-raised army units waged war against black people. Prominent historians say this is wrong and point to, among other units, the Military Mounted Police, raised by the British army in Sydney in 1825, which participated in numerous attacks on Indigenous people, including at Slaughterhouse Creek in 1838.

And then, of course, there are the infamous black police - military units raised solely from men who were born and bred on this continent and whose antecedents can be traced back tens of thousands of years. They were the police involved in massacres like that in 1887 when Boonjie became Butchers Creek and Poppin Jerri became Douglas Grant.

Narcha to his Ngadjon people (Barry Clarke to the killers) lived on after the massacre until 1903, surviving, it is said, another mass murder at Butchers Creek. Upon his death, he was mummified in a traditional manner and remained, unburied, with his rainforest people. In 1904-05 a German-born Darwinian anthropologist, Hermann Klaatsch, travelled the Atherton Tablelands to "attack the problem of the origin of Australian blacks, and of their import in relation to the whole development of mankind".

He stole Narcha and several other mummified adults and children. Klaatsch shipped Narcha to Berlin, where he was displayed prominently in a glass case at the Museum of Ethnology in the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. There is every chance that the distinctive captive Douglas Grant, once Poppin Jerri, free to roam Berlin, saw Narcha there behind glass, having been separated from him at a massacre at Butchers Creek 30 years earlier. If so, this reunion held a tragic poignancy. For Narcha, it is said, was in all likelihood Poppin Jerri's father.

This essay is taken from The Honest History Book, edited by David Stephens and Alison Broinowski and published by NewSouth, priced $34.99

Topics

- Indigenous Australians
- Indigenous peoples
- Museums
- First world war
- features

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Wesley Enoch

One purpose of Indigenous theatre is to write on to the public record neglected or forgotten stories.

Many of these stories survive in our oral storytelling traditions and have been passed down through families to arrive today as folklore – stories of the people. Theatre has become a crossover point where these stories are made public and expressed to demonstrate our history.

One hundred years ago Indigenous servicemen volunteered to fight for the newly formed country called Australia. Though the constitution of this newest of old countries did not recognise them as citizens, Indigenous men signed up and fought in Palestine, the Somme, Gallipoli, Flanders Fields and every major battlefront during what would be called the Great War. Despite limited social standing, appalling living conditions and lack of human rights, Indigenous men enlisted. Was it the sense of freedom and adventure? Was it the fact that the newly minted AIF (Australian Imperial Force) had no way of administratively recognising their Indigenous background and hence granted all soldiers the same rights? Or was it a sense of patriotism in a country that offered renewed hope for change?

Over 1300 Indigenous men fought side by side with their white countrymen and forged bonds that would sow the seeds of the modern reconciliation movement.

When constructing this piece of theatre we were confronted by the enormity of the task, the cultural protocols, the military records, the family lore – so we adopted a broad acceptance of truth. In post-apartheid South Africa during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission there was a four-part definition of truth:

- Personal truth – the thing you believe to be true
- Social truth – what a group believe to be true through discussion and debate
- Forensic truth – the truth that can be proven through science and records
- Public truth – the value of telling the truth for the greater good

Stories have come to us through interviews with family members, scouring the official records, scholarly historical analysis and research and our own narratives; we believe them all to have equal value and truth.

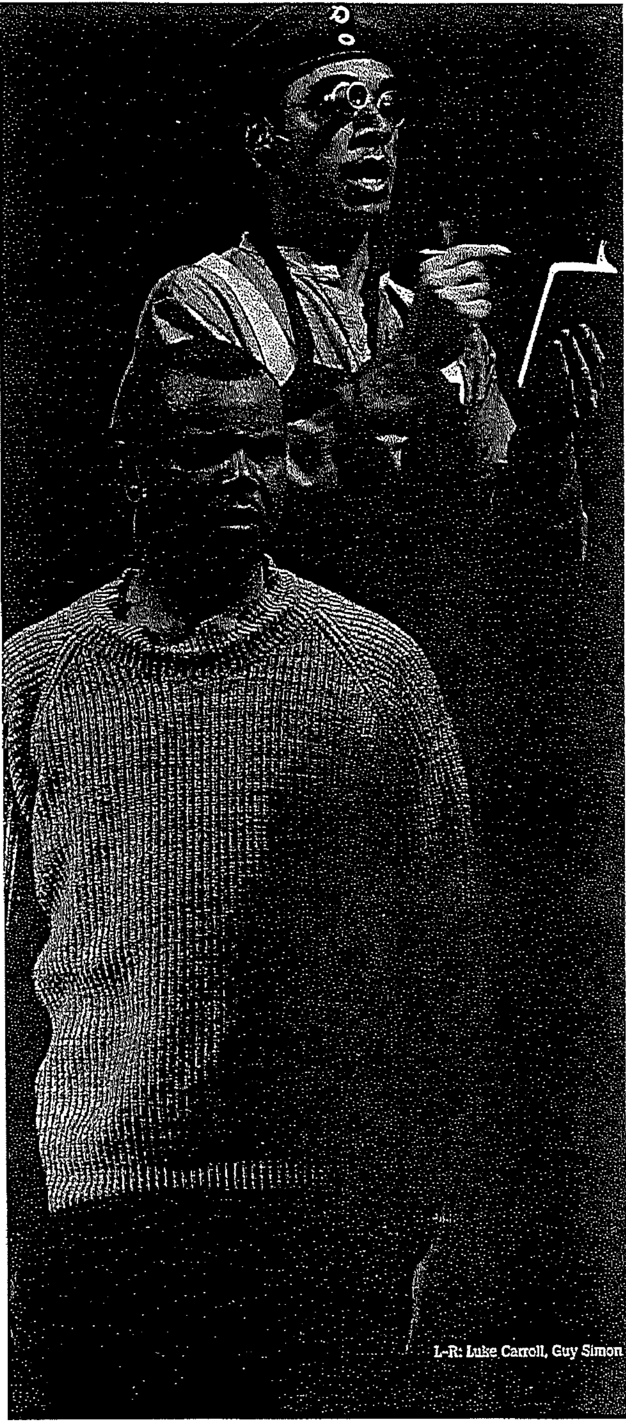
Black Diggers honours the memories of these men and their families and through them demonstrates the long history of national service and participation in public life by Indigenous Australians. We follow a number of archetypal character journeys based on real-life events in a fragmented view of history. It's like the shellshock experience of those in war – fragments of story mixed with emotional responses. There are 60 scenes broken into five parts:

- Pre-Nation – a reflection on the wars and experience of Indigenous people before nationhood
- Enlistment – the process of Indigenous men signing up
- The Theatre of War – the stories from the front as reported in journals, letters, official records and oral history
- The Return – the effects of returning and the expectations of both the men who returned and those they were returning to
- Legacy – what has been left behind for us

The invitation is to accumulate the stories and follow the characters/actors as they journey through. It has been a great honour to work on this project with such a dedicated and insightful group of contributors. There is much we know and there is much we can never know but sharing stories is the best way for us all to know more.

If you know a story of Indigenous service in World War I or have a photo or a piece of ephemera, please contact the Australian War Memorial and have it recorded. As we commemorate the centenary of World War I these words become even more apt.

Lest We Forget.



L-R: Luke Carroll, Guy Simon

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD WAR I INDIGENOUS DIGGER

Dr David Williams, Researcher

When World War I broke out in 1914, the White Australia policy was well and truly in force.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not considered citizens of Australia, but were rather the wards of the local Protector of Aborigines. They were paid low wages, were forced to live on reserves and mission stations, could not enter a public bar, vote, marry non-Indigenous partners or buy property. They were actively discriminated against, and yet when war was declared, many Indigenous men wanted to join up and fight for Australia.

The Defence Act of 1903 prevented those who were not of 'substantially European descent' from being able to enlist in any of the armed forces. Many Indigenous men who tried to enlist were rejected on the grounds of race, but others managed to slip through the net. In late 1917, following the defeat of a second conscription referendum, these restrictions were slightly eased. A new order stated that: "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."

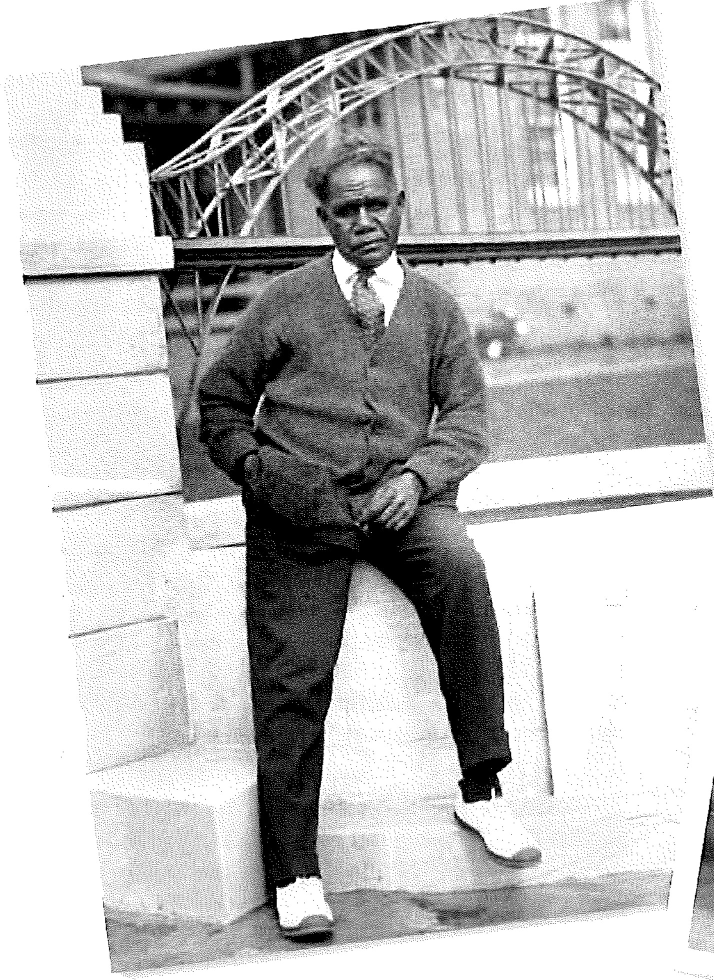
> When they came back home they were shunned, their sacrifices ignored and their families oppressed even further by the government.

Despite the difficulties, it seems that at least 800 Indigenous soldiers managed to join the AIF, out of a total of only 80,000 Indigenous people thought to be living in Australia at the time. Some did so despite being rejected several times for being insufficiently white. Some lied about their age or parentage, and some were granted formal permission from their local Protector of Aborigines to serve. Once past the initial barriers to enlistment, these soldiers fully integrated into the AIF. Whilst almost exclusively of low ranks, these *Black Diggers* were paid the same as other soldiers, underwent the same training and experienced the same hardships. As Gary Oakley of the Australian War Memorial has noted on several occasions: "The Army was Australia's first equal opportunity employer." In their civilian life they had to put up with constant racist slurs and attitudes. But in the trenches, any negative stereotypes that many non-Indigenous Diggers had would have quickly disappeared when they were living, eating, laughing and dying with these young men.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diggers fought in every significant engagement of the war – from Gallipoli, to Palestine, to the Western Front. They served as infantrymen, machine gunners, light artillery and as light horsemen. They won the respect of their fellow soldiers, and won many bravery awards and commendations. Many were wounded, some were captured and dozens were killed. But the most tragic aspect of their service was not that they offered their lives for a country that did not recognise them as citizens, but came after they returned to Australia. When they came back home they were shunned, their sacrifices ignored and their families oppressed even further by the government. Very few Indigenous Diggers were given the land grants offered to returned soldiers, and in many cases, the land for grants to war veterans was taken away from Indigenous communities whose men had fought overseas. War pensions and back pay were frequently denied and very few Indigenous Diggers were welcomed at their local RSL – except sometimes on ANZAC Day.

France, c1916 non commissioned Officers (ncos) and Gunners who served at Gallipoli. Image P01242.002 – courtesy of Australian War Memorial.

Even though their small number seems insignificant compared to the 416,809 men enlisted in the AIF to fight in World War I, their significance to modern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history is immense. Slowly, due to the efforts and enthusiasm of researchers such as Rod Pratt, David Huggonson, Phillippa Scarlett, Doreen Kartinyeri, Gary Oakley and Garth O'Connell, among many others, the long-forgotten service of these men is being acknowledged and celebrated. The Ipswich re-burial in April 2012 of Trooper Horace Dalton, 11th Lighthorse Regiment, with full military honours and traditional ceremony, is a welcome example of this change. Today the bodies of Indigenous Australians who fell in the battlefields of France, Belgium, Turkey and Palestine remain buried thousands of miles away from their ancestral homes. Their brave spirits deserve the honour of remembrance – lest we forget again.



ELIZABETH MCKINNON SEARCHES FOR THE TRUE STORY OF DOUGLAS GRANT, ONE OF MANY ABORIGINAL MEN WHO ENLISTED IN WORLD WAR I.

DOUGLAS GRANT

› ABORIGINAL DIGGER

From the very beginning, I was captured by Douglas Grant's story. From his early adoption by a museum taxidermist to an accomplished but tragic life, he was torn between two worlds as an educated Aboriginal man in white society in the early twentieth century.

ADOPTION

Among the varying published accounts, it is difficult to discover the truth behind his adoption, but the common facts are that in 1887, Robert Grant, a taxidermist, with his wife and a colleague, was collecting specimens in the Bellenden Ker Range, Far North Queensland. An altercation in nearby Atherton between local Aboriginal people, gold miners and police escalated into a massacre of which the toddler Douglas was the only Aboriginal survivor.

Was Douglas saved by one of the very miners who had just shot and killed his parents? Or did Grant himself save the boy at gunpoint just as his head was about to be dashed against a tree by an Aboriginal tracker?

Such newspaper accounts written long after the event seem fanciful and melodramatic, but the Grants did take the orphaned boy to the family home in Lithgow where he was raised as one of their own. Lithgow at this time had a strong Scottish community, and Douglas was raised to speak with a distinct Scottish burr. He had an early interest in entomology, lodging several lots of insect specimens he'd collected from the Lithgow area with the Museum in 1894 and 1895. The family relocated to Annandale just west of Sydney in 1897 when Robert Grant was appointed as taxidermist to the Museum.

WAR

Douglas showed an early aptitude for drawing, and in 1897 he won first prize for a drawing of Queen Victoria during her Diamond Jubilee Exhibition. He attended Scots College in Sydney with his brother, Henry, and left school to work as a draughtsman for Mort's Dock and Engineering Company in Sydney. His brother meanwhile followed in his father's footsteps to become a taxidermist at the Museum, rising to Senior Taxidermist in 1909, a post he held until 1942.

By the outbreak of World War I, Douglas was working as a wool classer at the historic 'Belltrees' property near Scone in the NSW Hunter Valley. He enlisted in 1916 with the 34th Battalion and gained sergeant's stripes but was prevented from leaving for the front by regulations banning Aboriginals from enlisting. But Douglas re-enlisted the following year and this time served in France as a private with the Australian 13th Battalion, only to be wounded and captured in April 1917 during the first Battle of Bullecourt.

With his dark skin, Scottish accent and educated manner, Douglas was something of an ethnological curiosity to his German captors, and his head was studied, measured and, reportedly, modelled in ebony. To his comrades, Douglas was not an Aboriginal man in a white army; he was just a fellow Digger. Douglas recalled later in life that, 'the colour line was never drawn in the trenches'. The men voted him the Red Cross representative to distribute ration parcels, a job he performed diligently. His intellect, sense of humour and love for literature made him popular among his peers in the camps.

BEYOND THE LINE

Following the war Douglas went to live with his sister in Lithgow, working at the Small Arms Factory. With some of his fellow soldiers, he broadcast sessions on the local radio and became secretary of the Lithgow sub-branch of the RSL.

But life became difficult for Douglas and other Indigenous men who went to war. Some time after 1928, Douglas lost his job at the factory and found it difficult to obtain stable work. As an Aboriginal, he was not entitled to the grants or benefits that other returned soldiers could obtain. For a time he took part in Anzac Day parades with his trench mates, until the inequality of life took hold.

In 1929, he wrote an article which appeared in the *Sunday Pictorial* reflecting on the infamous massacre of 31 Aborigines the previous year in Coniston, NT, and on the social injustice in Australia and the difficulties faced by 'half-castes'. He later worked as a clerk at Callan Park Hospital where many returned soldiers were housed.

However it appears he led a lonely life, developing depression and becoming a heavy drinker in later years. In the 1940s an acquaintance from the Museum, James Kinghorn, was marching with his unit when he saw Douglas sitting under a tree in the Domain. He broke ranks to ask him why he was not marching, to which Douglas replied, 'I'm not wanted anymore, I don't belong. I've lived long enough'.

Douglas's foster brother passed away in 1944 in tragic circumstances. Douglas battled alcoholism and died six years after his brother, following a stroke. He had been a resident of the Salvation Army Home on Bear Island at La Perouse.

STRUGGLE

There is renewed interest in telling the true story of Aboriginal involvement in World War I, with the play *Black Diggers* premiering at the recent Sydney Festival (with Douglas Grant's story included). Estimates of Aboriginal involvement in the war vary from 400 to 1000 men, yet it is an overlooked part of Australia's history.

Much of what I've read about Grant in researching this article has been from the perspective of white society. It was difficult to discover a clear picture of the man among the available conflicting and often patronising accounts. However, he emerges as a man who struggled to find his identity; a decent man, educated and loyal, who fought for his country and worked for values of greater equality, support for the disadvantaged and Aboriginal rights.

ELIZABETH McKINNON MUSEUM STUDIES INTERN

WEBLINK ›

Read an account of Indigenous Australian service men at awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/aborigines/indigenous/

Opposite left
An older Douglas Grant sits beside the war memorial he designed at Callan Park Hospital, Rozelle. Photo by Sam Hood.

Opposite right
Private Douglas Grant served in the 13th Battalion, embarking for France in August 1916. Photo courtesy Australian War Memorial. *P01692.001*

Indigenous Australia

Grant, Douglas (1885–1951)

by Chris Clark

This entry is from the Australian Dictionary of Biography

Douglas Grant, c.1918

Douglas Grant (1885?-1951), draughtsman and soldier, was an Aboriginal man born about 1885 in the Bellenden Ker Ranges, Queensland. In 1887 his parents were killed, apparently in a tribal fight although some accounts claim it was during a punitive action launched from Cairns, and he was rescued by two members of a collecting expedition from the Australian Museum, Robert Grant and E. J. Cairn. The former sent the infant to the Lithgow (New South Wales) home of his parents and later adopted him. As Douglas Grant the child was raised with Robert Grant's own son Henry, received a good education at Annandale, Sydney, and trained as a draughtsman. He became a clever penman and sketch artist and at the Queen's diamond jubilee exhibition of 1897 won first prize for a drawing of the bust of Queen Victoria; in addition he learned taxidermy from his foster-father.

For ten years Grant was a draughtsman at Mort's Dock & Engineering Co. in Sydney. About 1913 he resigned to work as a woolclasser at Belltrees station, near Scone. In January 1916 he enlisted as a private in the 34th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, but when his unit was about to leave for overseas service he was discharged because of regulations preventing Aboriginal people leaving the country without government approval. He again enlisted and in August embarked for France to join the 13th Battalion. On 11 April 1917, during the 1st battle of Bullecourt, he was wounded and captured. He was held as a prisoner of war in a camp at Wittenberg, and later at Wünsdorf, Zossen, near Berlin. He became an object of curiosity to German doctors, scientists and anthropologists—the sculptor Rudolf Markoeser modelled his bust in ebony—and was given comparative freedom.

Grant was repatriated to England in December 1918, and visited his foster-parents' relatives in Scotland where his racial features, combined with a richly burred Scottish accent attracted attention. In April 1919 he embarked for Australia and after demobilization on 9 July returned to work at Mort's Dock. Several years later he moved to Lithgow, where he was employed as a labourer at a paper products factory and a small-arms factory. He was active in returned servicemen's affairs in this period and conducted a 'Diggers session' on the local radio station. In the early 1930s, by which time both his foster-parents and his foster-brother had died, he returned to Sydney. He worked as a clerk at the Callan Park Mental Asylum and lived there, constructing in his spare time a large ornamental pond spanned by a replica of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. After World War II he lived at the Salvation Army's old men's quarters in Sydney and after 1949 at La Perouse. He died of a subarachnoid haemorrhage in Prince Henry Hospital, Little Bay, on 4 December 1951 and was buried in Botany cemetery. He was unmarried.

A popular member of his battalion, Grant had also impressed his German captors as a man of superior intellect; to his fellow prisoners he was aggressively Australian. His attainments included a wide knowledge of Shakespeare and poetry and considerable skill as an artist and bagpipe-player. Despite his acceptance of white culture, in later life he suffered rejection and frustration on account of his race. He was nonetheless an exceptional man.

Select Bibliography

- T. A. White, ***The Fighting Thirteenth***, (Syd, 1924)
- H. Gordon, ***The Embarrassing Australian*** (Melb, 1965)
- ***Journal*** (Legislative Council, New South Wales) 1888-89, 1, p 185
- ***British Australasian***, 2 Nov 1916
- ***Army Journal***, Mar 1973
- ***Reveille*** (Sydney), Dec 1931, Jan 1932, Feb 1952
- ***Sydney Mail***, 20 Mar 1918
- Grant papers, MS 2766 (State Library of New South Wales).

Citation details

Chris Clark, 'Grant, Douglas (1885–1951)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://ia.anu.edu.au/biography/grant-douglas-6454/text11049, accessed 24 May 2018.

© Copyright Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2012

THE AUSTRALIAN

Mapping the massacres of Queensland Aboriginal society

NICOLAS ROTHWELL THEAUSTRALIAN 12:00AM June 29, 2013

IN October 1890, Archibald Meston, a handsome, slightly scapegrace pillar of the Queensland establishment, felt the time had come for a brisk assessment of the state's dark and conveniently ill-remembered past. At that point in his hectic career Meston was still in his 30s and had already been by turns a wordsmith, a parliamentarian, an explorer, a newspaper editor and a bankrupt: now he was on the verge of a new chapter in his life, as protector of the Aborigines. It was a title replete with ironic undertones.

Meston set out his portrait of the decades gone by in blunt terms in The Queenslander, a weekly with wide distribution: "The records of those unhappy years are unspeakably ghastly in their accounts of murders of white men and slaughter of the blacks. The whites were killed in dozens, the blacks in hundreds." The archives of Queensland history groan with telltale passages of this kind: reports and reminiscences that make plain the scale of the bloodshed on the northern frontier during the period of colonial settlement and conquest, when the Australian hinterland was being discreetly, violently cleared and claimed.

Conspiracy of Silence, by Cairns-based historian Timothy Bottoms, provides an overview of our understanding of this bleak phase in the formation of north Australia and builds on much previous work. For most of the century just past, the act of dispossession at the heart of the national story was airbrushed out of memory. But in the 19th century, when the vast expanses of Queensland beyond the Dividing Range were being tamed and taken, a different kind of bid to tilt and accent the record of events had been in place: a double pattern of censorship and attempts at unveiling. As the killings multiplied, the perpetrators concealed the evidence or minimised their scale; meanwhile witnesses and whistleblowers waged a campaign of disclosures. Thus a struggle for interpretation of the frontier landscape was already under way and its weighting was familiar: the press and conscience-stricken agitators fighting to expose the actions and the inaction of the political class.

This pattern complicates the task of the contemporary historian. What counts as evidence? How well does the record of facts set down capture the flow of cause and consequence? Reappraisal of the colonial era has been under way for almost a generation now, since the first frontier works by Henry Reynolds and Raymond Evans appeared in the 1980s. Evans contributes a brief foreword to this study, setting the context, sketching the latest updates in the task of reassessment: "It has now become clear," he says, "that the killing incidents occasioned by the state-financed, equipped and run Native Police squads which operated in Queensland for more than half a century between 1849 and the 1900s would have numbered in the thousands" - and these officially sanctioned killings were supplemented by freelance shootings and poisoning episodes.

Bottoms collects a rich supply of testimony: from publications, new and period; from his own field interviews and research. He confirms the consistent picture of an advancing northward tide of clash and resistance. Strikingly, he provides illustration in the form of a set of maps: "Some Massacres on the Queensland Frontier", he offers as his heading for them, modestly, tellingly; they may be the most comprehensive "massacre maps" yet published for the era of Australian settlement.

They do their work. Not even experts in the records of the archives could be familiar with every episode marked here by a little map-dot: Birdsville, Burketown, Coen, Wyandotte. It may be that a handful of these cases hover on the edge of the historical record; the total picture is more difficult to brush away.

Bottoms tells his own tale in brief, to make a simple point. He grew up in provincial towns such as Naracoorte and Albury, "blithely unaware of Aboriginal Australia". He became a teacher, working at Santa Teresa just south of Alice Springs, and then in Kowanyama in western Cape York. In these remote communities he was thrown together with the locals: he became aware of their way of seeing the landscape, and their traditions and beliefs. Next Cairns. There was a large regional Aboriginal population. Their stories were unknown. He made himself their scribe and published a heartfelt portrait of their past, Djabugay Country. He was commissioned to write a history of Cairns by the local council; he wrote it: the manuscript was vast and impressive in its detail, and full of Aboriginal content. The council refused to publish it on the grounds the cost would be prohibitive.

Undaunted, he pushed on with his projects: "My approach has been to address the thinking reader who wishes to come to terms with and develop an awareness of the elements that comprise Australian history." This is a journey

that involves "facing the awful truth", he says, about times long gone. But it also allows the tracing of continuities. For Bottoms, "the political machinations of the past and the subsequent consequences have relevance" today.

His is a fairly standard story of personal enlightenment through study and experience - and the version of the frontier he offers up is pretty much the new standard version endorsed by academic experts: a history once suppressed, now accepted, but not exactly embraced and enshrined at the heart of modern Australia's image of itself. How could it be? Chapter by chapter, region by region, killing by killing, tale by tale, Bottoms builds his mosaic: the punitive expedition to Fraser Island in 1852, the Bendemere and Goulbolba Hill massacres of the 1860s, the 1870s slaughter at Koonchera and Thundapurty waterholes - here they all are.

Many of the episodes Bottoms deals with were small-scale affairs: "massacre" is now defined by historians of the 19th-century frontier as any organised killing of five or more victims. Some, though, were anything but small. At Goulbolba, more than 300 people were shot or drowned and their skulls and bones could be seen scattered in the surrounding hills for years afterwards, until a succession of sharp bushfires burned the landscape clean.

On the Upper Dawson River in central Queensland, at Hornet Bank station, a notorious attack by Yiman tribesmen claimed the lives of 11 whites, including seven members of one family. The less well publicised retribution was so savage it resulted in the killing of as many as 300 Aborigines and virtually depopulated the area; indeed, Steele Rudd's father, Thomas Davis, used to ride through that scrub country in the years afterwards and "saw the bleaching bones of the dead blacks strewn here and there - a gruesome sight - full-ribbed bodies, fleshless arms, disjointed leg-bones and ghastly grinning skulls peeping out of the grass".

Frontal assaults, ambushes, mounted raids, large-scale cross-country drives and dragnets - different means of attack were employed in different regions, but often the personnel involved were the same: white men with experience of this low-level form of war would move with the frontier, and what they knew of bush conflict was invaluable. The key enforcers, though, were mercenaries, if of a distinctive kind: the Native Police squads - young Aboriginal men removed from their own country and enlisted as shock troops in regional pacification campaigns; coerced, rewarded, paid with the privilege of survival and power: the militia of a shadow world.

Their success was easy enough to measure, but harder to broadcast or proclaim. The Queensland authorities adopted a tactful register of language, for there was a constant need to balance the announcement of official reprisals with the more general doctrine of concealment. Hence the coded vocabulary that became common in the north, where "dispersal" was the standard euphemism for a successful raid, and "no arrests made" was instantly translatable as "all were killed".

But a certain childish simplicity can be traced in the sources. The aristocrat settler Harold Finch-Hatton in his 1886 frontier memoir describes a "nameless" gentleman who poisoned a large group of Aborigines at Long Lagoon, which stands on Mt Spencer station inland from Mackay, a holding in those days, as it happens, of the Finch-Hatton family: "More than a hundred blacks were stretched out by this ruse of the owner of the Long Lagoon. In a dry season, when the water sinks low, their skulls can occasionally be found half-buried in the mud."

Strychnine seems to have been a popular weapon in the armoury of "first wave" landholders, perhaps because of the alarming disparity in numbers between Aboriginal and incomer. Often the furthest reaches of the frontier proved the most blood-spattered, and often it was the most distinguished explorers and pioneers who were the chief aggressors: Frank Hann and Frank Jardine, for instance, Gulf and Cape pioneers respectively, men whose names a good number of Australia's great ranges and river systems still bear today.

Their current renown and past eager journal-keeping brings their actions to light. Much, though, of what transpired in the far north remains in the darkest obscurity and clues to many an unknown clash lie half-lost in the furthest nooks and crannies of populist prose. Here's Glenville Pike, for instance, the vernacular historian of Cape York, author of the bizarre Unsung Heroes of the Queensland Wilderness, expending his lush style on the Palmer River gold rush country: "Blackfellow Creek was so named because diggers rushing to the Hodgkinson field in March 1876 came upon acres of bones where a whole tribe had obviously been wiped out - an Australian version of the killing fields that has been hidden or whitewashed for nearly 120 years."

Burnings, mass drownings - the list, proof of man's fearful ingenuity, runs on. Raymond Evans is the chief expert in drawing up the balance sheet of deaths. Three years ago he published a statistical calculation extrapolated from a series of monthly reports filed from the Native Police camps that operated in the second half of the 19th century: his conservative estimate is that 24,000 Aborigines were killed in that time by these para-statal militias.