

ANZAC DAY 2019 SERVICE
SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR
THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
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I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

Just over three weeks ago on Sunday 31st March, the Bridge of Remembrance, which links the Cenotaph with the Soldiers Memorial Walk on the Domain, was opened. This Centenary of Anzac Day project is to be a lasting memory of the 15,000 Tasmanians who enlisted during the First World War, the 2,500 who died as well as all Australians who served during World War I. A central feature of the ceremony was a smoking ceremony and three Indigenous dances. Speaking at the opening, the Minister for Veteran Affairs the Honourable Darren Chester MP, noted that we should remember the Indigenous Australians who served in World War 1 at a time when they were ineligible to vote.

The Centenary of Anzac Day with its particular focus on World War 1 provided an opportunity to consider more broadly the effects of war and the contributions and suffering of those who have not always been specifically and sufficiently acknowledged. The contribution of women, for example, and the different ethnic groupings within the Australian imperial force.

The Anzac tradition has been increasingly embraced by contemporary Australians but it is a tradition from which our country's Indigenous people have felt excluded.¹ It is pleasing that there have been attempts to address this.

Specifically, the Anzac Centenary projects included a number which commemorated the service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as producing a list of Indigenous personnel who served in World War 1; including their stories in the new galleries at the War Memorial; and a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service in the ADF.

¹ Noel Pearson, 'Walking in two worlds', The Australian, 28 October, 2006.

How was it that Indigenous Australians served in our armed services in World War 1 but at the same time were ineligible to vote?

At least 1000 Indigenous Australians fought in the First World War, probably more. This was at a time when most could not vote and none were counted in the census, as noted in the Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia.² At the outbreak of war, many came forward to enlist and were accepted. Others were rejected because of their race (they were not of, quote, 'substantial European origin', as required by law³). Some, however, did not let this deter them: they travelled to different centres and some were accepted there.

By the end of 1915 it became even harder for Aboriginal Australians to enlist because of restrictions placed on, quote, 'all coloured men'. By October 1917, when more recruits were needed, restrictions were eased and Aboriginal Australians could be accepted if one parent was of European origin'.⁴ Noel Pearson's great uncles, Norman and Charlie Baird, are examples of men who were accepted. Both men, with an Aboriginal mother and Scottish father, received an English education and a Kuku Yalanji education in the bush. They strongly identified as Aboriginal Australians. Charlie enlisted and left for Egypt in 1915 and Norman in 1917 and served in France. I will come back to them shortly.

In Tasmania, it has been estimated that some 74 Aboriginal Tasmanians served in World War 1, including 31 from Cape Barren Island and Flinders Island.⁵ Because the official position at the time was that Tasmania did not have an Aboriginal population, Tasmanian Aborigines were much more readily accepted into the first AIF than many Aboriginal Australians who volunteered in mainland Australia.

Jack Hearps, from Queenstown, a descendant of Dalrymple Briggs, was an early enlistee. He was one of the first soldiers of Aboriginal ancestry to receive a

² Australian War Memorial, 'Indigenous defence service', <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/indigenous> accessed 1 April 2019.

³ *Defence Act 1903* (Cth) s 61(h).

⁴ Australian War Memorial, 'Aboriginal service during the First World War', <https://www.awm.gov.au/about/our-work/projects/indigenous-service> accessed 1 April 2019.

⁵ Andrea Gerrard, *Overlooked: Tasmanian Aborigines in the First World War*, Master's thesis, University of Tasmania, 2015, iv.

commission in the field. Lieutenant Jack Hearps was killed in action in August 2016 leading his men into battle at Mouquet Farm.⁶

His cousin, Charles Hearps, who was awarded the Military Medal for bravery while in action, was also wounded but survived.⁷ John William Miller, grandson of Fanny Cochrane Smith, was killed in action within hours of landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula.⁸

Edward Lewis Maynard also died in action at Gallipoli.⁹ He was one of nine Aboriginal Tasmanians from Cape Barren Island and Flinders Island who did not return from the battlefield to their island home.¹⁰

Some historians have expressed the view that Indigenous Australians who were permitted to enlist in World War 1 served on equal terms and were not discriminated against. Tasmanian historian Andrea Gerrard disagrees, arguing that while they received the same pay, equipment and rations, there is evidence of discrimination in terms of promotion and exposure to active service and a higher risk of being killed or wounded.¹¹

After the war, while Indigenous ex-servicemen were entitled to the same repatriation benefits as the non-Indigenous, in areas such as education, employment and civil liberties, Aboriginal ex-servicemen and women on the mainland found that discrimination remained or, indeed, had worsened. Only one Indigenous Australian is known to have received land in New South Wales under the 'soldier settlement' scheme, despite the fact that much of the best farming land in Aboriginal reserves was confiscated for soldier settlement farms. Repression of Aboriginal Australians increased between the wars with 'protection' legislation giving government officials greater control over them.

For Aboriginal war veterans who returned to their homes on the Furneaux Islands after World War 1 accessing health care under the Repatriation System at the Launceston General Hospital would have been difficult, as was getting assessments for benefits.

⁶ Gerrard, n 5, 109.

⁷ Gerrard, n 5, 110.

⁸ Gerrard, n 5, 15.

⁹ Gerrard, n 5,

¹⁰ Gerrard, n 5, 164.

¹¹ Gerrard, n 5, 161-162.

What happened to Noel Pearson's great uncles on their return? Norman, who was an advocate for the rights of his people, was under constant threat of removal to Palm Island. He, like many others who had served, felt a strong sense of entitlement to proper citizenship and he fought for this. Attempts were made to force his family's removal from Bloomfield in Far North Queensland, and one of his sons, ten-year-old Joseph, was removed to a mission near Cairns. With his English and Kuki Yalanji education, Norman 'walked in two worlds', was an advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people and worked for the language and culture of the Yalanji people. Despite the way he was treated and Joseph's removal, Norman and Joseph both enlisted in World War 2.

In 1939 Indigenous Australians were divided over the issue of service in World War 2. Some believed it would assist the push for full citizenship rights, as it seems did Norman Baird, but others were bitter that Aboriginal sacrifice in World War 1 had not led to any improvements in rights. Nevertheless hundreds did enlist and at the start of the war were allowed to do so.

The Defence Committee later decided that this was neither 'necessary nor desirable', for this to change again when Japan entered the war and there was an increased need for more recruits.

The Royal Australian Air Force was, it seems, less restrictive in its recruiting than the army on the basis of race. However, little is known about Aboriginal air crew and the story for the Navy is similar.¹²

It is reported that wartime service gave many Indigenous Australians pride and confidence in demanding their rights. However, while they were treated equally with white Australians when at war, they came back from the war with much the same discrimination as before it. For example, many were barred from Returned and Services League clubs, except on Anzac Day, and many were not given the right to vote for another 17 years.

Some irregular army units, such as the Northern Territory Reconnaissance Unit, comprised of mostly Indigenous Australians, received no monetary pay at all until back pay and medals were finally awarded in 1992.¹³

Aboriginal women also played an important role, enlisting in the women services or working in war industries. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) joined the

¹² Australian War Memorial, n 1.

¹³ Above n 1.

Australian Army Service in 1942 after her two brothers were captured at the fall of Singapore. Her service as a signaller in Brisbane and the contacts she made helped to lay the foundation for later advocacy of Aboriginal rights.

Of course, Anzac Day is a day to remember not just those who served in the two world wars, but all those who have served in the Australian Armed Forces in all wars and peacekeeping operations and their families. Today I know we have present at this Service East Timorese veterans from their war of independence, and of course Australian veterans of Interfet.

Nor should we forget the difficulties many veterans have on returning to civilian life, problems of post-traumatic stress and the effect this has on their families, their partners, their children and parents.

When I spoke at my first Anzac Day service as Governor, I spoke of my father's war service including as a Rat of Tobruk in the Second World War. When I spoke at this service two years ago, I spoke of the often-overlooked role of women in war.

Anzac Day has its rightful place of solemn commemorative reflection, remembering service and sacrifice and at the same time committing ourselves to the pursuit of peace and an international regime governed by negotiation and law, not force. And I hope to have conveyed the message that today and in the future, the Anzac tradition should continue the trend to be an inclusive one.

Lest we forget.