

# ANZAC Day



**ANZAC Day on April 25 is a prime time to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to this nation.**

Anzac Day is usually an occasion where schools, communities or families come together to share stories, to honour and remember those who fought in wars and especially those who lost their lives in doing so.

The telling of these stories depends on each of us. Aboriginal ANZACS are often overlooked in commemorations, but war does not discriminate. Talk to your students about who in their own families has been involved in the services, what they have previously learned about Aboriginal soldiers and explore some of the activities, videos, links and resources in this feature.

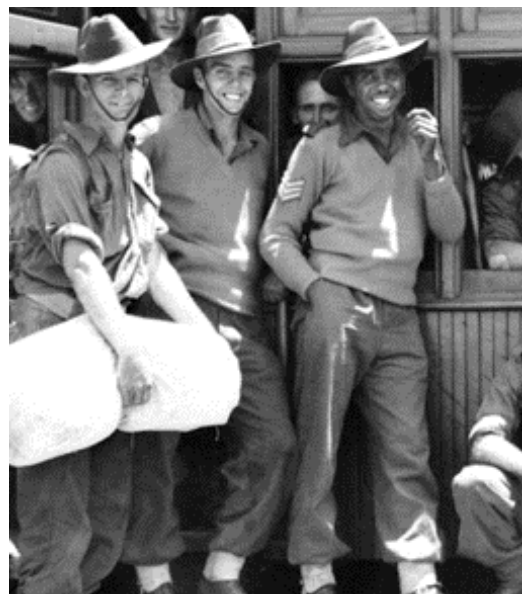
Over 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fought for Australia in World War I despite profound barriers to enlisting.

In proportion to population, no community in Australia contributed more to the war effort in the Second World War than Torres Strait Islander people. By 1944 almost every able-bodied Torres Strait Islander male had enlisted. However, they never received the same rates of pay or conditions as other soldiers, initially one-third that of regular soldiers, and after a two-day "mutiny" in December 1943 this was raised to two-thirds.

The [Australian War Memorial site](#) lists known Indigenous service men and women who enlisted for service in conflicts including the Boer war, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This acknowledgement of service is part of the ongoing process of recognition and reconciliation.

*"When my uncle came back from serving in Korea, he couldn't even get a beer in a pub let alone a pension, and he wasn't permitted to become a citizen until 1968."*

*John Kinsella, nephew of Australia's most famous Aboriginal soldier, Captain Reg Saunders MBE.*



**Did you know** that Victorian Gunditjmara man Reg Saunders was the first Aboriginal person to be commissioned as an officer in the Australian Army?

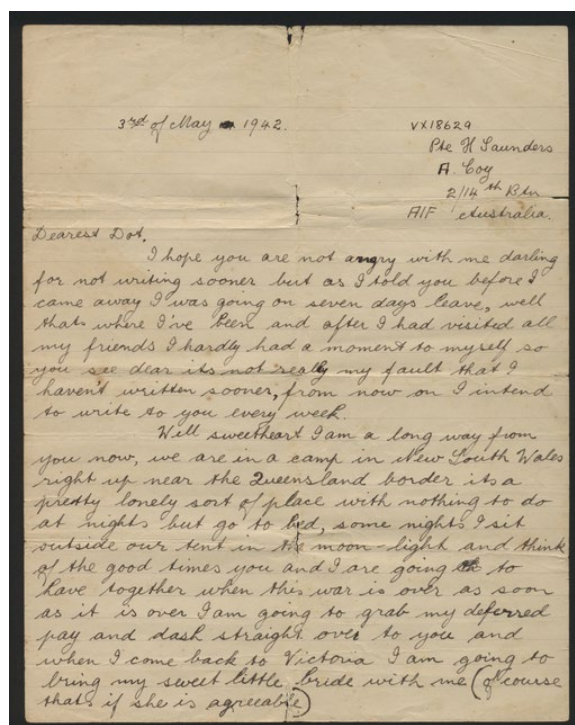
Reg and Harry Saunders, from Lake Condah near Portland in the Western Districts, had enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF) soon after WWII was declared. Twenty-year-old Reg joined the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Division in April 1940 and after basic training soon found himself on a troopship bound for the Middle East. 18-year-old Harry was initially knocked back when he tried to volunteer but, after travelling to Melbourne, was successful. He would also serve with a Victorian unit, the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Division, which departed Australia soon after his brother. They would meet again in December 1940, while on leave in the ancient city of Jerusalem. Read more In [Greece, Crete and Syria: 75 Years on](#) by Adrian Threlfall, and further explore Indigenous Australians' war service through some of the following resources.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 089220  
Group portrait of 9 Platoon, A Company, 2/14th Infantry Battalion on the Kokoda Trail, New Guinea

A rare view into the private life, hopes and dreams of a serviceman, can be found in letters from Private Harry Saunders to his sweetheart Miss Dorothy Mary Banfield, written between 3 May and 25 October 1942 before he was tragically killed in conflict at the age of 21; and

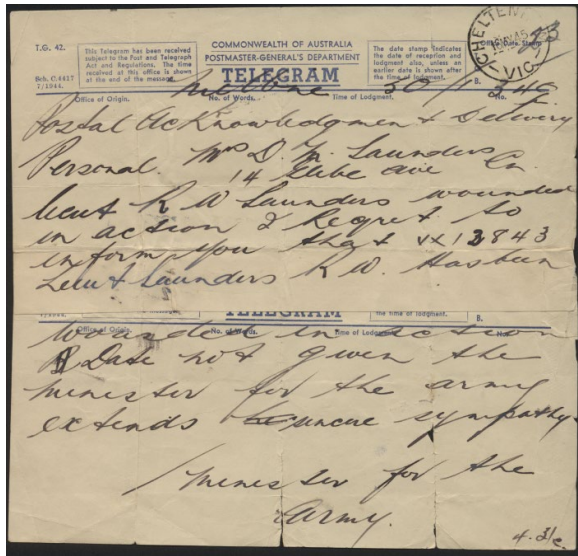
from his brother Reg Saunders from 1943. In his correspondence, Private Harry Saunders writes about being on leave, training hard, his intentions of marrying Miss Banfield, doing long route marches, hearing that his brother Reg had escaped Crete, visiting friends that were camped nearby, being in action in New Guinea, being in hospital with malaria, and losing his belongings. Private Saunders also responds to news from Dorothy's letters and sends his love. Click on the letter below to download Private Saunders' letters, including a telegram.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

AWM2021.22.19

To learn what happened next, read about the gift to the Australian War Memorial of private letters from Reg Saunders to Dorothy Banfield by his daughter Auntie Glenda Hume in 2021, reported by the [Sydney Morning Herald](#); and click onto the telegram about the then Lieut. Reginald Saunders.



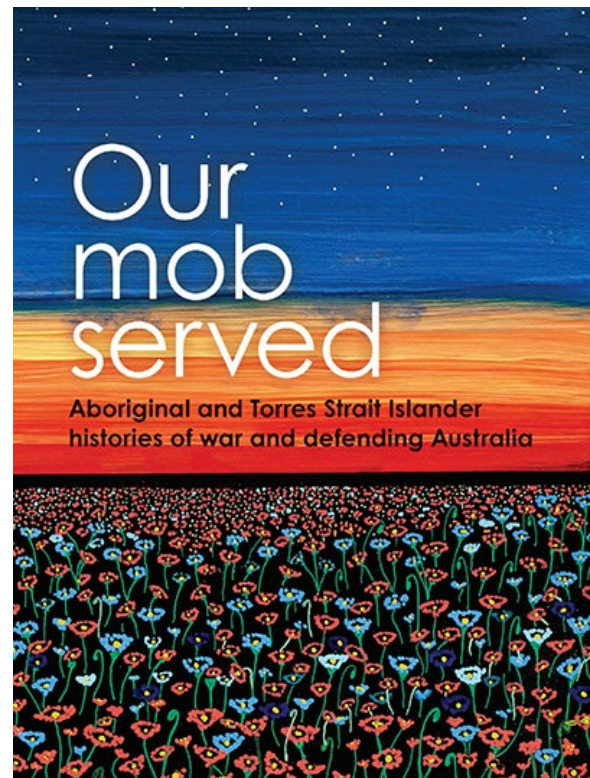
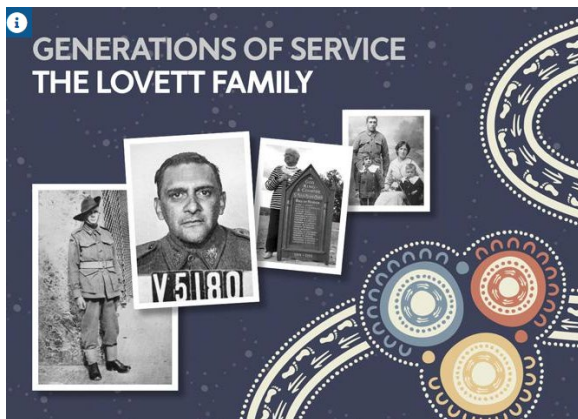
Schools can [contact](#) the **Australian War Memorial** to borrow **Memorial Box 03: Too Dark for the Light Horse** for follow up lessons. This site also takes you to online resources and Australian Curriculum links.



The Australian War Memorial site has a variety of online resources (see below), as well as the [Department of Veteran Affairs \(DVA\)](#). Using the Australian War Memorial's online databases, [investigate](#) the war service of Aboriginal servicemen and women.

Download DVA's [Indigenous Service](#) publications for primary and secondary schools for background and suggested inquiry activities. Search 'Indigenous Service'.

On this site you will find resources like [Generations of Service: The Lovett Family Digibook](#), linked to the Australian Curriculum Years 3-6.



The oral histories and treasured family photographs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women create a vivid picture of Indigenous war service in [Our Mob Served: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories of war and defending Australia](#) published by AIATSIS (2019).

AIATSIS CEO Craig Ritchie said the book, a moving tribute to the little-known history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander war time and defence service, is long overdue. “One of the outcomes of the four year ‘[Serving Our Country](#)’ research project, this book brings to the fore the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people served our nation,” said Mr Ritchie. “It shares some of the powerful stories heard as the project travelled to many cities and towns around the country recording the experiences of ex-service men and women and their families. The editors have squeezed as many of these generously shared stories and photographs as they could between the stunning covers.”

**Serving our Country: a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the defence of Australia** was a four-year Australia Research Council (ARC) linkage grant, which documented the historical contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian defence and auxiliary services from the Boer War to 2000.

Further explore the dedicated [AIATSIS](#) site – **Serving their County.**

Boomerang sweetheart badges (pictured right) were commonly presented to servicemen and servicewomen before their departure for war service to symbolise their safe return home. They have also been used in designs for sweetheart badges, which were worn by female relatives of men serving in wartime as a symbol of hope for the safe return of their loved ones.



*Group portrait of the special platoon consisting of Aboriginal soldiers, all volunteers mainly from Lake Tyers, at Number 9 camp at Wangaratta with Corporal Mullett (left), Major Joseph Albert Wright (centre) and Sergeant Morris (right). Major Wright, a World War 1 Light Horse veteran, was in charge of this Platoon, which was the only Aboriginal squad in the Australian military forces. Source: [Australian War Memorial](#)*

Watch **Bush TV's [Untold Stories](#)** about WW1 Aboriginal service men (3 min. ), and research the lives of Victorian Koories such as Brabuwoolooong private Harry Thorpe. *Why were there such barriers and how did some overcome them?*

Watch a range of videos such as Living Black's [Unidentified Soldier](#), [Indigenous Servicemen through the Years](#) and ABC Message Stick's [ANZAC](#), and discuss issues of equality, identity, recognition and life after service raised.



For a home-based activity with kids and family, milk carton lanterns lining your driveway at dawn like the ones pictured below is a worthwhile activity, customised to include Koorie perspectives. All you need is milk cartons, candles, markers and creativity.



Group portrait of Aboriginal women and girls knitting socks, jumpers and balaclavas for the war effort at Cummeragunja Government Mission, NSW (opposite Barmah, Vic) on the Murray River. Identified, left to right, back row: Merle Morgan, June Morgan, Weeny Charles, Amy Briggs, Valda McGee, Edna Walker, Sheila Charles, Joan Charles, Elsie Cooper, Midge Walsh, Florry Walker. Front row: Joyce Atkinson, Clare Charles, Alma Charles, Ada Cooper, Nelly Davis?, Elizabeth Morgan, Lauraine Charles, Greta Cooper, Violet Charles, Wynnie Walker, Hilda Walker, Georgina Atkinson, Lydia Morgan, Reta Cooper, Maggie Weston. **Australian War Memorial: P01562.001.**

Check out the range of Aboriginal ANZAC-themed activity sheets on [Wingaru](http://Wingaru.com.au).

## ANZAC - Aboriginal Diggers

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people have served in every conflict & commitment involving Australian defence contingents since 1901, including both world wars.  
Can you find the names of the Aboriginal Diggers listed below?

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L D C E A R Z M P B H C A S F I E Z X A
H E L E N A N N I E M C D O N A L D A P
O P N E A L D U R I Y D O N R O A D P T
K P V A W L S N H W H K Y W P S A W V L
Z H L K A T G S Q U C F C E S Y L F J E
R I M L U G F Z D E G E K A L X U R E M
R L H O R L E Q S G E Y J E I L S A R A
N L K V E B G W D V C N T M K C R N O L
A I S F G D O U G L A S G R A N T K M E
K P S B S O K U Q O J U L I X C N F E N
B M A M A F P L Y H U M B D F T D I L W
A C S N U W I L L I A M I R W I N S O A
M L A E N A D N L D B X T X K X A H C T
N E T G D Q P H C O A C G U Q U L E K E
O O D G E R O O N O O N U C C A L R E R
H D M A R I O N L E A N N E S M I T H S
M W R J S D S X P Y Z M Q K V P W S R M
                    
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Douglas Grant  
Frank Fisher  
Helen Annie McDonald  
Jerome Locke  
Len Waters

Marion Leanne Smith  
Oodgeroo Noonuccal  
Phillip McLeod  
Reg Saunders  
William Irwin

[www.wingaru.com.au](http://www.wingaru.com.au)

The **Anzac Day Schools' Awards**, worth up to **\$5000**, are an opportunity for students to engage with Australia's wartime history in significant and meaningful ways. The theme of the 2026 awards is **Women in Service**. Check out the [ANZAC portal](#) for more information, including research links to Women in service and how to record oral histories with veterans. **More than 250** Indigenous men and women served during the Vietnam War. **Entries close 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2026.**



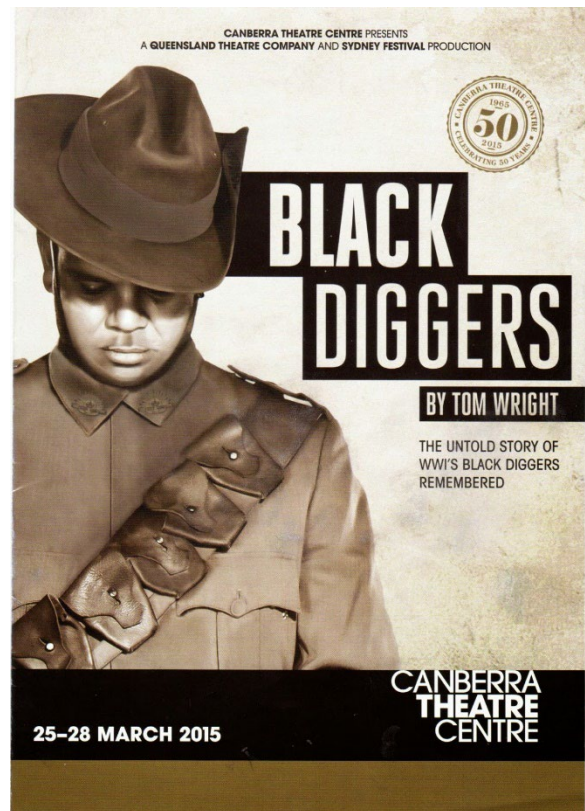
With students, make and display an ANZAC Day portrait wreath and choose who you would like to remember this Anzac Day, or choose an image from suggested portrait images. The wreath template and instruction on how to make a commemorative wreath can be viewed and downloaded on the [Shrine of Remembrance website](#). Personal family or online photos can be used, and this site also includes a photo of Private Samuel Alexandra Peacock (Sam) Lovett, 6th Reinforcements, 2/5th Battalion, and his niece, Aircraftwoman (ACW) Alice Lovett, an Aboriginal servicewoman, standing on a Melbourne Street. In this photo ACW Lovett is a member of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) and is wearing 1942 pattern WAAAF overalls.



NAIDOC 2014 poster:  
<https://www.naidoc.org.au/posters/poster-gallery/naidoc-2014-poster>



Watch the promotional video **Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King** - Cinesound News No. 488 - (DVA) by clicking on the image above and discuss the portrayal of Aboriginal soldiers and purpose of the promotional video.



**Black Diggers** is a play written by Tom Wright and originally directed by Wesley Enoch. The production is the culmination of painstaking research into the lives and deaths of the thousand or so Indigenous soldiers who fought for the British Commonwealth in World War I. Grand in scale and scope, **Black Diggers** draws

from in-depth interviews with the families of Black Diggers who heard the call to arms from all over Australia, as well as conversations with veterans, historians and academics.

Suitable for study with senior students, click on the Black Diggers poster link for a preview online, or to purchase a copy of the play. A filmed post-school matinee discussion uploaded by The Arts Centre, Melbourne can be viewed online through this [VCE Drama Teachers' Resource](#).

### Victorian Curriculum:

[VC2HH2K04](#) How they, their family, friends and communities commemorate significant past events that are important to their community: History F-2: Community histories.

[VC2HH4K03](#) significant events, symbols and emblems that express Australian identity and diversity and how they are celebrated, commemorated or recognised, including Australia Day, Anzac Day, Harmony Week, the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander People's flag: History 3-4 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Community, remembrance and celebrations.

[VC2HH4S04](#) Describe perspectives of people from the past based on evidence from primary sources: History 3-4: Historical Concepts and Skills > Using historical sources.

[VC2HH4S03](#) identify the features and content of historical sources: History 3-4 Historical Concepts and Skills > Using historical sources.

[VC2HH6S05](#) describe historical perspectives and identify beliefs, values and attitudes of people and groups based on evidence from primary sources: History 5-6 Historical Concepts and Skills > Using historical sources.

[VC2HH6K08](#) the changing experiences and perspectives of Australian democracy and citizenship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrants, women and children since Federation: History 5-6 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Australia (1900–2000).

[VC2HC8K12](#) various experiences and perspectives of national identity and citizenship, including the connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country and Place, and of different migrant groups: Civics and Citizenship 7-8 Knowledge and Understanding > Citizenship, diversity and identity.

[VC2HC8K10](#) how values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity can support social cohesion and a resilient

democracy within Australian society: Civics and Citizenship 7-8 Knowledge and Understanding > Citizenship, diversity and identity.

[VC2HC8K12](#) various experiences and perspectives of national identity and citizenship, including the connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country and Place, and of different migrant groups: Civics and Citizenship 7-8 Knowledge and Understanding > Citizenship, diversity and identity.

[VC2HH10K19](#) significant consequences of the world wars on Australian society and the experiences and historical perspectives of those on the home front, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and women: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Australians at war (1914–1945).

[VC2HH10K23](#) different interpretations and debates about the significance and legacies of the world wars: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Australians at war (1914–1945).

[VC2HH10K35](#) different historical interpretations and debates about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms campaigns: History 9-10: Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms (1938–present).

[VC2HH10K41](#) different historical interpretations and debates about changes and legacies of a major global influence, development and/or event, including on Australian society: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: The globalising world (1945–present).

[VC2HH10K15](#) significant places where Australians fought: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Australians at war (1914–1945).

[VC2HH10K16](#) the experiences and perspectives of those who fought or were deployed overseas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and women: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Australians at war (1914–1945).

[VC2HH10K19](#) significant consequences of the world wars on Australian society and the experiences and historical perspectives of those on the home front, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and women: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Australians at war (1914–1945).

[VC2HH10K30](#) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' experiences and perspectives of colonisation and resistance between 1788 and 1938: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms (1938–present).

[VC2HH10K32](#) the experiences and perspectives of significant individuals and groups that contributed to or denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms: History 9-10 Historical Knowledge and Understanding > Investigation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' rights and freedoms (1938–present).

[VC2HC10K04](#) the Australian Government's roles and responsibilities at a regional and global level, including diplomatic relations in the Asia-Pacific region; Civics and Citizenship 9-10: Knowledge and Understanding > Government and democracy.



Arch of Boomerangs at Aboriginal Wedding:  
Aboriginal members of the A.I.F. made an archway with boomerangs for the wedding of Mr. George Patten and Miss Suzie Evelyn Murray wedding at Ormond Baptist Church, Melbourne. Sir Doug Nichols was reportedly Best Man (image SLV; reported in the [Argus September 21, 1940](#)).



*And a final word ...*

*We're always seeking to improve our education resources and to make them useful, relevant and highly readable.*

*We invite you to email through suggestions including how you as educators incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, especially Victorian ones in your teaching and curriculum.*

This ANZAC Day special feature, our briefs and *Koorie Perspectives in Curriculum Bulletins* are available on the [VAEAI website](#).

Produced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), April 2026.

*Any enquiries, feedback and suggestions are welcomed, by contacting VAEAI on (03)94810800 or emailing [vaso@vaeai.org.au](mailto:vaso@vaeai.org.au).*

For more Koorie Perspectives, see the VAEAI [Koorie Education Calendar](#) and our [Koorie Education Resources](#).