



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a long and proud, but often little known, history of contributing to Australia's military efforts. This Anzac Day take some time to learn about and remember the forgotten Anzacs.

Did you know?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have fought for Australia in every war since Federation and as early as the Boer War.
- The Australian Defence Force officially repealed its discriminatory policy excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from service in 1949.
- During World War II, the Australian Army employed whole Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia in defence work, including construction, army butcheries, farming, hospital aids and general labour. Employees were given rations, housing and sanitation, worked fixed hours and had access to medical treatment in the army hospitals.
- Famous Australian poet, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) joined the Australian Women's Army Service and was trained as a wireless operator.



Meet... The Lovett Family



The Lovett family occupy an impressive position in Australian military history as one of the largest volunteer family groups to serve on the side of the British Empire. Overall, twenty members of the Lovett family, including two female members, have served Australia in both war and peacekeeping missions, from the Western Front to East Timor. Not only did all twenty members survive their service, but four of the Lovett brothers served in both World War I and World War II.

The Lovetts are Gunditjmarra people from Victoria's western districts. Known as the "fighting Gunditjmarra", they fought British Settlers in the Eumarella War in the 1840s. Decades later, during World War I, five Lovett brothers voluntarily enlisted to fight with the Australian armed forces on the side of the British Empire, despite not being recognised as Australian citizens. Like many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their applications were nearly rejected because of their Aboriginal status however they were eventually accepted because they were not "pure blooded blacks".

When they returned home, the Lovett family's traditional lands, at Lake Condah, were sold to the State Government for its Solider Settlement Scheme. Unlike other non-Indigenous servicemen who were offered land upon their return, the Lovett's application for land under the scheme was denied.

In more recent years the Lovett family has received some recognition. In 2000, the Lovett Tower in the Department of Veteran Affairs Building in Canberra was named in recognition of the Lovett family's contribution to the Australian military.

Some quick statistics...

Over **3000** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women are known to have enlisted in World War II.

There are up to **7000** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans and war widows in the Australian community today.

Over **800** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Soldiers are known to have served in World War I. The true number is likely to be much higher.

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

Take action

If you're in Canberra, attend the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commemorative Ceremony](#) after the Anzac Day Dawn Service at the Australian War Memorial.

If you're in Sydney, attend the Coloured Diggers March on Anzac Day in Redfern. The March begins with a Welcome to Country at Redfern Park at 1.35pm.

If you have stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served for Australia let [Gary Oakley](#) at the Australian War Memorial know.

Listen to [Freedom Called](#), a song written by Dave Arden and Paul Kelly about Aboriginal servicemen and women in World War I and World War II.

Watch [Percy's War](#), a documentary about Percy Pepper, an Aboriginal man from Victoria who served in World War I.



All images courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. Photo 1: Special platoon of Aboriginal soldiers in Wangaratta, 1940. Photo 2: Private Samuel Alexander Peacock Lovett, 6th Reinforcements, 2/5th Battalion, and his niece, Aircraftwoman Alice Lovett. Photo 3: George Leonard and Private Harold West, 14th Reinforcements to the 2/1st Battalion, embarking at Sydney.

Reconciliation Australia would like to thank the Australian War Memorial for their assistance in developing this factsheet.

Reconciliation Australia is the national body promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. www.reconciliation.org.au