



“Indigenous soldiers thought 'when we got back, we'd be treated differently

A National Apology to First Nations Soldiers and their descendants.

Fifty years after Australia withdrew from the Vietnam War, the Nation and the RSL apologized to Vietnam Veterans for the treatment they received on returning to Australia. Generally, the RSL did not welcome the veterans. “Vietnam was not a war” was often heard as it was an undeclared war.

Indigenous Australians were exempted from conscription during the Vietnam War but volunteered regardless. A team of volunteers had so far identified 285 Indigenous servicemen and women who served in Vietnam.

An estimated 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people served with the Australian Imperial Force in World War I. There were more than 50 at Gallipoli. It is estimated that about 4,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fought in World War 2. They fought illegally as they were not considered citizens in their own country. Under the Nationality Act 1920, all Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders born after January 1, 1921 gained the status of British subjects. In 1949 (the year I was born), they automatically became Australian citizens under the Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948.

Returning home after the First World War, Aboriginal ex-servicemen received little public or private support. All but one were denied access to soldier settlement schemes. In some states, Native Welfare Agencies quarantined their wages and pensions.

On Saturday, 27 May 1971, Australia celebrated a historic milestone - 50 years since the 1967 Referendum, which voted to remove references in the Australian Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This constitutional change meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were fully included in Census results for the first time, beginning with the 1971 Census.

For much of Australia’s political history, tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people couldn’t vote in state or federal elections. In 1962, the Australian Parliament passed a landmark Act that gave all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the option to enrol and vote in federal elections. However, it was not until 1984 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were finally treated like other voters and required to enrol and vote in elections.

Returning Aboriginal soldiers from the Second World War could march on ANZAC DAY but not have a beer with their mates. They were not welcome in the RSL. Their children could not swim in the local swimming pools etc.

Surely Aboriginal ex-servicemen and women, indeed First Nations people, deserve a national apology, which is much more than 50 years overdue.

“Lest We Forget”

I request that the Australian Government offer an apology to the First Nations soldiers who returned from world wars for the ill-treatment they received.



Gunditjmara man Reg Saunders surrounded by his mates of the 2/7th Battalion, in 1943. (Supplied: Australian War Memorial)

Recently, here in Bundanoon, the local RSL Sub-branch refused to fly the Aboriginal flag at our Southern Highlands Memorial despite the Flag protocol of the Prime Minister in Cabinet. NSW RSL's policy is that the National flag is to be flown, and the choice of other flags can be decided; however, the National Flag protocol is recommended. This comes about because the choice of flags can not be mandated, as many memorials have only one flag pole.

RSL's hold services on ANZAC DAY and REMEMBRANCE DAY ie. two days of the year. The national flag marshal recommends the flying of flags on other days of the year eg, NAIDOC Week etc. The Bundanoon RSL has put locks on the three flag poles here. The Bundanoon Community Association is asking the Wingecarribee Shire Council to implement a policy to redress this situation. The council owns the memorial and the flag poles.

Clearly, the Bundanoon RSL Sub-branch (eight members) is failing in its duty of custodian on behalf of the community.

I am told that the Bundanoon Community Association has written to you. I endorse their request.

If the Liberal National Party proposed a National apology to Aboriginal veterans from ww2 and before, I am sure that all sides of parliament would be supportive.

I am a veteran and Ex-president of the Bundanoon RSL Sub-branch.

On ANZAC DAY this year, I met with elders of the Wiradjuri region and a NSW Aboriginal Lands Councillor. I listened and now respond. Of note, one of my ex-students, Lee Anne Hampton, became the first woman elected to the Bland Shire and the first Aboriginal. Education and Truth-Telling do make a difference. I was surprised when I was presented with four Aboriginal shirts.

I was the Principal of St Mary's Central School of West Wyalong for nine years. Mutual respect is evident.

Closing the Gap: I would like Aboriginal youth to recognise outstanding role models from their culture.

What I am asking helps in this endeavour.

Lets We Forget.

Regards,



Lee Borradale
Gundungurra Country



"I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Gundungurra Country and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging."