



**The Hon Victor Dominello MP
Minister for Citizenship and Communities
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs**

“Stand To”

SYDNEY LEGACY

17 May 2012

AWA BUILDING, LV 1, 47 YORK ST SYDNEY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Australia’s war history is a story of co-operation and partnership. We have been counted on as a friend and ally of freedom and of all those who seek to protect and defend it.

We have been at the ready... to “Stand to arms” when the threat to this precious freedom is encountered, ready to defend our nation against those who would threaten us.

Those of you who have served will be familiar with the phrase “Stand to”, the order that demands that every soldier don belt equipment, check that weapons are in working order and loaded - to be alert and ready in the face of a looming threat. During the First World War it was an order practiced in the trenches to ensure that all soldiers were ready before first light and at dusk, the likely times for enemy attack.

As a nation we have regularly been called upon to “stand to”.

We remember well the wars of the twentieth century. But we must not forget that many Australians are serving today in significant numbers in Afghanistan, East Timor

and the Solomon Islands – strong partnerships where Australia stands with others to preserve and protect freedom.

Inevitably, in the first years of nationhood in the early twentieth century, Australians fought as part of the British Empire. It is within this heritage that we recall the image of the Aussie Digger – bronzed and laconic, comfortable with the untamed bush and its demand for improvisation, suited to the deprivations that attend wars fought far from our home.

Australia's ANZACs are so much more than a collection of stereotypical characters. The ANZAC is a national symbol, an inspirational figure and a vital part of our folklore and contemporary Australian identity.

During the First World War almost 400,000 men enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). It was the actions of the AIF on Gallipoli that gave us the term ANZAC as an identifier, as a badge of honour and a nickname to be proud of.

It was adopted by the men of the AIF when they went on to fight the Germans on the Western Front, particularly at the Somme Valley in France and around the Ypres Salient in Belgium. It was also used by our Light Horsemen who fought to protect the Suez Canal, then drove the Ottoman Turks back across the deserts of Sinai and defeated them in Palestine.

Since the 1920s it has been popular to imagine the ANZAC as essentially British in origin and ancestry, moulded by the Australian environment to become some ideal soldier/bushman.

Does this stereotype survive scrutiny?

Without a doubt a large percentage of those volunteering for the AIF in 1914 and early 1915 were expatriate Poms. But many were not.

Let's look at a few examples and ask ourselves where they fit in the ANZAC legend.

It has been more than 30 years since Peter Weir's monumental film *Gallipoli*

reintroduced us to the bushman soldiers of the Australian Light Horse and the heroic but doomed charge they made at the Nek on Gallipoli in August 1915.

In Weir's film the heroes are played by Mel Gibson and Mark Lee. Lee's character is loosely based on Troopers Wilfred and Gresley Harper of the 10th Light Horse - young, handsome, athletic, well-educated sons of a pastoralist. Both would die in that charge on 7 August 1915, just one of eight sets of brothers and cousins who were killed in that one small action.

The film depicts so many stereotypes of our ideal of the ANZAC. I wonder how the audience would have reacted if Weir had used Trooper David Louis Passerini as the basis for his character instead.

Like the Harpers, Passerini was born in Australia and enlisted in the south-west. Like the Harpers he was a very fine horseman and his links with the Australian rural stereotype were even stronger as he had worked as a prospector and gold miner.

Unlike the Harpers, Passerini's family were Italian Maltese immigrants. Passerini was a veteran, having seen combat against the Boers. He was on active service the year Australia federated. In 1915 Trooper Passerini rode to war on a NSW bred saddle horse known as a waler, wore a slouch hat with emu plumes and landed at Gallipoli.

He survived the charge at the Nek but was wounded in the face with grenade fragments during a battle three weeks later for Hill 60 on Gallipoli - the battle in which Lieutenant Hugh Throssell became the only Australian Light Horseman to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War.

Passerini was invalided home in 1915, recovered from his wounds and married but rejoined the regiment in 1917. He was killed in action during the raid on Es Salt near the Palestinian-Jordanian border in April 1918. His remains were never recovered and he is remembered on the Jerusalem Memorial in Israel. Legacy cared for his wife Maggie until she remarried in the 1930s.

Another name from Australia's roll of honour is No. 7770 Private Vincent Mahboub

who joined the New South Wales-raised 35th Battalion AIF in 1917. Vincent Mahboub was born in Mount Lebanon in the Ottoman province of Syria. He migrated to New South Wales with his parents. During the First World War he could not wait to enlist and volunteered at the age of 18.

Private Mahboub was killed in action on 8 August 1918. He had been with his Battalion just over a week when they took part in General Monash's great victory of the Battle of Amiens. This battle caused the enemy to flee along the Somme Valley before the victorious Australians.

It had such a devastating effect that General Ludendorff called 8 August 'the black day of the German Army'. It was also a black day for Michael and Rosie Mahboub of Excelsior, 200 km north-west of Sydney. Their son was buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Harbonnieres on the Somme Valley in France.

Both these men challenge the stereotype of the ANZAC of British heritage. But these are not isolated stories.

Three weeks after Monash's Australian Corps had inflicted the black day on the German Army they were on the outskirts of Peronne and at the base of Mont St Quentin. The New South Wales-raised 33rd Battalion opened the battle with an attack through the woods to the north of Mont St Quentin.

The Germans were driven from the wood by two extraordinary acts of bravery. The first, by Private George Cartwright would earn him the Victoria Cross, the other, by Private William Irwin, the Distinguished Conduct Medal and a grave beside the Somme.

Private Irwin was awarded his medal "*for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during operations at Road Wood on 31 August 1918. Singlehanded and in the face of heavy fire, he rushed three separate machine-gun nests, capturing guns and crews. While rushing a fourth, he was severely wounded. His unrestrainable dash inspired the whole of his company*". 39 year old Private Irwin died of his wounds before he learned of the award of his medal.

So why doesn't he fit the digger stereotype?

Because Private Irwin was an Aboriginal man from the Gamilaraay language group and the conditions of entry into the AIF stated that recruits must be 'of substantially British origin', a clause used to exclude many non-Caucasian volunteers until enlistment levels in Australia dropped so low that recruiters became desperate.

He is the only person in Bean's *Official History of Australia In The War 1914 - 18* whose ethnicity is noted.

Another brave Australian soldier who distinguished himself during the battles on the Somme in August 1918 and who was also not of substantially British origin was Private Attilio Caprari MM of the 44th Battalion AIF. Caprari was born in Sondrio in Italy but was working as a miner in Western Australia when the First World War broke out.

Carrying a Lewis light machine gun on the Western Front must have been child's play after lugging an air leg drill in the drives of mines beneath Kalgoorlie.

Private Caprari MM returned to Western Australia after the war and marched with his mates on ANZAC Day proudly wearing his Military Medal.

Like all Australian veterans of the First World War Attilio Caprari was awarded the British War Medal and the British pattern of the inter-Allied Victory Medal for his service as well as his Military Medal for bravery on the Somme in August 1918.

It is interesting to note that Caprari substituted his British Victory Medal for an Italian version of the Victory Medal. Does this gesture suggest that Caprari had a sense of his own identity that was inclusive rather than exclusive. He could be both a proud Australian veteran but he was also keen to express links with his country of origin while joining in the ANZAC Day March, one of the most significant annual events for the country of his adoption. Caprari is one of many examples of how diverse the cohort has been, who have answered the call to 'stand to'.

The Australian forces did not discriminate against Aboriginal people once they had

been allowed to enlist. In fact, war service could be said to have brought Aboriginal Australia and European Australia together in an exchange of culture, ideas and mateship.

The symbols of Aboriginal culture and interpretations of traditional practice have also been a part of Australia's military history.

The boomerang, a hunting tool and fighting weapon, has appeared on Australian military badges for a century. It is used as a uniquely Australian symbolic fighting weapon souvenir.

The 1915 collar badge of the 12th Light Horse Regiment uses the symbol of an Aboriginal person at war. It is one of the earliest known images of an aboriginal warrior used in military heraldry anywhere in the world.

Another Gamilaraay man to go to war a generation after Private Irwin was Warrant Officer Len Waters who flew with 78 Sqn RAAF. He called his P-40 Kittyhawk fighter 'Black Magic'.

Waters, a shearer born at Euraba Mission near Boomi in northern NSW, was the first Aboriginal to qualify as a fighter pilot. He enlisted two months after his 18th birthday and flew over 100 sorties against Japanese forces in the islands of the Dutch East Indies.

Another well-known Aboriginal soldier of the Second World War is Private Reg Saunders of the 2/7th Battalion who was one of the leaders of a group of Australian and Maori soldiers that launched a bayonet charge against a group of over 400 German paratroopers on the shores of Suda Bay in Crete.

Reg became the first Aboriginal Australian commissioned into the Australian Imperial Force and go on to command a company of 3RAR at the battles of Kapyong and Maryang San in the Korean War.

Since then Aboriginal people have served in the Australian forces in increasing numbers. They have seen action in the Malayan Emergency (1948–60), the

confrontation with Indonesia (1962–66), the war in Vietnam (1962–75) and in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as on peacekeeping operations since 1947.

Let me share with you some more examples, perhaps familiar faces to some of you.

1. Pte Reg Rawlings, killed in action in the battle of Amiens August 1918.
2. Pte Stephen Dodd, South Korea, 1953
3. Gunner John Kinsela 106 Bty RAA, Nui Dat, Vietnam 1970.
4. Flight Sgt Harry Allie at work at RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia, in the 1980s
5. Petty Officer David Williams RAN served for over 20 years including as a clearance diver during the Vietnam War.

As the Minister responsible for both Aboriginal Affairs and Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to note that the NSW Government supports the Aboriginal Diggers Commemoration Service in Redfern and the annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans' Commemoration Service which honours the service and sacrifice of Indigenous Veterans in all Australian conflicts. I will attend this commemoration next week during Reconciliation Week.

Australian forces served alongside the Republic of Korea and twenty other nations between 1950 and 1953. This increasing ethnic diversity after the Second World War is further suggested by the likes of fine Australian soldiers like Sgt 'Len' Lenoy who was killed in action and posthumously mentioned in dispatches at the 1951 Battle of Kapyong and Lance Corporal George Long, of Sydney, another 3RAR Kapyong veteran. Both Lenoy and Long were of Australian Chinese ethnicity.

The ANZAC story is a story that unifies and unites Australians – regardless of their background.

On 1 April 2012, at the ANZAC Memorial, I announced the appointment of former Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC (Retd) as Chair of the NSW Centenary of ANZAC Advisory Council ... the body now tasked with planning the commemorative events to be held from 2014. He will shortly be joined by some 25 ambassadors who will help the Government and local communities across NSW

plan and prepare for a successful Centenary.

General Cosgrove brings to the role the strong professional knowledge and leadership that will help ensure the ANZAC Centenary will be commemorated in NSW with the honour it deserves.

When former Chief of the Australian Defence Force General Peter Cosgrove retired from service, his farewell message to the Forces said, “we serve our country, we serve Australia and our fellow Australians.”

Now more than ever, our fellow Australians include people of all cultures and all creeds. A fact we should not only tolerate, but embrace.

From Charles Bean to Peter Weir we have imagined the Australian soldier of the First World War to have been of homogeneous stock and single-minded in their motivations for enlistment and dreams of home. But this is only part of the story...

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