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INDIGENOUS WAR VETERANS' STORIES TOLD

A new research project from The Australian National University will reveal for the first time the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have played in Australian war and peacekeeping.

The new research project is being led by the National Centre for Indigenous Studies (NCIS) in partnership with the Australian Centre for Indigenous History (ACIH). It will focus on the contributions of Indigenous personnel to all conflicts and peacekeeping operations since the Boer War.

NCIS Director Professor Mick Dodson said that there were many stories about Indigenous Australians' military service in books, pamphlets and newspapers, as well as oral history, which had not been collated or mobilised for public education and display.

"There is a whole range of stories of national significance about Indigenous veterans which have not been previously told, let alone fed into the school or public domain," he said.

"Honouring the service contribution of Indigenous Australians to the nation is a vital part of the reconciliation process and will feed into new and richer understandings about Australian identity and history.

"The project will also explore the potential of family collections to further the understanding of Indigenous Australians perspectives on military participation and the impacts it had on their lives and communities.

"If action is not taken soon important history will be lost, particularly the oral history held by Indigenous elders and the families of Indigenous war veterans which is at immediate risk."

Indigenous service veteran Harry Allie, a decorated RAAF officer who in 23 years of service won service awards and commemorations, said it was critical to highlight the contributions made by Indigenous military personnel.

"This project has my full support. It will, for the first time, give Indigenous individuals and communities the opportunity to tell their stories and present their memories of military service."

Head of ACIH Professor Ann McGrath said the first phase of the project will involve a review of materials which outline the service history of Indigenous soldiers, sailors and Air Force personnel, as well as their families' contributions.

"The twelve month pilot project is funded by the Commonwealth's Department of Veteran Affairs and is designed to develop a much larger collaborative enterprise with major national institutions," she said.

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MEDIA RELEASE

“NCIS and ACIH are supporting and conducting the research which will result in a comprehensive critical literature review and a database to support additional research.”

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