

Name-Tori Hall  
Class-9A  
Assessment- Frank MacDonald Prize



Frank MacDonald Memorial

Essay Question- Aboriginal people in the First World War may have served on equal terms but after the war they found that racial discrimination remained, or indeed, worsened.

Discuss this statement with reference to the experience of Aboriginal soldiers during and after World War One, particularly those from Cape Barren Island.

By- Tori Hall

**LAND  
FOR  
RETURNED SOLDIERS**

IT is proposed to make available certain areas for the special purpose of providing for returned soldiers. Arrangements have been made for setting apart an area of about 250,000 acres in the Wyalong-Hillston country, which will be served by new railways.

The bulk of this land is suitable for wheat growing under modern up-to-date farming conditions. Further similar areas elsewhere will also be made available. In addition, the Land Boards throughout the State will be authorised to give preference to returned soldiers in ballots for any ordinary Crown lands which may from time to time become available.

In order that the extent of this preference may be understood, I may say I anticipate that 2,000,000 acres will be made available during the financial year ending 30th June, 1916. In addition, large areas will be thrown open for selection in subsequent years. Much of this land will be suitable for wheat growing and dairying.

It is further proposed to take similar action as regards farms in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. A number of farms will be set apart exclusively for returned soldiers, and the Commissioner will give preference to returned soldiers in respect of other farms made available for ordinary applications.

The whole policy of the Lands Department will be governed by an anxiety to give compensating advantages wherever possible to men who risk their lives in the service of the Empire.

**W. G. ASHFORD,**  
Minister for Lands.

W. G. Ashford, Minister for Lands, 1915.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL ARTV01051



World War One is regarded in Australian history as an event in which Australian's can take immense pride in the ANZAC spirit that continues to live on today. One significant outcome that is overlooked when reviewing Australia's involvement in World War One is the inclusion of First Nations soldiers in this conflict. The Commonwealth Defence Act of 1917 was a document which stated Aboriginal men were able to be included and serve on equal terms. One restriction was that Aboriginal men had to have one white parent<sup>1</sup>. This was the first instance of inclusion of Aboriginal men on equal terms in the war effort. The Australian Human Rights Commission defines how 'when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities as others in a similar situation' this is an example of racial discrimination<sup>2</sup>. For the Aboriginal men who returned home after fighting in battle, their situation deteriorated, and they were not recognised or celebrated for fighting for Australia. For the seventy Tasmanian Aboriginal men, which included twenty-one soldiers from Cape Barren Island, the First World War and their time and contribution were diminished when they were excluded from celebrations or rewards that included all other war veterans<sup>3</sup>. The truth is that although Aboriginals and European people were equal on the battlefield, post war Aboriginal soldiers were treated unfairly and the equality that they received during times of conflict again remained unreachable.

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<sup>1</sup> Shellharbour City Museum,(2023), 'Aboriginal Service in WWI' accessed on the 7<sup>th</sup> July,2023, from [Aboriginal Service in WWI | Shellharbour City Museum Anzacs \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.shellharbourcitymuseum.com.au/anzacs/aboriginal-service-in-wwi)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, (2014)'Racial Discrimination' accessed on the 7<sup>th</sup> July,2023, from <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/racial-discrimination>

<sup>3</sup>Nation Archives of Australia,(2019), 'World War I: Indigenous ANZACS', accessed on the 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2022, from [World War I: Indigenous Anzacs | naa.gov.au](https://www.naa.gov.au/wwi/indigenous-anzacs)

Aboriginal men viewed the war as a chance to be seen and heard by white society, after many years of being judged and stereotyped against due to the colour of their skin<sup>4</sup>. World War One broke out in 1914 and initially all indigenous men were rejected due to the colour of their skin and racial discrimination. By October 1917, when the truth about the reality of war was being published and war ceased being glamorise as an opportunity to embark on a holiday or grand adventure, the Australian Government found that sourcing recruits was harder<sup>5</sup>. The new military order stated, '*Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin*'<sup>6</sup>. After years of being made feel like second class citizens due to a lack of citizen's rights Aboriginal men saw this as a chance to prove themselves. For the first time in national war effort Aboriginal men were provided with the opportunity to wear the same uniform (a long loose fitting jacket, a soft grey flannel shirt, khaki cord breeches and underclothes), earning the same amount of money (six shillings a day) and eating the same food as non-indigenous men (bully beef which is tinned corned beef, rice, jam, cocoa, tea and some bread)<sup>7</sup>. Aboriginal men finally felt like what they were doing mattered and was accepted on equal terms.

Aboriginal men's contribution to the war effort was significant and there are numerous battles which would not have achieved a desired outcome without their high levels

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<sup>4</sup> Australian War Memorial,(2023), 'Indigenous Defence Service', assessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> July,of 2023, from <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/indigenous#:~:text=When%20war%20broke%20out%20in,lost%2C%20restrictions%20were%20cautiously%20eased.>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government, (2023), 'Anzac Portal', accessed on the 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, from <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/politics/conscription>

<sup>6</sup> Australian National University, (2023), ' Aboriginal Enlistment During World War I - This Month in History', accessed on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, from <https://history.cass.anu.edu.au/news/aboriginal-enlistment-during-world-war-i-month-history>

<sup>7</sup> ANZAC War Memorial, (2020), 'Make Hard Tack', accessed on the 28th July, 2023, from [Make hard tack | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://www.awm.gov.au/make-hard-tack)

of input. Aboriginal men were sent to famous battles such as the Battle of Beersheba. It was here that Australian soldiers became known as Light Horse Brigade. This title was granted due to the sheer speed Australian soldiers demonstrated as they approached Beersheba to take on a conflict with their enemy while riding horses. The Battle of Beersheba took place on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1917, after two failed attempts in Gaza in March and April 1917 to gain power. The Battle of Beersheba consisted of seven hundred to eight hundred light horse men along with one hundred Aboriginal men<sup>8</sup>. These Aboriginal soldiers were known in The Battle of Beersheba as being excellent horse men. One of the most well-known indigenous horse men is James Lingwoodock. His role in this battle was to lead all the other men on horses. Some other battles that James Lingwoodock was involved in were the battle in the Jordan Valley, the Battle of Samakh, and Es Salt Raid<sup>9</sup>. These are all battles which he actively took on a leadership role and supported fellow other soldiers. Aboriginal men in battle were able to demonstrate their strengths as a soldier without fear of racial prejudice. This freedom allowed them to lead in areas they excelled. Aboriginal men demonstrated their brilliant horsemanship without fear of discrimination from their peers or those in power. Aboriginal men were commended for their efforts and contribution in battle.

Thomas Edward Mansell was a Tasmanian soldier during the First World War who came from Cape Barren Island. Thomas was born in 1892 and he enlisted to join the ANZAC's on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1916. He was first deployed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1916 to fight in the

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<sup>8</sup> Queensland Government,(1955-2023), 'The Battle Of Beersheba', accessed on the 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, from <https://anzac100.initiatives.qld.gov.au/remember/battle-of-beersheba/index.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Anglican Focus,(2020), 'Troopers John Geary and James Lingwood, 11<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment and the Queensland Black watch' accessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, from [Troopers John Geary and James Lingwoodock, 11th Light Horse Regiment and the 'Queensland Black Watch' \(anglicanfocus.org.au\).](https://anglicanfocus.org.au/troopers-john-geary-and-james-lingwoodock-11th-light-horse-regiment-and-the-queensland-black-watch/)

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First World War at France<sup>10</sup>. Thomas was not the only soldier in his family his cousin Archie Douglas Mansell also went to war. Archie enlisted on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1916 and was deployed only two months later the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. Archie was lucky enough to make it home, returning from the war on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1919<sup>11</sup>. Thomas wasn't so lucky and sadly got injured in the line of duty. His historical records show that soon after being placed in hospital he died from influenza in France on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1916. Thomas only had the chance to fight in the war for nine months. Thomas was sadly a victim of war and one of many who unfortunately saw the harsh reality of war losing his life in conflict.

Racial discrimination did not just disappear once Aboriginal soldiers returned home from The First World War. Unlike their fellow white soldiers who were celebrated and congratulated for their efforts in the war, Aboriginal men were not recognised or acknowledged. Aboriginal soldiers weren't only left out of the parades and services, but they were also excluded from the Soldier Settlement Scheme. Aboriginal men became aware that if you applied for the Soldier Settlement Scheme and got accepted, you would receive a five-hundred pounds loan (which was later increased to six-hundred and twenty-five pounds) and a block of farmland<sup>12</sup>. This settlement scheme would have provided Aboriginal men with a life changing opportunity for their families. Instead, out of all the indigenous service men who

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<sup>10</sup> Australian War Memorial,(2023), 'Private Thomas Edward Mansell' accessed on the 24<sup>th</sup> July, from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11052747>

<sup>11</sup> Australian War Memorial,(2023), 'Roll of Honour Thomas Edwards Mansell', accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2023, from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1649047>

<sup>12</sup> Old Treasury Building,(2021), 'On the land: Soldier Settlement Scheme', accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2023 from <https://www.oldtreasurybuilding.org.au/lost-jobs/on-the-land/soldier-settlement-scheme/#:~:text=Those%20who%20got%20through%20the%20application%20process%20successfully,that%20they%20could%20support%20themselves%20and%20their%20families>

applied only two Aboriginal soldiers got accepted<sup>13</sup>. One soldier was George Winter McDonald a Gunditjmara descent and Percy Pepper who was a Gwaikurnai man. Both these men were regarded as fair skinned. History records how due their lightness the Government didn't count them as Aboriginals anymore. It was only because of their lack of Aboriginality being recognised that George and Percy received the Soldier Settlement Scheme. Aboriginal men and women were denied citizenship in Australia at this time and treated as second class citizens with a lack of rights and privileges.

Aboriginal men who fought in the First World War may have served on equal terms on the battlefield but post war they were still discriminated against and looked down on because of their race. Indigenous men were so eager to be on equal terms with the Europeans that they went to war to fight for a country that didn't classify them as human beings or citizens. Aboriginal men were apart of many battles, and history now records and is revealing the contributions that individual soldiers made in key battles. Unfortunately post war the treatment that Aboriginal men and women faced worsened and, in what is now known as racial discrimination the examination of the Soldier Settlement Scheme shows prejudice and separation based on race. Aboriginal men and women in World War One fought equally as hard as those with European decent however they were still stripped of their basic human rights when they returned as what should have been distinguished war veterans.

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<sup>13</sup> Abc News,(2023), 'They were back to being black: The land withheld from returning Indigenous soldiers', accessed on the, 3<sup>rd</sup> August,2023, from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-14/land-withheld-from-indigenous-anzacs/10993680>

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Word Count 1551

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