

**25 July 2017**

## **Indigenous students to uncover forgotten WWI history at State Library of Queensland**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers in the First World War saw foreign battlefields as a chance to secure decent wages and escape segregation and discrimination back home, according to Indigenous students taking part in a special State Library of Queensland workshop on 31 July.

Twenty-four students in Years 9 to 12, from Cloncurry to the Gold Coast, will sift through State Library's century-old letters, diaries and photos to uncover long forgotten stories of Indigenous bravery.

The two-day workshop is part of the Department of Education and Training's Anzac Indigenous Cultural Study Tour and Indigenous Student Ambassador Network Leadership Camp which encourages students to better understand the contribution of Indigenous service personnel to the Anzac legacy and share their knowledge with others.

The five major prize winners of the study tour will also visit key sites and memorials in Canberra and New Zealand in September.

Sophie Thorne-Saffy, who is an Indigenous student leader in Year 11 at Charleville State High School, believes many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders felt safer on foreign battlefields than in their own country.

"They weren't treated equally at home so going to fight was like a safe place for them; they were away from all the segregation and racism they had to suffer through most of their lives." Sophie said.

"They needed an escape from the torture they lived through (in Australia)."

"Many saw that going into the defence force was going to help people see them as citizens and help push for the respect they wanted and also needed," Sophie said.

More than 1,250 Indigenous Australians enlisted in the First World War, with around 300 from Queensland.

However, at the start of the conflict, *The Protection of Aborigines Act, Queensland (1897)* made enlistment impossible. The Act denied Indigenous people the basic rights of citizenship, and restricted their movements and activities.

Despite this prohibition, Indigenous men still tried to enlist from 1914. Many travelled hundreds of miles to try their luck at recruiting centres far away from their communities, if they had been rejected closer to home. Others with mixed parentage scraped through by claiming foreign nationality.

In May 1917, the Australian Government relaxed the rules around Indigenous enlistment following heavy losses on the Western Front.

*The student workshop is part of SLQ's Q ANZAC 100: Memories for a New Generation program which is proudly supported by the Queensland Government.*

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