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The group at the Rona Tranby Trust ceremony in Sydney.

War stories recorded



TWELVE descendants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander World War I soldiers have received support from the Rona Tranby Trust to record the stories of their ancestors, as part of the Australian Light Horse Project.

The recipients will travel to Be'se Sheva (also known as Beersheba), in Israel, for the Anzac national service commemorating the centenary of the Battle of Beersheba on October 31.

Australian Light Horse Regiment soldiers became famous for their bravery in World War I, including at Beersheba.

Gamilaraay woman Angela Stanley, one of the participants in the project, said she is excited to tell her grandfather Alexander Stanley's story.

Ms Stanley, from Mungindi in north-west NSW, said she was her family's unofficial historian, and is looking forward to creating a short film for the project.

"I've been doing a bit of research on my grandfather," she told the *Koori Mail*.

"Unlike a lot of the other Aboriginal soldiers who came back from the war, Grandfather was actually celebrated by the Moree community.

"One of the missions in Moree is called

Stanley village after him, and his name is on a plaque at the entry to the Moree Services Club.

"There are a lot of different stories about Grandfather, and I'd like to find out who his family was. On his enlistment papers he put down his employer, and it made me ask the question, why didn't he put down a family member?"

Alexander Stanley was in the 11th Light Horse Regiment in World War I, and he also served in World War II.

Ms Stanley said telling his story would be vital because there was so little record of Aboriginal people during that period.

"Local hero"

"I have a lot of family in Moree, and they know Grandfather as a local hero, and I think his story could help people with the struggles they still have out here," she said.

"The statistics say it all. I hope Grandfather's story will encourage not just my family, but all his descendants to be the strong people that he proved we could be.

"His story can help us reconcile our identities. He is one part of the jigsaw puzzle that needs to be put into place.

"If we can understand ourselves through our ancestors, then his is a story worth telling. He was a character."

Doris Paton, a Gunditjmara, Gunai, and Monero Ngarigo woman from Gippsland, Victoria, has one photograph of her great-grandfather, and she wants to find out more.

She said her great-grandfather, David Mullett, was a storyteller and an educated man who served in World War I and was shocked by the prejudice when he returned.

"My father remembers him telling stories," she said. "He told me that my great-grandfather wrote a letter, asking to march with his mates, and he was denied. "Because he was an educated man he wrote a lot of letters, and I'd like to analyse some of those."

Ms Paton said that as an Aboriginal person this story means a lot to her, because that's one of the stories to help contextualise herself, her family, and her community.

"It's very important to tell the stories of our ancestors' lives," she said.

"People need to hear and understand these stories. It brings back the memories about what life was like for Aboriginal people, and how it impacted our families."



John Patten and Professor John Maynard, who are involved in recording the stories.