

THE LOST STORY OF CECIL:

From the frontlines of WW2
to a hostile home front



Compiled by Ms. Megan Graham with
contributions from Lily Blowes, Tyra
James and Asha Handcock-Cropper
from St. Joseph's Primary School, Leeton



FAY CLAYTON 2012

Foreword

In 2018 Petaurus Education Group Inc. helped students from Ashmont Public School produce a book about the life of Aunty Fay Moseley, a proud Wiradjuri woman from Wagga Wagga. This book and associated videos can be found at:

www.wirraminna.org.au/portfolio/cultural-stories/

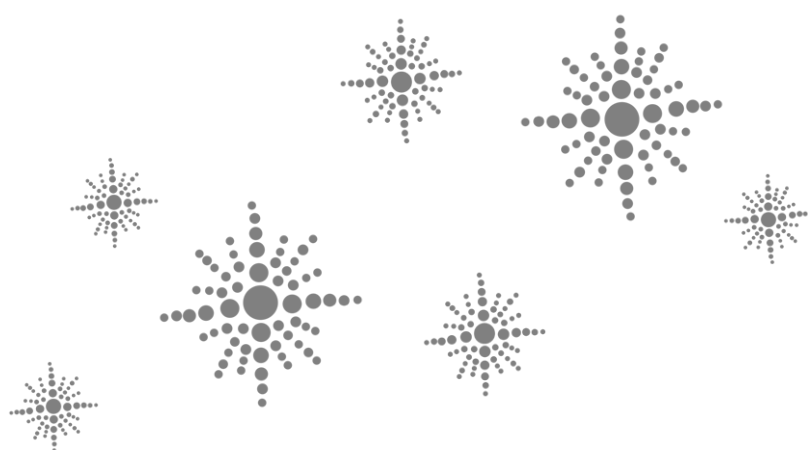
In 2019, Petaurus was successful in securing a grant from the Veteran's Affairs ANZAC Community Grant Program. This project aimed to promote appreciation and understanding of the service of Indigenous military personnel who served in a World War.

We chose Aunty Fay's father Cecil Robert Clayton to feature in this story. The process involved students from St. Joseph's Primary School in Leeton interviewing Aunty Fay so we could build a case study that was skillfully compiled by a freelance journalist, Ms. Megan Graham.

The project has culminated into the development of a wonderful book that can be used by schools and the community to understand the sacrifices Indigenous servicemen and women had to endure.

Sincerely,

Owen Dunlop
Executive Officer
Petaurus Education Group Inc.



The lost story of Cecil:

From the frontlines of WW2 to a hostile home front

Compiled by: Ms. Megan Graham

Student contributors: Lily Blowes, Tyra James and Asha Handcock-Cropper from St. Joseph's Primary School, Leeton

Acknowledgements: This book is based primarily on interviews with Wiradjuri Elder and artist, Aunty Fay Clayton Moseley. It also includes significant contributions by veteran journalist and WW2 research enthusiast, Stewart Crutchett. Further generous assistance was provided by Deb Goodwin, Jim Lamb, Betty Murphy and Dr Megan Elliott-Rudder.

Traditional Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and thank them for sharing their knowledge and culture with us.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document contains images and/or names of people who have since passed away.



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The Fighting Thirteenth

A lot of Australian soldiers fought for the Allied Forces in World War Two. As a nation, we remember these men every year, on ANZAC day and Remembrance Day.

Some of the Australian Army battalions are remembered as playing a particularly crucial part in the war effort. One of these is the 2/13th Battalion, formed primarily of men recruited from New South Wales. Many of these soldiers came from the Riverina.

The official war diaries for this unit describe the 2/13th as “the Fighting Thirteenth” which was to be “the first Australian troops to meet the German land armies in this war”.

It goes on to state that the 2/13th is “one of the most highly decorated units of the Australian Imperial Force in World War No 2... This is a direct reflection on the manner in which it has conducted itself during its campaigns in the Middle East”.

When fighting one of WW2’s most important battles in the Middle East, in a place called Tobruk in Libya, the 2/13th men endured truly awful conditions. It was scorching hot in the daytime and extremely cold at night, and there were regular dust storms which made life difficult.

The brutal environment made for miserable conditions, yet the Battalion at Tobruk were known for their humour and resilience. They called themselves the ‘Rats of Tobruk’, after hearing a German officer call them that on the radio. What was meant as an insult, these soldiers turned into a badge of honour.



Source: www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1365490



Rats of Tobruk

The surviving Rats of Tobruk also fought other key battles in the Middle East during the war. For these reasons, the men were highly respected when they came back to Australia. The exception to this rule was the Aboriginal soldiers, who returned home to the same racist and unfair treatment many of them had suffered before the war.

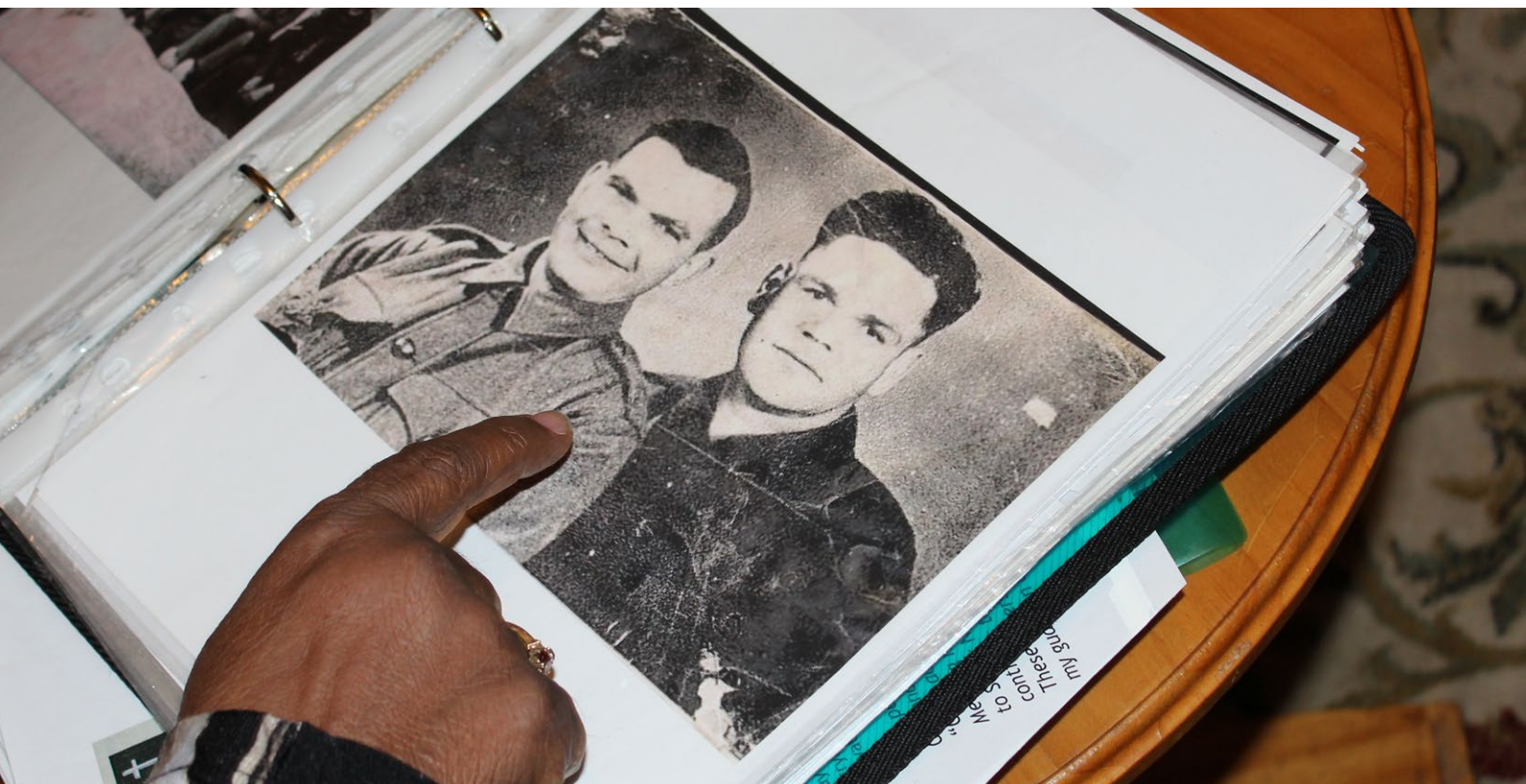
The gifts of land given to the soldiers who had fought in World War Two were not given to Aboriginal soldiers. Basic rights like entering shops and being able to move around whenever they wanted were withheld from many of these men, who had fought so hard for Australia.

Wiradjuri man Cecil Robert Clayton was one of these 2/13th soldiers who was treated differently because he was Aboriginal. Having gone through many ordeals and brutal battles in the war, he could have let this injustice turn him into an unhappy man.

But, according to his daughter and other official records, Cecil was a happy, loving husband and father. He worked hard and was respected by his employers.

Cecil was not beaten by the war like many returned soldiers were. In fact, he was eager to start a family. He married an Aboriginal woman named Lillian, who he met in Darlington Point, and they had nine children.

Then one day, his children were taken from him.



Memories of a father



One of Cecil's few surviving children, Aunt Fay Moseley, has very fond childhood memories of Cecil. She was just 10 years old when she was taken.

"He was a very good dad, very gentle," Fay said fondly.

"My father was a beautiful man, very intelligent. If anyone did the wrong thing, they'd get the men together, they would sort out the problem and then they'd shake hands. If anything happened to his brothers, he'd stick up for them — but you wouldn't expect it, given he had such a soft personality. He was very loyal."

Aunt Fay recalls that one of the things her Dad loved to do was read.

"Because Dad was in the army, he read a lot. He loved to read comic books like the old Superman comics, and old cowboy books by Zane Grey. He would read the Bible often. He'd read stories to us, aloud, and that meant we all developed a love of books and reading.

"When he came back from the war, he was judged by the Welfare board to be a good man, and he was given an exemption certificate so he could go into the shops, unlike a lot of Aboriginal people at the time.

"He'd come out with books from the second-hand shops. He'd bring them home and we'd listen to him."



B

ABORIGINES WELFARE BOARD

PS.NO.

SUBJECT: CECIL ROBERT CLAYTON, HALF CASTE, 41 YEARS, of
AMESBURY, LEETON - APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATE
OF EXEMPTION.

This man resides with his wife and eight young children in a cleanly kept, though poorly built iron and weatherboard home. The children are well cared for.

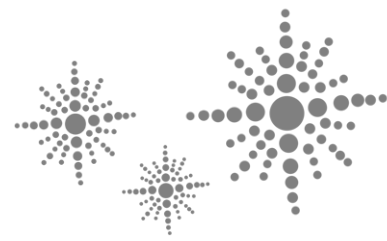
His conduct is good, he is a moderate drinker and non-gambler. He is employed at a Cannery at Leeton. During the War he served with the Armed Forces overseas.

Both the Police and the Welfare Officer recommend the issue. I concur and recommend accordingly.

M. H. Saxby
M. H. SAXBY.
Superintendent of
Aborigines Welfare.
22.6.55

The Chairman.

Approved



Cecil was very involved in the Indigenous Church just across the road from their house. Fay's mother Lillian was too, and they'd both sing there every week.

"He and mum would get up and play the organ or whatever instrument was there. Always music — they loved singing and playing. He and the other adults would be up at our house after tea and they'd sing things like The Old Rugged Cross. He had a lot of good mates. As well as church songs, Dad also loved really old country and western songs," Fay said.

During the week, Cecil would sometimes be away for a few days working. He had been given a special driving role with more responsibility than most of the jobs filled by Aboriginal people in those days. When he wasn't away, he would come home from work and help Fay and her siblings with their homework.

"He made sure that we all worked hard in our education. I remember doing my homework beside a Kerosene lamp because we didn't have electricity. I was in the top class in two of my classes in primary school and I did well in exams.

"I think he learned a lot about discipline in the army. You have to adhere to the rules and regulations."

Aunty Fay has a particular memory of Cecil that sums up his caring nature.

"When we were little, one day my brother and sister said 'Let's go climb the big gum tree'. We climbed up, but when we got up there, they were being silly and pushed me off! I was falling head first and a branch caught me in the leg — it went right through my flesh.

"I was hanging upside down, screaming. Dad drove the car around, stood on top and rescued me off the branch. He carried me down and took me to the hospital.

"The police charged him because the car wasn't registered! So, he had to pay that. But I was okay in the end — they put stitches in my leg," Fay said.



A Wiradjuri Story: Gugaa the Goanna

The Wiradjuri are the First Peoples of the three rivers in central NSW, which are the Wambool (Macquarie), the Calare (Lachlan) and the Murrumbidgee rivers. This Dreamtime story explains why the Wiradjuri people's totem is the goanna.

Before the Murrumbidgee river existed, there was a great drought. Many Wiradjuri people were dying of thirst and even the birds were falling out of the trees. Yet strangely, the goannas were as happy and lively as ever.

The rumour was that the goannas had a secret source of water. They knew of a deep gnamma (the Wiradjuri word for rock-hole) high in the ranges, but they were greedy with this knowledge. They didn't even tell their goanna wives about it.

The goanna wives shared of the little water they had, which saved the lives of many other creatures dying of thirst. They repeatedly asked the goanna men where the water source was, but the goanna men would not tell.

The wives tried following the men when they were going to get water, but the rough terrain made it very hard to keep up. They would bring yam-sticks so they could try to follow under the guise of digging for sweet roots (a traditional task for the goanna wives).





The women decided that one of them should wait high up on the mountaintop where they could see where men went to find water. This was risky because there were many spirits in the mountains – some good but some very bad – and a person on their own could easily fall prey to such perilous forces, especially a woman.

One by one, the wives refused to go because they were too scared, until finally the youngest of the wives said ‘yes’ to the task. The young wife made the frightening trek to the highest peak and then made a light shelter for herself.

Back at the camp, the men realised she was missing and set out to find her.

Alone and afraid, the young wife found herself suddenly surrounded by ‘bush men’ spirits. They had come to her in peace. They knew the location of the secret spring, and they wanted to show her the way.

When they arrived there, the woman drank until her thirst was quenched.

The ‘bush men’ spirits told her to return to camp and gather the other wives to bring them into the hills that lay to the south — there they would wait. It was important that none were left behind in the valley.

When this was done, the young wife returned to the spirits, who told her to force her yam-stick deep into the side of the mountain and then run.

Bravely, the woman did as told. Once the yam-stick was deep into the side of the mountain, she ran as fast as she could. A flood of water burst open behind her, rushing down the valley on its way to join the Murray River.

All the land now had water and the animals could drink from this great river, which has been called the Murrumbidgee ever since.

Life on the Murrumbidgee

As a little girl, Fay used to swim in the same sustaining waters of the Murrumbidgee to get to school in the summer. Swimming the canals is just one of many memories of the happy family life she had before she was stolen.

On hot summer mornings and evenings, Fay and her siblings would swim up and down the local canals between home and school. The canals, which fed water from the Murrumbidgee River into the town of Leeton, provided a refreshing relief from the hot weather.

“In the summer, we swam to school down the hills, in the canals. We’d get out, cross the road and jump into another channel that we knew went past the school. It was a nice way to get to school,” Fay said.

Fay laughed when she admitted that, “If we had fights with the non-Aboriginal kids, sometimes we would catch the leeches or the baby yabbies and put them down their backs! It was naughty and we’d get into trouble, so we didn’t do it often.”





She remembers being very well looked after in a happy environment that was regularly filled with family and friends.

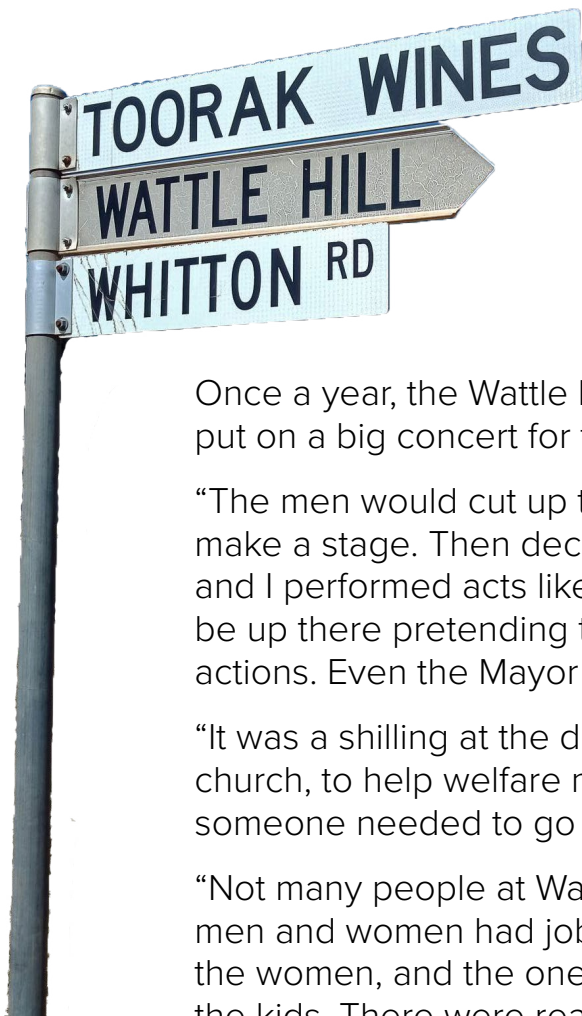
“Dad had a job moving stock around, and so we’d have bonfires down on the flat and cook up a lamb that Dad would sometimes bring home from his job. If it was a really big ‘do’, he would bring home a cow,” she said.

“Our house was always full of other people’s kids. If their parents were away working, they’d come around and we would feed them.

“Wattle Hill was a fruit bowl, so we’d have plenty of fruits and veggies. We could fish in the river, the canals. Nowadays you wouldn’t catch anything in them because they’re too polluted.

“Often at nights after school, we had pots over the fire. Mum would put on a big stew, and she’d make ‘johnny cakes’ (damper)”.





Once a year, the Wattle Hill Community with Aunty Fay's family would put on a big concert for the rest of Leeton.

"The men would cut up the chaff bags and place them around to make a stage. Then decorate it with plants and bush. We would sing, and I performed acts like: I was a little doll that'd been broken, and I'd be up there pretending to fall off my mother's knee. We would do the actions. Even the Mayor used to come!

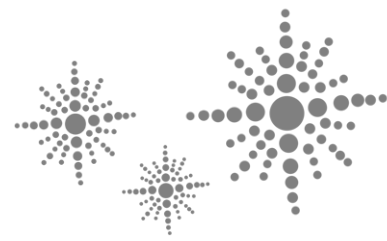
"It was a shilling at the door to get in. That money was kept at the church, to help welfare matters within the community. For example, if someone needed to go away for a funeral," Fay said.

"Not many people at Wattle Hill drank alcohol. Almost all of the men and women had jobs. The men were working and so were the women, and the ones that weren't working were looking after the kids. There were really big responsibilities and we were all well looked after. We had clean clothes and our tummies were full."



Home before the homes

© Fay Clayton 2012



When Aunty Fay recalls fond memories of childhood, she feels sad and confused about being taken from such a nurturing environment.

“The official reports talked about our home, that it was clean, tidy, and the kids were well fed... and yet, why did they take us? There was no reason to take us.”

Aunty Fay and five of her siblings — Yvonne, Christine, Tommy, Buddy and Iris — were all members of the Stolen Generation.

The Stolen Generation represents all the Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their parents and their homes by the Australian government, and placed in Group Homes or non-Aboriginal foster families.

Three of Fay’s younger siblings were not stolen because they were staying with relatives at the time the others were taken.

The children were taken to Sydney by train. Fay and her sisters, and the youngest brother Tommy, were taken to Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls. The older brother Buddy was sent to Kinchela Boys Home in northern NSW. A few years later, Tommy also ended up at Kinchela.

Cecil and Lillian were left with a family in tatters, and eventually they separated too.



Cootamundra Girls Home, 2017

Army life

Private Cecil Robert Clayton of 'The Fighting Thirteenth' was fit to fight for Australia. Why was he not fit to be a father?

Cecil was a private in the Australian Army for four years during the Second War World, serving in the 2/13th Battalion, Company A, in either Platoon 2 or 3, between July 1940 and April 1944.

World War Two Service



PRIVATE
CECIL ROBERT CLAYTON
NX36259

SERVICE	AUSTRALIAN ARMY
DATE OF BIRTH	27 OCTOBER 1913
PLACE OF BIRTH	DARLINGTON POINT, NSW
DATE OF ENLISTMENT	10 JULY 1940
LOCALITY ON ENLISTMENT	NARRANDERA, NSW
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	WAGGA WAGGA, NSW
NEXT OF KIN	HIGGINS, ROSIE
DATE OF DISCHARGE	8 JUNE 1944
POSTING AT DISCHARGE	2/13 BATTALION



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs



Sadly, because Cecil died several decades ago, and was separated from his family for most of his post-war life, it is not easy to find information about him. Many returned soldiers did not speak a lot about the war, because the experiences could be very upsetting to remember.

But, there is information about Cecil's Company and platoon that tell us a lot about what his four years in the Army were like.

Platoons 2 and 3 of Company A did some very special things in the war. In particular, they made a big impact fighting in the Middle East.

These were the famous 'Rats of Tobruk' who defended Egypt from German attacks, by putting up a strong resistance in the neighbouring country of Libya.



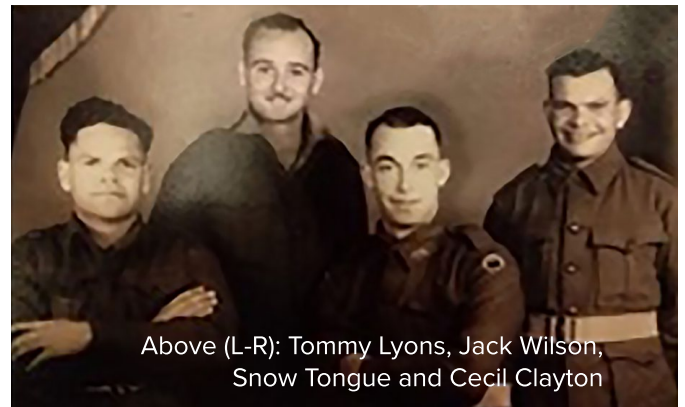
For eight long months, April to December of 1941, the men fought in dreadful conditions at Tobruk. They endured tank attacks, artillery barrages and daily bombings.

Each man was given one bucket of water per day, for everything including drinking, washing and shaving.

At the end of the eight months, Cecil's battalion was the only one to escape Tobruk by land. The other Allied forces fighting at Tobruk were all evacuated by sea. But the ship that was destined to take the 2/13th men out of the area was destroyed by a bomb.

This meant that these men stayed the longest of all the Australian troops, and had the most difficult journey to get out when it was over.


It is believed that Cecil Clayton and his good mate, fellow Wiradjuri man Tommy Lyons, were the only two Aboriginal men in Company A.



Above (L-R): Tommy Lyons, Jack Wilson, Snow Tongue and Cecil Clayton



Source: www.battlefields.com.au/podcasts/
episode titled 'War Stories: Tobruk Veteran Bert Le-Merton'



Unquinty man, Stewart Crutchett, recalls a story told by his father, Kenneth Crutchett, who was a Rat of Tobruk. Kenneth was part of the same group (Company A, platoons 2 and 3) as Cecil.

“My father and his fellow soldiers had given away all their rations and Red Cross packages. Their ship [to take them out of Tobruk] was coming in that night, and they knew the English soldiers coming in to replace them were going to be doing it tough.

“Well, the ship was blown out of the harbour. There was no way out, except overland. And so that’s what this group, which included Tommy Lyons and my father, had to do.

“Of course, they were hungry. An officer told them they’d be placing the men down near the supply depot overnight. The officer said, ‘It’s up to you blokes to look after yourselves’.

“So, four of the men from the group went out in the night and broke into the store supply, which was then owned by the English Army. They grabbed a case of sausages each. They were caught by the military police and court-marshalled!”

The Australian Army appointed a very experienced lawyer (referred to as a ‘Queen’s counsel’) to defend the men. The British Army charged one soldier first, which was private Joe Madeley. But they made a mistake, saying that Joe had stolen four cases of sausages, which would have been physically impossible to do.

On this technicality, the charges against all four men were miraculously dropped. If they hadn’t been, it is likely that the men would never have made it back home to Australia. Why? The British Army which arrived to replace the Australians lasted only a few weeks before being defeated.

With at least a sausage to fill their tummies, Cecil and his fellow soldiers of Company A fought their way out of Tobruk on land and had several hairy moments where they faced enemy soldiers.

It is estimated that 80 of the approximately 150 men in Company A survived. Cecil Clayton and Tommy Lyons were two of them. Some of them (pictured on page 13) survived to feast on a Billy Stew once they were safely across the border.



From the desert of Tobruk to the battlefields of El Alamein in Egypt

Several months after leaving Tobruk, Cecil returned again to the frontlines, this time in Egypt. There he fought and was injured during the major battles at El Alamein in 1942.

By July 1942, the region of North Africa was crucial to the overall war efforts. After four months of intense fighting at El Alamein, the German and Italian forces were now losing the battle. They were forced to withdraw — this defeat would see the German and Italian armies removed from Africa altogether.

Records show that Cecil was seriously injured at El Alamein. The biggest of these battles commenced on October 23, and Cecil was wounded in action on October 29. The wounds were to his left arm and chest.

Approximately 1200 Australians were killed in the four months of fighting there.

It is because of the extremely difficult fighting conditions at both Tobruk and El Alamein that the 2/13th Battalion was so celebrated when the war ended.

Copy

SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM

Rank **PTE.** Christian Names **Cecil Robert** Surname **CLAYTON**

Date of Enlistment **10.7.40.** Marital Condition **Single.**

Place **Wagga.** Next of Kin **Rosie Higgins,**

Date of Birth **27.10.13.** Address of Next of Kin **Cuddagai St.,**

Place of Birth **Darlington Point.** Relationship **Mother**

Trade or Occupation **Labourer.**

Religion **C. of England.**

Medical Classification **Class I.** Identification—Colour of Hair **Black** Eyes **Brown**

REPORT

Date	From whom received	Record of all casualties regarding promotions (acting, temporary, local or substantive), appointments, transfers, postings, attachments, etc., forfeiture of pay, wounds, accidents, admission to and discharge from Hospital, Casualty Clearing Stations, etc., Date of disembarkation and embarkation from a theatre of war (including furlough, etc.)	Date of Casualty	Place of Casualty	Authority of Officer Certifying Correctness of Entry	Signature of Officer Certifying Correctness of Entry
11.7.40	CP 84. Bn	MARCHED IN TO R R D. & POSTED TO 84. Bn.	10.7.40	WAGGA	W.3011	F.G.
13 I.T.B.		TAKEN ON STRENGTH ex 8 R.R.Bn. 4/3/15	2.9.40	"		
17.9.40	c/o I.T.B. 13th	A.W.L. 6630 10/9/40 to 1630 hrs. 12/9/40 Admonished. Forfeits 3 days pay 4/63/21	13.9.40	"	B.2069	F.G.
17 FEB 1941	B.2069	GRANTED PRE EMBARKATION LEAVE	7 FEB 1941	TAMWORTH	W.3011	A.
17 FEB 1941		MARCHED OUT FROM WAGGA	8 FEB 1941	TAMWORTH	W.3011	A.
18 FEB 1941	5 Trng. Bn.	MARCHED IN TO TAMWORTH	18 FEB 1941	"		A.
		TAKEN ON STRENGTH ex 13. I. T. Bn. R. 11				


Embarked Overseas Germany U.S. 10

1/820 17-4-41 Sydney A.206

Service and Casualty Form for Private Cecil Robert Clayton

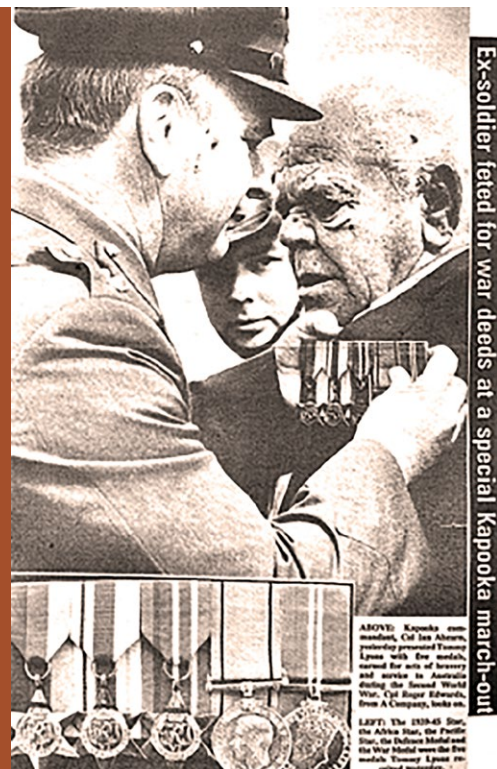
Remembering Cecil and Tommy and other Indigenous soldiers who were mistreated after WW2

Around 3000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers served in the armed forces during WW2. Not all of these soldiers signed themselves up under that category, and so it is believed there were likely more than 3000. The exact number may never be known.



Tommy Lyons did not receive his medals until 1996, when he was well into his 80s. The Narrandera-based Elder, whose family had close ties with Cecil's family, was finally granted this honour when a group of his 2/13th Battalion mates threatened to hand their WW2 medals back in protest.

Thomas Edward Lyons, affectionately nicknamed 'Tiger', died two years after receiving his medals.

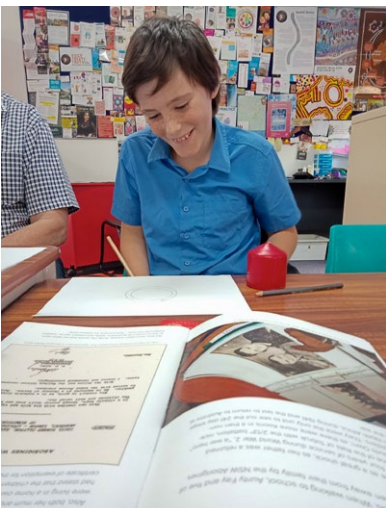


Another Aboriginal WWII veteran, Mick Flick from the NSW town of Collarenebri, objected to his poor treatment also. Just like the other Indigenous ex-servicemen, he was denied the land that other soldiers received as reward for their service.

Not only that, but his six children were refused entry to all public schools in the district, and he was forced to fight the Aborigines Protection Board to stop his kids from being taken.

One ANZAC Day in the 1950s, Mick made a poignant protest. He dressed up in his war medals and purposefully marched through the ranks of his fellow soldiers in the wrong direction. This caused a stir and the story spread, which has led to fairer treatment of Aboriginal ex-servicemen.

Mick had gone to war to fight for Australia, just as Cecil had.



In Aunt Fay's mind, her father went to war to protect Australians "yet he couldn't protect his own kids — they just took his children away".

She recalls the only time she met her father as an adult.

"At my Mum's funeral, when I was in my 30s, he approached me and said 'Which one are you?' and I said 'I'm Fay'. He said, 'I'm your father'.

"'Oh!' I said, 'How are you?'" Those were the only words I got to say to him, because he was caught up with so many people at the funeral trying to talk to him. Then he went back home to Kerang and I never saw him again," Fay said.

"I don't understand why we were taken. Why? It was a good life. We were protected. There was no reason."

<p>AUSTRALIAN ARMY SERVICE RECORD PR CECIL ROBERT CLAYTON</p> <p>Cecil Clayton was born at Darlington Point 27/10/1913 He worked as a labourer throughout the Riverina District until 10th July 1940 when he enlisted in the Army at Wagga Wagga</p> <p>PR Clayton joined the 2/19th Infantry Battalion (Known as The Devil's Own) and for the next 4 years fought for his Country in many battles in various parts of the world.</p> <p>PR Claytons Battle Honours include: Defence of Tobruk, El Alamein, South West Pacific, Iae Nadzab, Liberation of Australian New Guinea, Sic, North Africa, El Regima, Tobruk, Belghamed, Defence of Alamein Line, Finschhafen, Scarlet Beach, Bumi River, Defence of Scarlet Beach, Juventneng - Kumana, Borneo, Brunei, Miri.</p> <p>On His Discharge 8th June 1944, Cecil returned to the Riverina. However he did not receive any benefits, (E.g. Soldier Settlement Blocks, Etc.) as his Non-Aboriginal comrades.</p> <p>Cecil married Lillian and together they had 9 children. In 1957, whilst Cecil and Lillian were both at work, government officials removed 6 of their older children, because they were Aboriginal.</p>	<p>PRIVATE CECIL ROBERT CLAYTON NX36259</p>  <p>They took his children away</p>	<p>THE BLACK RAT</p> <p>He lived in a tin hut with a hard dirt floor He had bags sewn together that was his door He was a "Rat of Tobruk" until 45 He was one of the few that came back alive Battered and scarred he fought for his land And on his return they all shook his hand The price of fighting for the freedom of man Did not make a difference for this black man He Returned to the outback, no mates did he find If he had a beer he was gaoled then fined He sold all his medals he once proudly wore They were of no use to him anymore Confused and alone he wandered around Looking for work though none could he found The Anzac marches he badly neglected Which showed to his comrades how he was rejected He fought for this land so we could be free Yet he could not vote after his desert mailae And those years in the desert they really took their toll He went there quite young and came back so old This once tall man came from a proud black tribe Died all alone, no one at his side.</p>
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Lament

© Fay Clayton and Iris Clayton 2012



Lily Blowes, Tyra James, Aunty Fay Clayton,
Jassmine Leigh-Smith and Asha Handcock-Cropper

*“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.”*

