

Australian War Memorial needs to tell stories of Frontier Wars in colonisation of Australia

By Stephen Bargwanna
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As a Baby Boomer, out of the loins of the Second World War, I was raised knowing more about Native American culture, of "Cowboys and Indians" than of Australian Aboriginal culture.

This was due to both the entertainment power of Hollywood film and TV and the denialism of the impacts of our ancestor's invasion and settlement. I knew more about the the Cheyenne and Apache nations and the warrior leaders Geronimo, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull than of any Aboriginal resistance leader. These courageous warriors were unknown and unrecognised up to then and today.

I realised this ignorance with increasing shame as my children and grandchildren became more educated than I on the wonders of our ancient Aboriginal culture. Fortunately, we are all now learning together their place names, languages, mythology, customs, astrology, botany, pharmacy and so on. What an exciting time in history it is for us, a revelation of our country as it was for millennia.

My dawning guilt and curiosity was further fuelled by my family's W. J. Wills images, staring down at me from the family walls. He was a famous explorer of the ill-fated Burke and Wills fame. I'm one of his closest living relatives. He perished at the age of 27. He was my grandfather's great-uncle. He didn't use any Aboriginal survival knowledge and died a dreadful death of exhaustion and despair.

Most Australians welcome reconciliation with our original inhabitants. We are on a journey of discovery. The Uluru Treaty process for national atonement is well under way to energise and institutionalise this. A referendum on constitutional acknowledgement and truth telling is next. This will help us to maturity as a nation. To inflame public imagination in this reconciliation process we should promote the known, yet unrecognised, heroes of the Frontier Wars. How many Australians know of the Frontier Wars, the Aboriginal resistance, and its heroes?

It's time they had recognition in popular storytelling, film, television, monuments, and statues! I only know a little. In Sydney, there was Pemulwuy. In Tasmania, there was Tongerlongeter. In the Kimberley, there was Jandamarra fighting for his people. What I do know is that they were truly heroic fighting with spears, woomeras, and clubs against the overwhelming power of guns, horsemen, police, and a military machine.

These freedom fighters shed blood for their land, their people, their way of life. Just like the thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our settler way of life.

We have monuments scattered across the country to our war veterans and the dead in the 234 years of our settlement history. Let's now find a place to tell the stories of

those Aboriginal leaders and their people who fought the pioneer wars to preserve their 60,000 years occupation.

The obvious place to entrench this, through public education instead of entertainment is at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Here [there are funds available where some \\$500 million had been set aside for its expansion and modernisation](#) telling the stories largely of the distant wars. What a great story this recognition of the Frontier Wars and its leaders would tell of Australia's first defenders in the nation's capital, at our War Memorial.

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