



The Hon Andrew Gee MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel
Federal Member for Calare

MEDIA RELEASE

6 July 2021

CELEBRATING NAIDOC WEEK AND INDIGENOUS VETERANS

AUSTRALIANS are encouraged to pause and remember the legacy and valuable contribution of Australia's First Nations' service men and women this NAIDOC Week.

NAIDOC Week, held from 4 - 11 July, is a national celebration of the world's oldest living cultures and highlights the strengths and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to our country and culture.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Andrew Gee said this year's theme *Heal Country!* recognises the special connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the land and helps to start meaningful discussions about caring for land and caring for each other.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage enrich our workplaces and society," Mr Gee said.

"As the Minister for Veterans' Affairs I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the proud history of service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Defence Force, and say 'Thank you for your service'.

"The contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to our modern military history dates back to the Boer War, over 120 years ago."

One such veteran is Edwin Mi Mi, Wakka Wakka man and former soldier from Gayndah in Queensland, who has shared his experience as a contemporary veteran this NAIDOC week.

Edwin's military career spanned an impressive 24 years, enlisting in 1985 at the age of 19 and retiring in 2008. During that time he worked his way up to a Warrant Officer Class II in the Royal Australian Infantry Corp.

Edwin's career included tours of Iraq, Somalia, and two tours of East Timor.

Edwin's passion extended beyond his military career, where he was approached as part of the Army Reserves to assist with various Indigenous programs. This has involved travelling to remote regions, to talk to young Indigenous people and educate them on the option of the military as a career.

Open Arms — Veterans & Families Counselling provides free and confidential support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families. Help is available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 (international: +61 1800 011 046 or +61 8 8241 4546) or visit www.OpenArms.gov.au

“You get to pass on your knowledge to the young soldiers coming through, and see them develop within their careers,” Mr Mi Mi said.

“A lot of the soldiers that I’ve trained have progressed up through the ranks and become leaders in their groups. That is something I take pride in.”

Edwin joined the Army in the footsteps of his Uncle, a Vietnam vet, and he retired from the military to spend more time with his family - and family continues to be a focus for him moving forward.

“I’m getting more involved with the family in relation to our cultural heritage and the knowledge that needs to be passed on by our Elders,” Mr Mi Mi said.

“I am passionate about teaching my kids to be aware of their heritage as well, and the knowledge that comes out of that.”

Minister Gee said NAIDOC Week is a time to recognise all Indigenous Australians who have donned the uniform and celebrate their achievements, culture, and history.

“Let us all reflect on the important contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made and continue to make, both through military service and in their contribution to our society and culture,” Mr Gee said.

As part of NAIDOC Week, the Australian War Memorial will hold a Last Post Ceremony today (Tuesday 6 July 2021 at 4:45PM) to commemorate Private Beresford Paul Edwards. Last Post Ceremony attendance bookings are required and can be made on the [Australian War Memorial website](#).

ENDS

MEDIA CONTACTS:

**Minister Gee office: 0456 921 330
DVA Media: 02 6289 6466**

Office of the Hon. Andrew Gee, Canberra ACT.