

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN**

Name: Aunty Lyn Dickson

Date: 6 March 2014

Place: Bankstown

Interviewer: Fabri Blacklock

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **FB: This is an interview with Aunty Lyn Dickson on the 6th of March 2014 at Bankstown. So, Aunt, can you tell me your full name and where your mob comes from, please?**

LD: Sure. My name is Marilyn Dickson. I'm actually known as Lyn which is short for Marilyn. I'm a very proud woman of the Wiradjuri nation. My mob are from the Cowra-Parks-Condobolin areas. My grandmother was born just outside of Cowra on a mission and when she married my grandfather, a Scottish man, they moved to Parkes and then to Condobolin where they had twenty three children.

FB: Wow.

LD: Yes, there's unfortunately none of those twenty three left.

FB: That's very sad.

LD: Yes.

FB: And can you tell me when you joined the armed forces?

LD: 1969.

FB: And when did you leave?

LD: 1975.

FB: And what inspired you to join the armed forces?

LD: I guess I was a bit of a rebel in my younger days and my father and mother had three girls and I'm the middle one and my father owned a wrecking yard so he always wanted a boy. I was the one that ended up getting dirty and sort of leading the way in all the mischief and I think a progression was that I couldn't see a way out of the trouble unless I did something for myself which was in the end I joined the army and never looked back.

FB: So you enjoyed it?

LD: I loved it. It was where I needed to be; it provided the discipline and the order in my life that I needed.

FB: So you actually joined the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps and I guess a lot of people might not know exactly what that is so could you tell me a little bit about what that is and is it still active today?

2.11 LD: Yes, sure. The Women's Royal Australian Army Corps was formed in the 1950s after the Australian Women's Army Service sort of stopped being in effect. That was people of the land; they ran the land while the men were overseas, serving. So the Australian Women's Army Corps was formed because we needed a service that we could be part of and recognised as part of the army. At that time until 1970s we weren't really allowed to be part of the men's army as such and so we served in background positions. In the later years we started to do the same thing as the men, such as driving a truck, signals, all of that sort of stuff.

FB: And is it still around today or it's been disbanded?

LD: The Women's Royal Australian Army Corps is an association, it's Australia-wide. The New South Wales association is still in vogue. We have serving members of the Defence Force when it was the Royal

Australian Army Corps so we've become an association, not the WRAAC, as a separate entity.

FB: O.K. And so you told me you were a trainer. Can you tell me what your role involved as a trainer for WRAAC?

LD: Sure. Initially, I was part of the recruitment process. In 19 – now I can't think '71, I resigned from the regular army and joined the Citizens Military Forces at the 1st/15th NSW Lancers at Parramatta where I became a sergeant and I moved into Victoria Barracks at 2 Training Group where I became a recruitment instructor.

4.48 **FB: So you were involved in recruiting other women?**

LD: Recruiting. I was involved in training people to go out and recruit for the Defence Force, both men and women.

FB: So do you know of any other Aboriginal women that might have been in the WRAAC?

LD: I was just mentioning it to my work colleagues this morning. In the WRAAC Association I believe there's only three or four of us that recognise as Aboriginal people. It's a shame because I'm sure there are a lot more but people just didn't stand up and say "Hey, I'm Aboriginal". You just became part of the WRAAC Association and that's the way it was.

FB: And did you ever experience racism within the WRAAC or within the armed forces?

LD: Personally, no.

FB: No?

LD: No.

FB: You never witnessed any?

LD: No, I never witnessed any racism.

FB: That's good.

LD: Yes, no, no, no. I think that the WRAAC recognised you for what you were, not who you were. So if you were a professional in the way that you managed your service then it didn't matter what colour you were which was great.

6.01 **FB: Yes, that's good. So have you been involved in the Coloured Diggers Project?**

LD: No, I haven't.

FB: No, you haven't.

LD: No, I first heard about it from Uncle Harry Allie who I think you've already interviewed and I think it's a great, great project that's going to put Australian diggers, Indigenous diggers on the map.

FB: That's good. So as part of this project I think I was telling you they're building a memorial to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Men and Women which is going to go in Hyde Park. What do you think about that memorial?

LD: I think it's a wonderful thing. I think that it actually should go farther than just Sydney but for Sydney to actually decide to recognise Aboriginal people as having served our country, literally "our country", I think it's a great thing. You know, we haven't been recognised for so long. Some of our people were left overseas because they didn't just want to bring them home. That's terrible and when you consider that those that did come back were herded onto missions, had their children stolen, were not given the same rights as non-Aboriginal people who served overseas, we need that recognition and people need to know our history and that will provide an outlet for that.

FB: And that's why I guess this oral history project is so important as well, to get people's personal stories.

LD: Yes.

FB: So what does ANZAC Day mean to you?

LD: ANZAC Day to me means an avenue for people to actually recognise people that served their country, not necessarily to make this country safe, although they did during World War II, but to serve your country being, I guess, Great Britain in those times but to recognise the people that did and it's a good avenue for people that haven't served to go and say thank you.

8.24 **FB: Do you usually march on ANZAC Day?**

LD: I march with the WRAAC Association every ANZAC Day. Even when I had cancer I marched with ANZAC Day. And I get emotional when we march down George Street and here's Dick Smith every year right in the front of the crowd with a little sign that says "Thank you, girls". That's tremendous, that recognition of the WRAAC.

FB: That's Because I guess a lot of people wouldn't know about the WRAAC. Like I'd never heard of it until I'd spoken to you.

LD: Well, there you go. Watch ANZAC Day parades and you'll see that we are the ladies in green jackets and green berets and we actually march in formation. We don't straggle; we do it all flat-out, marching all the way. So we're very proud of who we are and we're proud of the recognition that we get.

FB: No, that's really good. That's very important. So we were just talking a little bit before, do you think there's any other ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Men and Women could be recognised?

LD: Yes. I think that kids are taught in school about a history of our wars that we've been involved in and things like that. There's no mention of Aboriginal people. And when you consider that Aboriginal people have served in the Defence Force in wars since the Boer War and never been recognised I think that when you teach history in school you should include the Aboriginal people as part of that defence, being the nation's first peoples.

10.20

Why teach the history if you're not going to include all of the people? So if you do that then kids will grow up thinking "Oh, Aboriginal people did serve. They're not just flag wavers". And I think that it shouldn't be just the city of Sydney, I think the same sort of thing should be put into the war museum down in Canberra so that people can actually recognise it.

FB: Yes.

LD: I think that every town and city that has a war memorial that they march to at ANZAC Day should recognise the Aboriginal people as having served.

FB: I know a few towns have been putting up memorials. I know Uncle Harry went to Adelaide and Uncle Vic Simon was telling me they've put one up in Forster, I think.

LD: Good, good.

FB: So, yes, we're slowly getting there.

LD: Well, when you recognise that most Aboriginal people that served came from New South Wales, we're the highest number, we got no recognition whatsoever and people go "Really? Did Aboriginal people

serve?" Yes. Well, at thirteen they were actually putting their ages up and saying they were from New Zealand so that they could serve because Aboriginal people weren't allowed.

FB: Yes.

LD: There's something wrong. Let's talk about the history and try and change it.

FB: And particularly a lot of people that they went to war and when they came back they were treated so appallingly

LD: Very. They didn't get the same benefits, allowances or anything else that the non-Aboriginal people who served did and that's sad. When you tell people about that now they just don't understand why that could happen.

12.11

And when I tell them that Aboriginal people weren't counted in the census until 1967 they go "What?" You know, there is no history apart from the racism and the discrimination that we've suffered all those years. But this isn't about discrimination, this is about recognition of service and I think that it's a great idea.

FB: Excellent. So when you left the WRAAC, what did you do when you left the WRAAC?

LD: I went into the public service like many people. I served as a clerk with the Defence Force, then I went into becoming a prison officer, then a Juvenile Justice worker, always looking after my people that were incarcerated. I went onto the Children's Guardian, still looking after the people. I went to Department of Community Services, still looking after the people, and here I am now working as an Aboriginal Community Development officer for Bankstown, Fairfield and Liverpool where I see a lot of people who have served in the Defence Force, which is great.

FB: So can you tell me a little bit about what your job entails today, what you do today?

LD: Sure. It's hard to explain because we're a non-output service. People think Community Development Officer is working with people. That's not right. I actually work with organisations, mainly mainstream but Aboriginal organisations as well, who provide home and community care and my main job is to ensure that community organisations and community people are aware of all the changes that are happening, where are the services that are out there to make sure that they connect with the right services, to advocate on their behalf if there are issues within those services or the service that they get as well as

providing cultural awareness training – or I call it “cultural competency” – to mainstream organisations.

14.39 I have been invited to do that with the Arab Women’s Council here in Bankstown, with major organisations like Catholic Care - every one of their staff in New South Wales has been trained by me on cultural competence. A lot of organisations like the Older Women’s Network have asked me to come and talk to them about Aboriginal cultural history and competence. People want to know these days what Aboriginal people have been through, their history and where they’re going towards.

FB: Bankstown is a very multicultural city, so a lot of the migrant people that have moved to Australia from other countries, have you found that they’ve embraced Aboriginal culture or what

LD: No, they haven't.

FB: No?

LD: Not until they start talking to me, to be quite truthful. Bankstown Area Multicultural Network is a very good venue for me because the people that work here, one’s a Dutch lady, one’s from Sierra Leone, another one’s got English ancestry, another one’s South American, so all of these people come to me and we talk. And when they start to hear about Aboriginal people and our history they start to want to know more and then they get their groups involved and their groups want to know more.

16.06 And I draw a comparison with what’s happened to Aboriginal people and what’s happened to these people in their own country, genocide, you know, discrimination, dispossession of lands, moving them from one place to another to get rid of them so that they can have that land. So they are truly shocked that we suffer or have suffered and still in some areas suffer from the same things that they have left their country to come to this lucky country and they’re shocked and now they support us. They come to our NAIDOC [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Observance Day Committee] days, they come to any Aboriginal gathering days that we have here and they support us.

FB: That’s great.

LD: Yes, I think it’s wonderful. It’s become such an eye-opener for non-Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal community because they now feel included in that non-Aboriginal community out there.

FB: Yes. And I think too with Uncle Harry being just recently honoured in the Australia Day - - -

LD: Elder of the Year.

FB: - - - Elder of the Year for Bankstown, that's a really great honour for a man that's done a lot of work.

LD: He's done a lot of work. He actually was part of the recruitment panel for me.

FB: O.K.

LD: And he has been a wonderful support to me throughout this. But then the community as well has come on board. We have one of the Aboriginal elders from Bankstown here on our management committee to support me, to make sure that my needs are met. So, yes, Uncle Harry is just an amazing man. He retired from work but he never really retired.

18.01 **FB: No. I see him at functions every couple of weeks.**

LD: Yes.

FB: He's a very busy man.

LD: Yes.

FB: All right, great. Thanks, Aunty Lyn. Is there anything else that you wanted to add or anything else you want to say?

LD: No, no. I'm just so proud to be part of this project for the recognition that we're going to get.

FB: Excellent, great.

LD: And hopefully that more will come out of it.

FB: Excellent. Well, thank you very much for your time.

LD: Thank you.

Interview ends