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Indigenous Soldiers

Over 1,000 Indigenous Australians fought in the First World War. Although Australians of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent could not vote and were not counted in the Census - facing discrimination, low wages, and poor living conditions - many were keen to join the Army and serve their nation and King.

Whilst many who tried to enlist were rejected based on race, some slipped through the net or later enlisted under a new military order that allowed 'half-castes' with one parent of European origin to be accepted.

Ivan Francis Grant enlisted under the name John Henry Grant and served in the 53rd Battalion. In this unit, Grant experienced - perhaps for the first time - a true equality, living under the same conditions of service as the other men. Unfortunately, he was killed in action at Villers-Bretonneux, France, on 29th March 1917.

While those like Grant would make the ultimate sacrifice, many Indigenous servicemen who survived to return to civilian life in Australia found they were treated with the same prejudice and discrimination that they had experienced before the war.

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