

## Conference Recognises Heroism & Sacrifice of Aborigines in Australian Frontier Wars

*Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese, 8 Jul 2015*  
*Jenny Cullen*

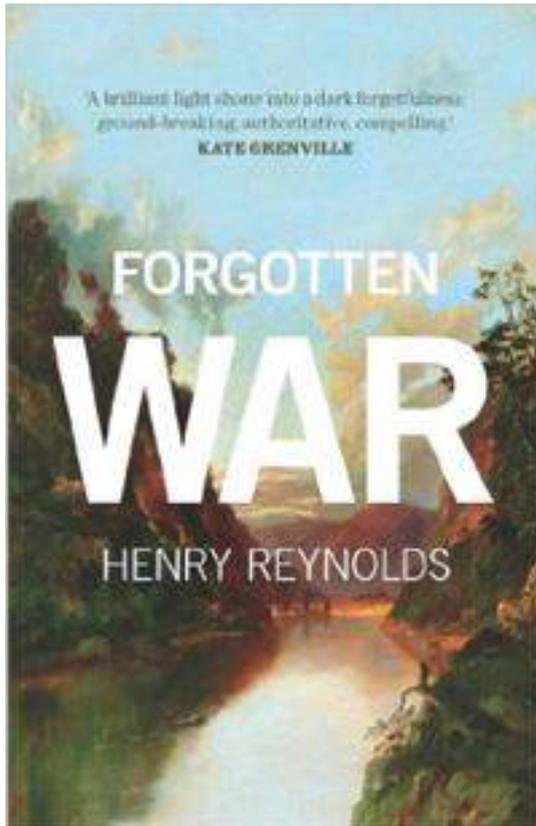


Eminent historian and award winning author Henry Reynolds will be keynote speaker at Conference on Aboriginal Australians at War. Aborigines who fought alongside white Australians in World War I and II, and the more recent Vietnam War are remembered in statues and in war memorials in towns and cities across the country. But the many thousands of Aborigines who fought against the white man in the Frontier Wars have been forgotten, says Father Jim Carty SM.

In a bid to change this and recognise the heroism and sacrifice of the estimated 30,000 Aborigines who lost their lives defending their families and their land, the Australia's Marist Family Peace and Justice Group is holding a special all-day Conference in Sydney next month.

"About 3000 white settlers lost their lives in the Frontier Wars. With their guns and military weapons, Aborigines armed with spears to defend themselves, stood little chance. But this chapter in Australia's early history is seldom acknowledged. It is not taught in schools as part of the curriculum, and many Aborigines as well as other Australians have little knowledge of these wars, with the popular idea that when Europeans arrived, the Indigenous people simply handed over their lands without a fight or even much of a protest," says Fr Jim Carty. "Few young people today have any idea of the huge losses sustained by the Aborigines during the Frontier War, or of the bravery and heroism they displayed in their attempts to protect their land and their families."

Fr Carty admits his own knowledge of the Frontier Wars was limited until he picked up a copy of *The Forgotten War*, by eminent Australian historian and award winning author, Henry Reynolds.



Henry Reynolds' 2013 award winning book *The Forgotten War*. Henry Reynolds is one of Australia's most outstanding historians and author of more than 10 books including major works such as *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience 1788-1939*; *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (1981) and most recently, *The Forgotten War*.

Although now in his late 70s and a man who seldom gives interviews, the Tasmanian-based historian has agreed to be a keynote speaker at the Marist Family Peace and Justice Group's Conference, entitled "Both Ends of the Gun: Aboriginal Australians at War" in Sydney on Saturday, 29 August.

Uncle Dave Williams, former long serving Naval Officer and Aboriginal Elder will also be a keynote speaker at the Conference which will be chaired by Jeff McMullen, journalist, filmmaker, founder of AIME (the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) and Trustee of the Jimmy Little Foundation where he works closely with Aboriginal doctors and medical services to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In addition the Conference will feature facilitators to answer questions and promote discussions. These include well known Aboriginals such as Mark Heiss, son of well known elder Elsie Heiss, a teacher at Marist College, North Sydney, sportsman and Member of the Board of the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCAR), and Elizabeth Burke, Aboriginal Education Advisor with the Archdiocese of Sydney's Catholic Education Office (CEO).

Both Mark and Elizabeth along with CEO's Director for the Inner West Region, Michael Krawec have been closely involved in organising the Conference and have worked closely as advisers and consultants with the

Marist Social Justice team since the Conference committee was formed 12 months ago.



Uncle Dave Williams long serving Naval Officer will also be a keynote speaker at the up coming Marist Family Peace and Justice Conference "From the start, the Catholic Education Office has given the Conference its full support," says Elizabeth Burke who believes the time is long overdue to clear up the misconceptions associated with the early days of European settlement and to address what happened in the Frontier Wars and acknowledge the bravery and heroism of Aboriginals against the guns and might of modern warfare.

"I am very pleased this Conference is taking place and proud to be a part of it," she says.

For Fr Carty the Conference represents more than two years of effort and determination.

The moment he read Henry Reynolds book, *The Forgotten War* published in 2013 he realised this was an ideal project for the Marist Family Peace and Justice Group's biennial Conference exploring important social justice issues.

"But it took me quite a while not only to track down Henry Reynolds but to persuade him to be part of the Conference and our keynote speaker," he says confessing that his first phone calls were met with polite rectitude but little enthusiasm.

"He didn't know me from Adam so it took a while for him to realise I was serious," says Fr Carty.

More than 350 are expected to attend the Conference and will range from senior school students to university students to historians as well as interested members from the general public.

Although the Conference will concentrate on the Frontier Wars, there will also be discussions about the role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have played in wars fought by Australian forces overseas, including those who signed up for the Boer War but were not allowed back into the country due to Australia's White Australia policy.



Frontier Wars where 30,000 Aboriginals lost their lives, their spears no match for the guns and weaponry of European settlers and soldiers "In those days Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were not issued with visas or passports and so were not permitted to return," Fr Carty explains. "When the First World War broke out, they were not supposed to enlist. But they did anyway out of a sense of patriotism and love for their country," says Elizabeth Burke. "For five years they fought alongside members of the Australian armed forces overseas and were treated as equals. But when they returned they discovered they were unable to join their white army mates for a drink in the pub."

Even worse, says Fr Carty, land owned by Aboriginal soldiers was requisitioned by the Government and given to ex-servicemen who had fought in World War I. "In other words the land that was their heritage was given to those they had fought alongside, but they received no land and no compensation."

While the Australian Government spent more than \$400 million to commemorate the Centenary of Gallipoli and monuments to the bravery of Australia's troops, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders members of the armed forces, there are no memorials to the 300,000 Aboriginals who died on home soil in the Frontier War, or the 3000 European settlers and soldiers who also lost their lives.

"Aborigines who fought for the white man are remembered with reverence. The many more who fought against him are forgotten."  
Henry Reynolds

**BOTH ENDS OF THE GUN**  
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**Saturday**  
**29 August 2015**  
 9:30am to 3:00pm

Register by 7th August  
 ☎ 0417 691 283 ✉ [justice@marketfamily.com.au](mailto:justice@marketfamily.com.au) W: [www.marketfamily.com.au](http://www.marketfamily.com.au)

Conference Recognises Heroism & Sacrifice of Aborigines in Australian Frontier Wars

The only war fought on Australian soil remains unacknowledged and forgotten.

One of the Aboriginal heroes of the Frontier War is without doubt Windradyne, the noble Wiradyuri warrior who after a courageous guerrilla-war against European soldiers and settlers, gathered a handful of his surviving people and walked 300 kilometres across the Blue Mountains and into the heart of enemy territory.

Wearing a hat emblazoned with PEACE he presented himself to Governor Thomas Brisbane, possibly preventing the extermination of one of Australia's largest Koori tribes. But rather than celebrated as a powerful symbol of good will and understanding between the original inhabitants and the newly arrived white settlers, the moment has been ignored by history.

"If he had been a Zulu Warrior such as Shaka or an Apache Chief such as Geronimo his name would have been etched in folklore. But in Australia the prevailing wisdom is that the settlers met little resistance and there was no fierce guerrilla like war mounted by the Wiradyuri to protect and keep their lands," Fr Carty says.

The "Both Ends of the Gun: Aboriginals at War" Conference organised by the Marist Family Peace and Justice Group will be take place from 9.30 am until 3 pm on Saturday, 29 August at Santa Sabina College, 90 the Boulevarde, Strathfield, NSW 2135. For more information see [www.maristfamily.com.au](http://www.maristfamily.com.au) or email [jascarty@maristfamily.com.au](mailto:jascarty@maristfamily.com.au).