

Douglas Grant

By Aiden Geneff

Douglas Grant is a proud First Nation Australian of Ngadjonji descent from the Bellenden Ker Ranges, North Queensland.

He was born in 1885. His occupations over the years were Draughtsman, public servant, factory worker, Wool Classer and an Aboriginal Australia soldier in World War 1, He was captured by the German Army at Wittendorf and later sent to Wünsdorf, Zossen near Berlin.

The Ngadjonji National was born 1885 in the Bellenden Ker Ranges. Douglas survived one of the British massacres in his First Nation community and was found by Scottish scientist, Robert Grant and his wife Elizabeth, they were on a expedition when they found the young boy. They decided to take him home to New South Wales even though it was illegal. He spent his childhood in Lithgow and Annandale, New South Wales. He also attended the Annandale Public School where he got his interest in drawing and won first prize in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee exhibition for a drawing of the bust of Queen Victoria in 1897 at the age of twelve.

With his talent for drawing, he worked as a Draughtsman for 10 years. He then became a Wool Classer at Belltrees Station in 1913. Three years later at the age of 31 Douglas enlisted

with 34th Battalion in 1916 but regulations prevented Aboriginals from leaving Australia. When he got permission to leave Australia he was transferred to the 13th Battalion. He was sent to fight in France and got wounded in 1917, then captured at Bullecourt in France. He was later sent to Wünsdorf camp where prisoners were studied by scientists.

While in prison he was responsible for receiving and distributing Red Cross parcels. Douglas Grant wrote to the secretary of Red Cross, Miss Elizabeth Chomley saying “I’m happy to say that I am enjoying perfect health but as it is only natural I long and weary for home which I trust may soon be within measurable distance. Please accept many thanks for past favours”. His role was very important because it provided essential nutrients and it lifted the mens spirits. He also documented important information about who was at the camp which helped families find out about what happened to their family members during the war.

After the war he returned to his job as a Wool Classer and then found work at a Lithgow factory. It’s told while at war he felt he was treated equally but back in Australia people treated him unequally. Mr Grant lobbied for Aboriginal rights and became active in servicemen’s affairs. He wrote opinion pieces in the newspaper, talked on radio shows, and urged the government to save Aboriginal lives. However, his mental health declined and he spent some time at ex-servicemen’s ward at Callen Park Mental Hospital, where he ended up working as a clerk. Then he lived with his brother Henry as he was declared unfit for work.

One ANZAC day ex-serviceman Roy Kinghorn saw Douglas in the Domain. Douglas said to Roy, "No I'm not wanted any more ... I think I'm better out here ... I've lived long enough to see I don't belong anywhere and they don't want me. Then they attended the service together which showed he was respected by fellow soldiers.

The Aboriginal Australia soldier of Ngadhonji descent was an educated, honest, hardworking and quick-thinking man. During WW1 he fought for his country and was well respected by his fellow soldiers. He fought for Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal lives when he returned to Australia but this was not easy and he was often treated badly as a result. He died at age 66 in 1951. It wasn't until 2015 that his efforts in helping his people and his country were recognised. The Douglas Grant Park in Annandale, New South Wales was named in his honour.