

'Breaker' Morant and his mates given medals at last

MATTHEW DENHOLM

After an almost 120-year battle, Harry "Breaker" Morant and his co-accused Boer War comrades, Peter Hancock and George Witton, are to posthumously receive military service medals.

Some see the three Australians – convicted in 1902 of shooting Boer prisoners while serving with the British – as scapegoats and victims of a miscarriage of justice; others as brutal war criminals.

However, military lawyer James Unkles said no one could deny their earlier meritorious service with Australian colonial military units, and this had been the basis of his successful pursuit of service medals.

"What the critics ignore is that prior to serving with the British contingent (known as the Bushveldt Carbineers, the three men – like thousands of other volunteers from Australia – joined colonial units," Mr Unkles said.

"Their service was exemplary and without incident. In fact,



George Witton's war medal

Morant was promoted to sergeant and was commended by his commanding officer. Hancock and Witton did much the same.

"After 120 years of controversy, it's time to ... recognise the service they rendered through these colonial units. I'm proud I have been able to bring some closure to the descendants on this," Mr Unkles said, adding military authorities had told him they no longer issued Boer War medals but had offered a pathway to securing them.

"I was directed that if I could satisfy by the service records that they did serve (with the colonial

units), then I could approach a commercial supplier and have the medals issued," he said.

"After a lot of painstaking research on records held in Britain and in Australia, I've been able to satisfy their service details for those colonial units. The medals have been produced and a representative from each of the families will receive them."

Brian Turley, Mr Witton's great nephew, was on Monday the first to be presented with one of the medals. "It's been a long time coming," Mr Turley said.

A solicitor-soldier from NSW, Major J.F. Thomas, was given just one day's notice to prepare a defence. Morant and Hancock were executed hours after the guilty verdicts. Witton was jailed and released four years later.

There is an ongoing campaign for a possible posthumous pardon.

Their story was told in the 1980 film Breaker Morant starring Edward Woodward as Morant, Bryan Brown as Hancock, Lewis Fitz-Gerald as Witton and Jack Thompson as Major Thomas.



Military lawyer James Unkles, left, with Boer War soldier George Witton's great nephew Brian Turley on Monday

AARON FRANCIS

Desert folk to redesign dole plan

PAIGE TAYLOR

The desert people who took the Morrison government to the Federal Court over a work-for-the-dole scheme described as racist and unworkable will help design its replacement.

Aboriginal people of the 10 communities in the vast Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku near the border of Western Australia and the Northern Territory have reached an out-of-court agreement with the federal government after a two-year battle over the scheme.

Politicians on both sides of politics came to see the scheme's punitive approach as ineffective.

In 2015, the Morrison government recast the work-for-the-dole scheme that had operated since 1977 as the Community Development Program. It was for unemployed people in designated remote areas and about 84 per cent of the 33,000 participants were Indigenous. Critics said the scheme lost relevance because communities were no longer in charge of the work people were required to do to get paid.

In a statement of claim in the Federal Court in 2019, Ngaanyatjaraku man Basil Dawson, 36, and 365 other CDP participants said they were paid significantly less than JobActive participants elsewhere in Australia and forced to do meaningless activities.

The Australian understands that as part of the agreement that ended the court mediation, the Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku where Mr Dawson lives is one of five trial sites for a replacement scheme that puts communities back in charge.

The other four trial sites are in the midwest of WA, Eyre in South Australia, Barkly in the Northern Territory and Palm Island in Queensland.

Spotlight on Indigenous diabetes crisis

AMOS AIKMAN NORTHERN CORRESPONDENT

A new study has found Indigenous children in Northern Australia suffer youth-onset type two diabetes at rates at least 10 times higher than previously thought, and possibly above those anywhere else in the world.

The study, published in the medical journal The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology, was the first to use primary healthcare data to estimate the disease's

prevalence. It looked at 381 type two diabetes sufferers aged under 25 years and identified from a First Nations population of about 60,000. The youngest was aged just four years.

Type two diabetes is a condition where the body struggles to regulate its sugar levels. There is no cure, but the condition can be managed. Without that, high blood sugar levels can eventually lead to disorders of the circulatory, nervous and immune systems.

People who develop type two diabetes young are more likely to

experience other conditions as adults. Babies exposed to high blood glucose levels during pregnancy are more likely to develop type two diabetes at an even earlier age than their mothers.

The research was led by Darwin-based paediatric endocrinologist Angela Titmuss, who is completing her PhD at the Menzies School of Health Research.

"Only 14 per cent of young people in our study ... had blood glucose levels within recommended targets," she said. "For those falling outside of the target, the

risk of developing complications such as kidney damage at a young age is significantly increased."

She said the findings reflected "the reality that the majority of young people in this study are living in poverty with very high levels of educational disadvantage".

"They are also living with the impacts of intergenerational trauma including exposure to multiple adverse early childhood experiences which we know contributes greatly to the development of chronic disease in later life, including diabetes and metabolic syn-

drome. Lack of food security further compounds these issues."

The study reported "a very high prevalence of type two diabetes among First Nations youth in Northern Australia, arguably the highest reported prevalence in any population of youth internationally in the past 25 years".

"To our knowledge, this study is the first report of youth-onset type two diabetes prevalence in Northern Australia, and suggests that prevalence is substantially greater than previously reported prevalence estimates in Australia,

of 0.5 cases per 1000 First Nations Australians younger than 25 years, 0.1 cases per 1000 Australian 10-14 year olds, and 0.9 cases per 1000 Australian 20-24 year olds," they wrote.

The study found rates as high as 31.1 cases per 1000 people in Central Australian girls. Some of the highest rates of youth-onset type two diabetes (38 cases per 1000 boys and 53 per 1000 girls) were detected in Native American youths in the 80s and 90s.

"Of concern, our reported prevalence of 31 cases per 1000

Central Australian females aged 15-24 years approaches these levels," the researchers wrote.

"We report a much higher prevalence of type two diabetes than seen in recent years in First Nations youth internationally, with reported prevalence ranging between 0.6 cases per 1000 young people and 27 cases per 1000 young people."

Co-author Louise Maple-Brown said the work would help doctors work with families and communities to improve standards of care.

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