

Nowra Aboriginal War Veteran Honoured By Ex-servicemen

The Nowra sub-branch of the R.S.L. recently paid their last respects to a veteran of World War I, in the person of Ernie Lacey, a member of the 17th Battalion, 1st A.I.F., who has been described as Nowra's best known and most respected aboriginal.

About 60 ex-servicemen attended the funeral in Nowra War Cemetery, which was carried out with full military honours, as was fitting. The casket was draped in a Union Jack on which was a Digger's hat and reversed spurs.

Mr. U. K. Walsh, who during the war was Major Walsh, M.C., E.D., who was asked by the President of the R.S.L., Mr. W. F. Robertson, to recite the Ritual at the graveside, said: "As the Chaplain has said, we would like to remember the deceased as a young man, forgetting all colour of skin; he offered his life for his country along with the rest of Australia."

Eric Baume's Comment

It is of interest to readers that Mr. Eric Baume, in his "Face the Facts" column in the "Sun" wrote:

"Moree can adopt the methods of Alabama. Keep aborigines out of public swimming pools. Treat them as some illiterate Kentucky hill-billy would treat a Negro.

But there is one town in N.S.W. which bears the hallmark of Australian worth and value.

That town is Nowra, on the South Coast, which recently paid a vivid tribute to an Australian of colour.

Men of two world wars gathered at his graveside. A minister of the gospel, naturally, conducted the funeral service.

But an ex-Major of the A.I.F., U. K. Walsh, read the R.S.L. ritual, and the bowed heads of scores of Diggers at the graveside were there to show the world what soldiers thought of an old Australian.

Sentimental? If you say so. But I can assure you that there is nothing sentimental in recording for a great city, and for the whole State, a little bit of Australian history.

The funeral of the aboriginal, Ernest Lacey, was a challenge to the hard core which would bring race hatred to this country.

Ernie Lacey was a blacktracker many years ago. He was born in Brewarrina. No one knew his right age. He didn't know much about himself.

So when World War I began, he became a gentleman of the Light Horse, and his dark face gave added pride to the uniform, and he was known as the great horseman of his regiment.

In the cavalry he served throughout the desert campaign. In 1916 he went to France. He was known wherever he lived as "The Diggers' Friend."

Those who knew him best said that any soldier in trouble, black or white, could turn to him.

The Diggers who were at his graveside at Nowra tell many stories about his fine character. Their wives repeat the sadness which Ernie Lacey's death has brought.

One of his comrades, who hides his identity under the nom-de-guerre of "Bert," has written of him in the newspaper of the district

Ullola, he sees through the rent of the Scattering fog,
The corroboree, war-like and grim,
And the lubra who sat by the fire on the log
To watch like a mourner, like a mother and mourner
for him.

Will he go in his sleep to those desolate lands
Like a chief, to the rest of his race,
Where the honey-voiced woman who beckons and
stands
And gleams like a dream in his face,

Like a wonderful dream in his face?

In Nowra—and they mean it as a compliment, however strange it may sound—Ernie Lacey is known as an aboriginal with a white man's heart."

SOME LOST PEN FRIENDS

Francis Cruse Writes

Dawn has had a letter from a very worried young man. His name is Francis A. Cruse, Ward 20, Randwick Auxiliary Hospital, Randwick.

Francis says, "Those pen friends who wrote to me (twenty-four to be exact) have not received a letter from me because I lost the two pages which contained their names and addresses. Do you think they would write to me again?"

So there you are. Francis is anxious to hear from those girls who wrote to him before. How about it, pen friends?