



NORTHERN TERRITORY LIBRARY HONOURS ALBERT BORELLA VC

Congratulations to Mickey Dewar, Heritage Co-ordinator at the Northern Territory Library (NTL), and winner of the 2015 ALIA NT Recognition Award for *Borella's War: The making of a legend, an exhibition that was created through the Northern Territory Department of Arts and Museums. It was developed as a key element of the Northern Territory's Centenary of Anzac program. It also formed part of the NT's flagship event, 'The Borella Ride'. The exhibition was on display at the NTL in February and March.*

Mickey was nominated by Phyllis Williams, Director, NT Archives Service and National Archives of Australia.

Mickey was the intellectual force behind the narrative, and she collaborated with Matthew Stephen from the NT Archives Service to develop the exhibition, along with several members of the library staff. The exhibition drew on the collections of both the library and the Archives Services, as well as the research skills of professional staff, to tell an engaging and accurate story of Albert Borella, the NT's only recipient of the Victoria Cross. The exhibition was well received, informing and inspiring students, tourists, historians and researchers alike.

In early 1913, Albert Borella, bushman and equestrian, moved from Melbourne to the Northern Territory to take up farming land on the Daly River. Despite extraordinary efforts and much help from the local Aboriginal community, he ended up broke and in debt. He walked off the farm and got a job in Tennant Creek. In January 1915 he travelled more than 600 miles (almost 1,000km) back to Darwin to enlist in the First World War. Borella fought in Gallipoli and on the Western Front, and in 1918 he was awarded the highest military honour in the British Empire, the Victoria Cross, for his actions of 'most conspicuous bravery in attack'.

In 2015, as Australia honoured the centenary of the Anzac landing, it was the story of Borella's famous ride to enlist that captured the imagination of everyone, particularly children. The re-creation of Borella's journey became 'The Borella Ride', which retraced Borella's original journey north to Darwin from Tennant Creek. Among the riders who took part were some of Borella's descendants. An integral part of 'The Borella Ride' was a travelling exhibition that accompanied the riders to explain some of the history to the school children along the route. The touring component went on permanent display in Tennant Creek, and *Borella's War* toured to his home town Albury, NSW.

The exhibition also presented an opportunity to recognise examples of mateship and courage under fire and honour some of the stories of those young men who suffered or were killed in conflict.

There were 23,945 visitors to the library throughout the period of the exhibition; visitation figures up by more than 10 percent from the previous year over the same period. In addition to self-guided school visits, NTL staff members led nine school tours (a total audience of 367 students), with a program of floor talks, specialist tours and panel events. There was also extensive newspaper, radio and television coverage.

Despite the exhibition's aims, much of it – the realities of the First World War, the extraordinary scale of destruction and the loss of so many young men – was probably not understood by the children who visited. Their responses were quick, funny, clever and enthusiastic, but they were not personally touched by the stories on display. It was quite a different experience when the stories of the young men we never knew were shared with a group of women from a local seniors group – everyone wept.



Lynette supervising the exhibition demount ready to transport to Albury, June 2015.

The children may not have understood the complexities of content, but they did leave the library knowing that libraries were places to see things they couldn't see anywhere else, hear stories that were true and learn about their nation's history.



Ryoko assisting with the exhibition demount June 2015.

Story developed by NTL staff with Dr Matthew Stephen (Co-curator) from NTAS. NTL staff working on this project included Dr Sam Wells, Alan Davis, Andrea McKey, Gaynor Lovett, Hayley Bawden, Kay Henderson, Suzy Young, Margret Curry and Brian Flanagan; exhibition content, logistics and oversight by Lynette Aitchison and Emma Darby. Photography by Alan Davis and Mickey Dewar.



A mock newspaper produced as part of the exhibition education materials.



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