

Front-yard salute to great-great-granddad who gave his all

IMOGEN REID

Ever since she can remember, 14-year-old Mabel-Jean Lochowiak has stepped out on Anzac Day to march proudly alongside her four brothers, Mikhail, Anzac, Jacob and Jackson, in memory of her great-great-grandfather, a Ngarindjeri man who enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and fought at Gallipoli.

Like thousands of Australians who have had their Anzac Day plans dashed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, Mabel-Jean's family will be forced to mark the day with their own form of contactless commemoration.

On Saturday, the Adelaide schoolgirl will remember those who served with her great-great-grandfather, Private Arthur Thomas Walker, with a dawn service in her front yard at Woodforde, in the Adelaide Hills.

"We normally wake up early for the march and the night before we do Mass," Mabel-Jean said.



ROY VANDERVEGT

Mabel-Jean Lochowiak and Arthur Thomas Walker

"We walk down to the National War Memorial on North Terrace, but this year we'll wake up early for the dawn service and stand outside with our neighbours.

"It's a bit sad we can't march because of coronavirus, but we're still going to pay our respects and mark the occasion as best we can."

Walker enlisted unlawfully to

fight in World War I. Surviving Gallipoli, the soldier from Goolwa, near the Murray mouth, went to Egypt and France, where he was killed in action on the Western Front and where his body lies.

"It makes me really proud that I'm a descendant of his," Mabel-Jean said. It's really a great honour." Having learned of her great-

great-grandfather's legacy from her grandmother, whose name is also Mabel-Jean, her favourite story of Private Walker is how he enlisted in the AIF.

"Aboriginals weren't allowed to enlist, so he had his friend ask an enlisting officer, who told Arthur Thomas not to tick the boxes asking if he was married or Aboriginal," she said.

Her grandmother searched for Walker's defence medals, which had passed on to his mother, but they were lost through the times of the Stolen Generations.

Mabel-Jean's father, John — Walker's great-grandson — said receiving a call in 2014 with the news that his medals had been found was a "spiritual experience".

"One of the traditions we have as an Aboriginal family is you are buried where you were born, so getting his medals, it was almost like his spirit had finally come home," he said.

Mr Lochowiak said Walker "got into trouble a couple of times when he was going in to retrieve

the wounded. He risked his life because they were his mates — he was caring and loving, which is symbolic of the Anzac spirit which is reflected in Mabel-Jean."

His daughter said she and her brothers wore replicas of the originals on Anzac Day "to keep his memory alive". A recipient of an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship, Mabel-Jean said part of the reason she attended Adelaide's Seymour College is to complete a strong education, an opportunity her great-great-grandfather did not have.

"It's given me so many opportunities, with tutoring and meeting new people from all around the globe," Mabel-Jean said. "The staff at the AEIF and the teachers at Seymour are really helpful and supportive. They give me the confidence to get involved."

The foundation provides tuition and boarding costs at private schools for 450 indigenous high school students around the country, with more than 650 graduates since it was established in 2008.