

BYRON RANGIWAI

“Write the world” and tell the stories of your ancestors

“As we dissect our war history, we discover previously untold or undocumented war stories of many Pacific people who served. Bringing to light these stories will allow a more complete history to be told of our country’s war efforts” (Cuthers, 2020, n.p.).



Figure 1. William Cuthers delivering a speech at the final Te Wānanga o Aotearoa graduation ceremony on 22 June 2021 (William Cuthers, personal collection).

Byron Rangiwai is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Healthcare and Social Practice at Unitec Institute of Technology. Byron was a Lecturer in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa from 2017 to June 2021. Byron supervised William’s exegesis (Cuthers, 2019a; Rangiwai et al., 2019).

William Cuthers is of Cook Islands Māori and New Zealand Māori descent. He was raised in South Auckland in the 1980s by his mother (Cuthers, 2020). William's connections to the Cook Islands and his ancestors' involvement in the World Wars have been of particular significance for him (Cuthers, 2020; Cooper, 2020; Farrell, 2021; Lintonbon, 2020).



Figure 2. Makiroa Cuthers (William Cuthers, personal collection).

William's paternal great-grandfather, Anguna Kainana, and his maternal great-grandfather,

Makiroa Cuthers, were members of the Māori Battalion who served in World War I (Cuthers, 2020).



Figure 3. Anguna Kainana (left). (William Cuthers, personal collection)

Additionally, four of William's great-granduncles from both sides of his family also served during the First World War (Cuthers, 2020). William's other paternal great-grandfather, Tuainekore Enoke, was a member of the Cook Islands Local Defence Force during World War II (Cuthers, 2020). Central to William's personal and research stories is his maternal grandfather, William Cuthers, who served as a Coastwatcher during World War II (Cuthers, 2020).



Figure 4. William Cuthers (William Cuthers, personal collection).

William Cuthers completed his Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge degree at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in 2019. According to William:

When I began this journey, I was motivated by something that my kaiako, Dr Byron Rangiwai said to us. He said, “write the world”, change the world with your writing. He said this to us early on in the piece, but it resonated with me. I started to believe that if my research and writing was good enough, I could change something in the world (Cuthers, 2021, n.p.).

William’s master’s research led to his understanding of and passion for the Coastwatchers (Cuthers, 2021). In addition, William’s desire to write the

stories of his ancestors (Cuthers, 2019b; Rangiwai, 2018, 2019) provided him with the motivation to push the boundaries in ways that would benefit Pacific peoples (Cuthers, 2021).



*Figure 5. William Cuthers with his wife and three children
(William Cuthers, personal collection)*

William published four academic articles on Indigenous knowledge and culture (Cuthers, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019b) and an exegesis (Cuthers, 2019a). His research work centred on identity and preserving the stories of his ancestors (Cuthers, 2019a, 2019b). William's research into his identity

led to the discovery that his grandfather, William, had been a Coastwatcher in the Cook Islands during World War II (Cuthers, 2019a, 2020, 2021). However, “New Zealand had never formally recognised these Pacific Island men for their service, in stark contrast to their Pākehā counterparts” (Cuthers, 2020, 2021, n.p; Farrell, 2021; Lintonbon, 2020).

William had been inspired and encouraged to *Write the World* (Rangiwai, 2019), and so wrote about the Coastwatchers (Cuthers, 2021). He sent his research findings to the Defence Force, the Minister of Defence, Members of Parliament, and the Prime Minister to seek recognition for these brave men (Cuthers, 2021).

William was able to enlist the help of some of Aotearoa’s leading journalists and documentary makers, resulting in the documentary, [*Coastwatchers - Operation Pacific*](#), which aired on TV1 on ANZAC Day 2020 (Cuthers, 2021). The documentary tells the story of the Coastwatchers and highlights the historical racism, inequality and injustice, and challenges the authorities to acknowledge the Coastwatchers formally (Cuthers, 2021).

While a formal decision on retrospective attestation from the New Zealand Defence Force is still pending, on 27 March 2021, at the Prime Minister’s invitation, William attended the unveiling of a memorial (Cuthers, 2021). This memorial, Te Reo

Hotunui o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa—a 3.6 metre high, 5000kg bronze conch shell with a 1.5-metre opening, designed by Michel Tuffrey MNZM (Herrior Melhuish O'Neill Architects, 2021)—stands at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park (Cuthers, 2021; Pukeahu National War Memorial Park, 2021). This memorial recognises the service and sacrifice of all Pacific peoples who supported New Zealand in the First and Second World Wars (Cuthers, 2021; Pukeahu National War Memorial Park, 2021).



Figure 6. View of Te Reo Hotunui o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa at the dedication ceremony (Pukeahu National War Memorial Park, 2021, n.p.).

In her speech at the unveiling, the Prime Minister stated: “I especially acknowledge the Pacific Island Coastwatchers risking themselves to protect their homes, families and the wider region” (RNZ, 2021, n.p.).



Figure 7. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaking at the unveiling ceremony (Herriot Melhuish O’Neill Architects, 2021, n.p.).

The story of these honourable men was previously untold, but now, more than 70 years after their service, their war contribution has finally come to

light (Cuthers, 2021). This would not have been possible without the flame that was ignited within William during his time at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (Cuthers, 2021).

So just as the gift was passed on to me, I wish to pay it forward and pass on the challenge to everyone to “write the world” (Cuthers, 2021, n.p.).



Figure 8. William Cuthers and Byron Rangiwai at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa graduation 2021 (William Cuthers, personal collection).

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