

6TH ANNUAL TOM BROCK LECTURE

NSW LEAGUES' CLUB

SYDNEY • 22 SEPTEMBER 2004

*"No More Bloody
Bundles for Britain:"
The post-World War II
Tours of the British
and French Allies*



Clive Churchill, who toured Britain and France in 1948, 1952 and 1956 and as the Kangaroo coach in 1959, led the Australian team in 1950 to its first Ashes victory since 1921.



Mr Thomas Keneally AO



Published in 2005 by the
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the Australian Society for Sports History

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TOM BROCK BEQUEST

The Tom Brock Bequest, given to the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH) in 1997, consists of the Tom Brock Collection supported by an ongoing bequest. The Collection, housed at the University of New South Wales, includes manuscript material, newspaper clippings, books, photographs and videos on rugby league in particular and Australian sport in general. It represents the finest collection of rugby league material in Australia. ASSH has appointed a Committee to oversee the Bequest and to organise appropriate activities to support the Collection from its ongoing funds.

Objectives:

1. To maintain the Tom Brock Collection.
2. To organise an annual scholarly lecture on the history of Australian rugby league.
3. To award an annual Tom Brock Scholarship to the value of \$5,000.
4. To undertake any other activities which may advance the serious study of rugby league.
5. To publicise the above activities.

Activities:

1. The Tom Brock Lecture.
2. The Tom Brock Scholarship.
3. Updating the Collection with new material published on rugby league.
4. Reporting to ASSH on an annual basis.

Illustrations:

Courtesy of Ian Heads.

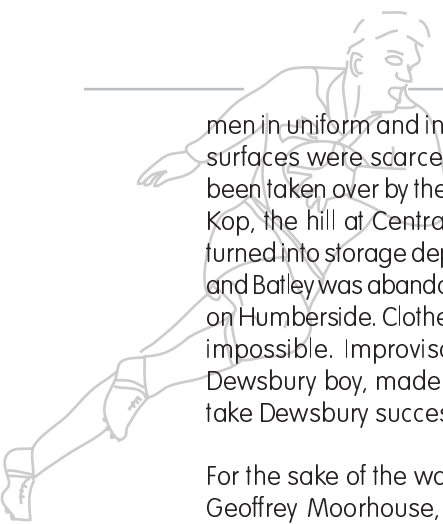
Details of the Tom Brock Bequest are located on the website of the Australian Society for Sports History: www.sportshistory.org.

It is hard for any one who wasn't alive at the time to understand the desperation of World War II, and the hope and exultation which quite temporarily greeted its end. Temporarily, I say, because the soldiers came home to the realities of the post-World War, to rationing, housing shortages, and a still flourishing black market. But even so it was obvious that Aussies, despite the narrow squeak we had had with the Japanese, had enjoyed an easier and healthier time of it all than the British had. The practice of sending food and clothing parcels to the embattled British may have begun in the then neutral United States as early as the northern spring of 1940, but it became the practice of generous Australian families after Goering's dreadful air blitz of England in the summer of 1940. Bundles for Britain became a national endeavour, and in the name of fraternity and kinship, Australian families skimped to put together parcels of knitted clothing and small luxuries for bombed-out, over-worked, hard-up British families. In every suburb, the town hall, the local Red Cross, and many other centres received the knitting and spare food of Australian homes for shipping to a distant Britain.



*An appeal to patriotism in
Rugby League News, 2 August 1941.*

The war over, Britain was still suffering shortages. In late 1945 Australia's External Affairs minister, Dr Herbert Evatt, patron of the NSW Rugby League, went to London for talks with the British Foreign Office and travelled on to Leeds to lobby the Rugby League Council, at whose meeting he suggested a British tour of Australia take place as soon as possible, preferably in the southern winter of 1946. Many of the Council put forward the argument that rugby league was just settling in again, counting its dead, assessing its new generation. But Doc Evatt argued the question of morale, as the Rugby Football League minutes of 10 October 1945 show.¹ Emergency leagues, as they were called, had been kept going between 1939 and 1945, with the British Rugby League Council being notified in 1940 that the Ministry of Labour 'wishes it to be conveyed to the meeting that it desires as much football as possible to be played, so as to provide recreation and relaxation to the workers'. That was not as easy as it sounded, given the number of



men in uniform and in reserved occupations such as coal mining. Playing surfaces were scarce. Central Park, Wigan's famous home ground, had been taken over by the Territorial Army, there were anti-aircraft guns on the Kop, the hill at Central Park. Salford's and Swindon's grounds were also turned into storage depots and parade grounds, and a game between Hull and Batley was abandoned after 65 minutes when the air raid sirens sounded on Humberside. Clothes-rationing made the acquisition of guernseys nearly impossible. Improvisation was everything. The smart Eddie Waring, a Dewsbury boy, made use of men from the large nearby military camp to take Dewsbury successfully to the Challenge Cup.

For the sake of the war there were games and armistices between what Geoffrey Moorhouse, the great historian of English league, calls *Homo Twickiens* and the League, when a number of games were played between a team of 15 rugby league servicemen and 15 rugby men. At the Headingley lunch prior to the game which the rugby league men won 15–10, one Captain Stanley Wilson of Northern Command made 'an earnest plea' for the playing of the annual fixture between the union and the league, in the hope of eventually healing the breach. 'In my view', he said 'the line between amateurism and professionalism is the most wavy line that has ever been drawn'.

Perhaps the administration of the present NRL in Australia could take a lesson from the flexibility with which, at Evatt's late 1945 suggestion, the British Rugby League now acted, holding trial matches at Central Park and Headingley to select their touring party of 27 men. They did so in blind hope, lacking the resources to get their men to Australia or New Zealand. The shipping of the world was fully taken up with repatriating troops and prisoners, and taking war brides to their new husbands' homelands, as well as, like my father's late 1945 troop ship, with shipping French and Dutch paratroopers to colonial wars in what was then Indochina and the Dutch East Indies.

The Australian government itself had to intervene and use its good offices to find 32 berths — not cabins — *berths*, for the champion team the trial matches had allowed the British to come up with. The berths were aboard HMS *Indomitable*, the aircraft carrier, which was due to sail from Plymouth to Fremantle on 4 April 1946. The team would inevitably and with some justice thereafter be styled 'the Indomitables'. The ship carried Australian troops, particularly members of the RAAF, and a number of British war brides, as well as its full crew. It also carried the great rugby league commentator and entrepreneur Eddie Waring who was canny enough to

get an upper class berth in the petty-officer's mess. Gus Risman, a 36 year old veteran, who would play rugby league for 26 years and also five rugby tests for Wales, was the captain. He was the only one who had previously toured Australia, but he had also met Australians in his war service with the First Airborne Division in North Africa. Risman was worried about his elderly mother's welfare while he was away, but his application that she should receive 30 shillings a week from the rugby league was turned down. Northern British MPs had to lobby the War Minister to release three of the team from the military to enable them to board with their fellow Rugby League Lions.

Reaching Fremantle, the teams travelled for five days by troop train to reach Central Station in Sydney. In those days test series, whether in cricket, league or union involved much foreplay — the Lions appeared in remote Junee, in Canberra, and again against New South Wales, a game which attracted a crowd of 52,000 to the Sydney Cricket Ground. Newcastle beat them 18–13, and Hunter people began to think a team of theirs might one day belong again in the Sydney competition. By the time of the first test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the Lions had played six games and attracted a frantic degree of attention.

The selection of the Australian team was an issue over which newly demobilised troops or newly de-manpowered workers and their children spent countless hours of fruitful, or at least enriching, discussion. The story



The 1946 Kangaroos pose before the first test at the SCG.



may be apocryphal, but it is said that when the English team disembarked from their bus for a training session at the SCG, an Aussie who beheld the size of the British forwards Whitcombe and Gee shouted, 'No more bloody bundles for Britain!' Somebody did say it, somewhere between June and Townsville in Queensland, and whoever it was, he was declaring that for rugby league and for the world the war had ended, and all bets were off. The aphorism stands also as a statement that Australia was nearing the end of its duties to the Empire, even though the full political flower of the Bob Menzies era was still to come.

The Australian team was led in the end by Joe Jorgenson of Balmain — its stars included Pat Devery, the Balmain five-eighth, discovered by Latchem Robinson, while playing football in the Domain as a sailor in the Royal Australian Navy during the war; and Lionel Cooper, whom Easts captain Ray Stehr had seen playing Australian Rules football as a soldier in Darwin. A notable member of this internationally inexperienced team was Arthur Clues, West's strong second rower who would soon be lost to Leeds, where he would play further football and open a sports store. Another still was Bumper Farrell, the legendary prop from Newtown, who had come close to being expelled from rugby league the year previously for almost biting off the ear of St George prop Bill McRitchie — though Bumper always denied this.

In an era of greater scrutiny, Farrell may have been in trouble for his associations with underworld figures, but in those days all that was grist to the legend, and he was the first of many post World War II Australian tough-guy front row forwards. It was an age of fiercely contested scrums, although post-1945 Bumper Farrell liked to assure the opposition that he had left his dentures in the dressing room.

The first test on 17 June 1946 brought a crowd of 64,526 to the Sydney Cricket Ground for a ferocious encounter. For many people the blowing of referee Tom McMahon's whistle that day was the true return to peace, to the remnants of the pre-war world, and to the intense sporting discourse between Australia and Great Britain. The Australians scored two tries and kicked a goal, and so did Great Britain, and Australian and British honour stood at 8 all at the end of the game. Jack Kitching, the Bradford Northern centre, a schoolmaster, was sent off for striking Australian captain Jorgenson. Expectation for the second test in Brisbane was intense, and the medium of radio, I believe, gave greater room for myth-making than the all-inclusive, all-enquiring eye of television.




Jack Rayner surges forward watched by Bumper Farrell (left) and Dennis Donoghue (Newtown versus Souths at the SCG).

My father's stories of the war in North Africa had been largely to do with the holy task of bringing embarrassment to British allies, of borrowing a compliant officer's uniform, hooning into Cairo in a truck and picking a fight with an officer of one of the household cavalry or infantry regiments in the officers-only bar of Shepherd's Hotel. For him and for hundreds and thousands of other men in eastern Australia, a huge amount of psychological back-pay was wrapped up in the question of this test series.

Such men were in for a disappointment. At the Brisbane Exhibition Ground on Saturday 6 July, the gates were closed when 40,500 were inside the ground. The Australian team itself was shut out with a large part of the crowd. It is estimated that 10,000 people invaded the ground after the gates were shut. A new captain had been appointed, Ron Bailey, Canterbury-Bankstown centre and captain-coach who had spent the first year of the war playing for Huddersfield, and who, the selectors thought, might be better qualified to read the Great Britain game.

The test was a rugged and forward-dominated affair, although the Halifax winger Arthur Bassett scored a hat-trick of tries for a final score of 14-5.



Back in Sydney three weeks later, a somewhat smaller crowd than had turned up for the first test, came to the decider. Britain won 20–7, but the Australians had lost their Balmain fullback Dave Parkinson with a broken leg only seven minutes into the game, and then, in the second half, Arthur Clues was sent off for punching the English halfback, Horne, who was in brilliant form and totally dominated the scrums. Perhaps this tour awakened in the Australian breast such a passion to beat the English that over time we ended up doing it so frequently that no rugby league supporter under 40 years of age can remember the intensity of emotional investment which attended the tour by that great Welshman Gus Risman and his boys. 1946 was simply a triumph for British rugby league, a post-war tour rich in imponderable values as well as in gates and public interest.



Many believed that the omission of Len Smith in 1948 was a 'stinging injustice'.

So, after the Lions tour of 1946, two more seasons of domestic rugby league passed, and Australia was ready to make its reciprocal tour of Great Britain and France. The mystifying omission of Len Smith as a member, let alone captain, of the 1948 Kangaroos is a matter of great speculation, and Ian Heads in *The Kangaroos* tends to blame divisions in rugby league, as in society in general, along Masonic-Catholic lines. Clive Churchill would call Len Smith's omission 'as the greatest blunder ever made by Australian test selectors',² but it overshadowed a number of other wonderful selections, including that of Johnny 'Wacker' Graves, one of the three or four greatest wingers this writer has seen, and Clive Churchill, Jack Rayner, Bobbie Lulham and Dutchy Holland. An abiding image, of many very fine images from that tour is of the captains, Wally O'Connell and Ernest Ward, leading their teams side by side onto Headingley before one of the greatest tests ever

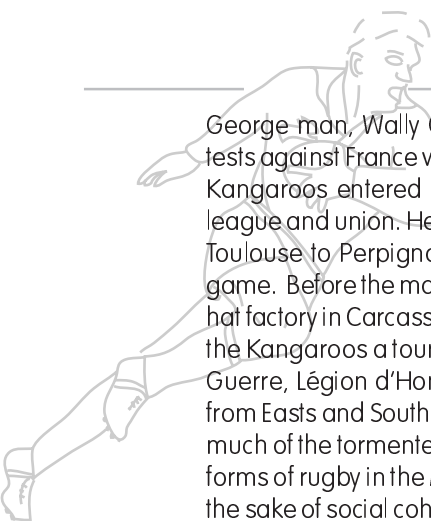
*Jack Rayner
instructs the
scrum. (From
the left Bernie
Purcell, Dennis
Donoghue, Ernie
Hammerton and
Norm Nilson).*



played, the first test of 1948. Both captains represent a denial of mythology, for that great centre three-quarter Lance Corporal Ernest Ward towers over Wally O'Connell, Australia's artful dodger. The stands are crammed. Great Britain defeated Australia 23–21 at Headingley, then 16–7 at Swindon, and the third game at Odsal Stadium, Bradford, was called off because of a profound fog which settled unremittingly in Slough where Odsal Stadium stood. The game would not be played until after the Kangaroos returned from France, and Great Britain would win it 23–9.

One cannot overestimate the impact on the Kangaroos of weather, disorientation, homesickness, and Ma Griffen's bad boarding-house food in Ilkley — stewed chicken and Brussels sprouts. 'We had to give her our ration books and she would provide the food', remembered O'Connell. 'I think she used to get half and sell half... We complained a lot, but when we started going to Liverpool and places like that, and saw square miles of bombed areas, we didn't complain so much.' Wally O'Connell visited Ireland and, to the ecstasy of the team,³ brought back 20 kilos of steak supplied by the Australian ambassador in Dublin.

But the tour was an endurance test which only the valiant could survive. In the overcast, drizzling, bitter days around Christmas 1948, the Australians went on to play in a France transmuted and fractured by the war, and in a code which had experienced extraordinary state-sponsored persecution. Australia's captain by now was a Queenslander, the late Bill Tyquin, a St



George man, Wally O'Connell having relinquished the position. The two tests against France were to be played in Marseilles and Bordeaux, and the Kangaroos entered like babes into an area of complex history for both league and union. Helped perhaps by over-indulgence on the bus trip from Toulouse to Perpignan, they were defeated by Catalans 20-5 in the first game. Before the match, Paul Barrière, a hero of the resistance, owner of a hat factory in Carcassone, and president of the French Rugby League, gave the Kangaroos a tour of his manufactory. In the figure of Barrière, Croix de Guerre, Légion d'Honneur, the boys from Brisbane, Newcastle, Balmain, from Easts and Souths and Wests ran into a man who could have told them much of the tormented history of the region, of the relation between French forms of rugby in the Midi and those in Britain. All this in a nation where, for the sake of social cohesion and national mythology, people pretended that most Frenchmen had resisted the humiliation of Vichy France, the puppet French government installed in the south by the Nazis, and of the Nazi occupation itself.

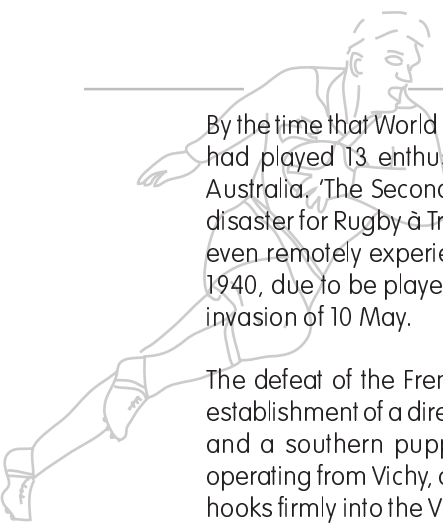
They call the Midi, the south-west of France *l'Ovalie*, the land of the rugby ball, where great players seem to be emanations of a regional ethos, as they are in New Zealand and used to be in South Wales. Rugby had been introduced into the Bordeaux area by Oxbridge expatriates in the wine trade, but was taken up by some of the more elegant French lycées. It was in the 1920s in the Midi that rugby became a vehicle for ancient rivalries between towns and villages, and took on a form which bewildered the elites of British rugby. A lusty *amateurisme marron*, or what became to be called *shamateurism*, was the French reality. Businessmen and mayors of corporations set players up with fake or nominal jobs. For example, in the little town of Quillan in the department of Aude, a local hat maker, Jean Bourrel, attracted players with offers of easy and high-paid employment. In 1929 Quillan, population 3,000, and Lézignan, population 6,000, reached the final, and Quillan won the national title. The style of play was inventive but brutal: in 1927, the Quillan hooker, Gatou Rivière was killed playing his old Catalan club, Perpignan. Carcassone versus Toulouse in 1927, Lézignan versus Beziers in 1929, and a savage 1930 France-Wales match in Paris all outraged the international union. The home union and those of the dominions broke off relationships with the Fédération Française de Rugby later in the year. 'Owing to the unsatisfactory conditions of the game of Rugby football as managed and played in France, neither our union or the clubs of the union under its jurisdiction will be able to arrange or fulfil fixtures with France or French clubs.' The French were cut off from all international competition in rugby between 1931 and 1945.

In the vacuum thus created, the journal *L'Echo des Sports*, rival of *L'Équipe*, became involved in rugby league promotion. On the last day of 1933, in Paris, there was an exhibition between the British XIII and the then touring Kangaroos led by Frank 'Skinny' McMillan and featuring Dave Brown, who scored a record-breaking 285 points on tour. Both sets of players were under instructions to let the game flow, and with the pressure of their British tour ended, Australia beat England 63–13. Amongst the spectators was a famous rugby footballer and ex-heavyweight boxing champion, Jean Galia, a 28 year old Catalan businessman from Perpignan. He was under a shadow from the French Rugby Union for offering money to players to switch clubs. Galia went down to the Midi again and gathered other players, and even though he had a chain of cinemas to run, toured England playing rugby league. In 1934 the French played all the leading British clubs and an England representative team. Galia's Boys were a sensation, attracted great crowds and their flair enabled them to produce scores which have a modern ring to them —

for example, 30–27 against Wigan at Central Park in March. On their return to France, they set up the *The Ligue Française de Rugby à XIII* at 47 Faubourg Montmatre, Paris 9, that spring, with Galia as a committee member. At the Stade Buffalo in Paris in April, seven miles out from the centre of town, the French Rugby Federation having influenced officials to deny them the use of a more convenient ground, the Frenchmen played an English team before a home crowd and were beaten 32–21, in a game which did nothing to diminish the passion of the French for the new game. The *Fédération Française de rugby* responded by banning administrators, players, and even the pitches on which the league demonstrations had taken place.



Queenslander Duncan Hall was a 1948 tourist and a member of the 1950 side that won back the Ashes.



By the time that World War II had broken out, *Les Tricolores*, or the *Treizistes* had played 13 enthusiastic internationals against England, Wales and Australia. 'The Second World War', writes Geoffrey Moorhouse,⁴ 'was a disaster for Rugby à Treize such as no other rugby league playing country even remotely experienced'. Ominously, the rugby league grand final of 1940, due to be played on 19 May, never took place because of the Nazi invasion of 10 May.

The defeat of the French and British armies in France in 1940 led to the establishment of a directly German Nazi government in the north of France, and a southern puppet government under the aging Marshal Pétain operating from Vichy, a spa town to the north-west of Lyons. The FFR had its hooks firmly into the Vichy administration.

Marshal Pétain's government was both collaborative with the Nazis, and yet felt the shame of having been so easily overrun by them. Even though genuinely amateur rugby league clubs outnumbered the professionals by as many of 14 to one, Pétain saw treizistes as bearing the shame of frankly stated professionalism, and overt professionalism did not fit the great virtues of his new collaborationist state, whose hoped-for strengths he expressed in the slogan: Work, Fatherland and Family (*Travail, Patrie, Famille*). The Ministry of National Education and Youth was run by a former Wimbledon and thus supposedly amateur tennis champion Jean Borotra, the Bounding Basque, and he would be assisted and eventually succeeded by Colonel Jep Pascot who had played fly-half for the French rugby team in the 1920s.

A conjunction of Pétain's attitudes, Pascot's allegiances, and the French rugby union's opportunism produced from Vichy a shameful ordinance which Pétain himself signed, number 5285, decree of 19 December 1941. Its first article stated 'the association called French Ligue de Rugby à Treize, whose offices are at 24 Rue Drouet, Paris, is dissolved, assent having been refused it'. The rugby league headquarters were raided and plundered of documents and, according to some historians, torched. It is interesting, and an eloquent proof of Vichy's closeness to the Nazi occupiers that Vichy could pass edicts to dissolve property located in Paris, the Nazi-governed north. Article 2 read: 'The patrimony of the association dissolved by virtue of the preceding article is transferred without modification to the National Committee of Sports'. Leading rugby league teams were to be forcibly amalgamated with the FFR. No such inhibitions were placed upon the other rugby code, despite the British-ness of the name *Rugby*, or on any other sport. The Vichy government, with the assistance of the Fédération Française de Rugby sent teams on training excursions and camps which involved



Two 1951 French tourists are concerned about the possible injury to one of their team.

training in the values of the new order. Many claim that there were secret wartime games of thirteen-a-side, and many treizistes were certainly associated with the Maquis, the French Resistance, including Paul Barrière, who would live to fit out the 1948-49 Kangaroos with new hats on a cold morning at the start of 1949.

When the Australians arrived for that first game in France, rugby league had been the beneficiary of a wave of support from anti-Nazi, anti-Vichy sentiment. Indeed, as the Nazis had retreated in 1944, some treizistes had taken revenge on rugby facilities of Vichy-favoured clubs, such as the Perpignan club, and few seemed to blame them. The code of 13 possessed the attraction of having been amongst the Nazis' victims. That, and the freer, slightly less forward-dominated aspects of rugby league gave it some advantages. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Sport had already decided in 1947, two years before John Graves led the Australians in a performance of their war cry from the stage of the Marseilles Opera, and after considerable lobbying by the FFR, that the treizistes, loyal as many of them had been to France, would not have the right to call their game rugby à treize. They were henceforth to be the *jeu de treize*, the game of thirteen. Shamateurism had prevailed in French rugby during the war, and still prevailed, and yet the lip



Johnny Wacker Graves who led the team in their war cry on the stage of The Marseilles Opera.

service so strenuously paid to amateurism by rugby seemed as desirable to the post-war republic as it had to Vichy. Ultimately rugby league's frankly avowed professionalism could not compete in the south-west of France, many rugby players could not afford either in terms of status or of financial remuneration, to turn professional players of the *jeu de treize*.

The cry then, as during Vichy, was — to quote the title of a recent French film documentary made by Aurelie Luneau on this scandal — *A bas le XIII, vive le XV!*

The Australians, then, arriving to play *le XIII*, had themselves been stung by the press accusation that they were having too good a time in the south of France, and applied themselves for the test at the Stade Municipal in Marseilles, where they played so well to win 29–10 that the French players and officials could not believe that they had been beaten by the British. The second test in Bordeaux was tougher but the Australians won 10–0.

Now a campaign-weary set of Kangaroos would leave France to play the last test against Britain, which perhaps predictably they lost, thereby deepening the Australian thirst for dominance. It would be at last achieved by narrow margins in 1950, when the Lions again toured Australia.

As for the French, the shameful attempts to oppress professional and amateur rugby league in the name of shamateur rugby union which had flourished under the Nazis, would continue. Treizistes would not win back from the Ministry of Youth and Sport the right to call themselves players of a form of rugby for three and a half decades. An organisation named XIII-Actif is engaged in attempting to recompense treizistes in every area of France who suffered personal discrimination for their attachment to the game we love. Indeed, a member of XIII-Actif depicts the resistance of the treizistes to the Vichy and the Nazis in terms which may make one's head spin but which I think have a certain validity: in their resistance, the towns of Midi were 'continuing at a radical tradition of opposition to the establishment

that goes back centuries to the Cathar and Protestant struggles against the Roman Catholic Inquisition of the Middle Ages'.

We were fortunate here in Australia to see French rugby league at its high water mark, when the French Rugby League — they were allowed to call themselves that here — arrived in 1951. There was still a little residual glamour of anti-Nazi resistance attaching to the French, who were led by the brilliant Puig 'Pipette' Aubert. He was lucky that the French words *nonchalance* and *flamboyance* were available to describe him, for had he been an Australian he would have been called a mug lair. Ray French would write that, visiting St Helens, 'I can still see the small, round, tubby shape of French fullback leaning against the fencing, chatting ... Such was his apparent nonchalance towards the activities of his team mates that he even smoked a cigarette, kindly offered by a spectator'. Puig-Aubert's French team — the extraordinary half-back Jean Dop, the crushing winger Constrastin, the impermeable French forwards, faced a splendid team lead by Clive Churchill and including an old friend of mine, Gordon Willoughby, who scored a try at the first test, though France won 26–15. Australia won the second test in Brisbane, and with a crowd of 67,000 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the French defeated Australia 35–14.



The 1951 French team.



A French player tries to halt the progress of an Australian player in a test played in 1951 at the SCG.

French rugby league has never been more alive than it was in the antipodes in those days, the men of the French South making whoopee in the deepest south short of Antarctica that one can find. Puig-Aubert was a legend with us schoolboys. He placed the ball, he turned his back on it, took three paces, turned again, sauntered in, kicked the goal. In his world one could have imposed a penalty for more than 20 seconds for a goal kick, and he would never have violated it; and he could defend like a terrier, despite the stories that he thought it was the forwards' business to do this. For us, Puig-Aubert was the reason why the French have not really lost the war. But sadly, rugby league, which the Nazis could not wipe out, would lose the war with the FFR, and its allies in government.

For a time however, it flourished still. Barrière was the sort of entrepreneurial genius every sport needs, and yet he unwittingly contributed to the decline of the *Jeu de Treize*. His concept was of a Rugby League World Cup in 1954, with the French putting up 25 million francs to underwrite the competition's finances. But in the final at the Parc des Princes in Paris, Great Britain narrowly beat France. It may have been an expensive defeat for French Rugby League. France's rugby team won its first Five Nations the same year. Much was made of French *Rugby à champagne* and *le 'French flair'*.

Ironically, it was particularly from 1958 and under de Gaulle, the enemy of Vichy, that rugby union was elevated to the status of a symbol of national vivacity and flair, and part of the national *patrimoine*.

Perhaps the league administration in countries like Great Britain and Australia has at various stages proved too insular or felt powerless to help out their friends in the French Midi. Rugby league is still *par excellence* the game, at amateur or modest semi-professional level, in towns like Bordeaux, Perpignan, Carcassonne, Villeneuve, Lyons, Toulouse, Carpentras and Avignon. At the highest level, however, it is as weak as Pétain could have hoped.



Saints' Ken Kearney takes the full-brunt of an English 'headlock' tackle in the NSW-England game in 1954 — which referee Aub Oxford abandoned.

I believe rugby league has too little a sense of its history, and too little appreciation of the struggle people have made to play it — whether it is the case of a dairy farmer's son in remote NSW pleading with his father to let him turn up bare-footed in time to play in some forgotten local game in the 1920s, or the war-battered Brits dragging together a team of barely demobbed players lacking in match practice, or the touring Kangaroos choking on Ma Griffen's consummately stewed brussel sprouts, or the French treizistes reeling under two levels of tyranny in World War II. It is a delight to have a chance to remember and honour them, all of them, here, amongst sympathetic listeners, in the slight stillness before the whistle is blown, and the rage begins.



Endnotes

1 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game: The Centenary History of Rugby League Football, 1895–1995*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1995, p. 208.

2 Ian Heads, *The Kangaroos: The Saga of Rugby League's Great Tours*, Lester-Townsend Publishing, Sydney, 1990, p. 119.

3 Heads, *The Kangaroos*, p. 114.

4 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 176.

