



**AFTERMATH: AUSTRALIA  
AFTER THE GREAT WAR**  
ONE-DAY CONFERENCE SATURDAY 6 APRIL 2019  
POMPEY ELLIOTT MEMORIAL HALL  
403 CAMBERWELL ROAD, CAMBERWELL

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER — MELEAH HAMPTON**  
AUTHOR OF *ATTACK ON THE SOMME: 1<sup>ST</sup> ANZAC CORPS AND THE  
BATTLE OF POZIERES RIDGE 1916*



MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.

Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs



# “AFTERMATH”: AUSTRALIA AFTER THE GREAT WAR



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**THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT  
THE POMPEY ELLIOT MEMORIAL HALL,  
CAMBERWELL RSL BY MILITARY HISTORY AND  
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**6 APRIL 2019**

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## The Inter-Allied Games of 1919

Presented by Major General Jim Barry, AM, MBE, RFD, ED.



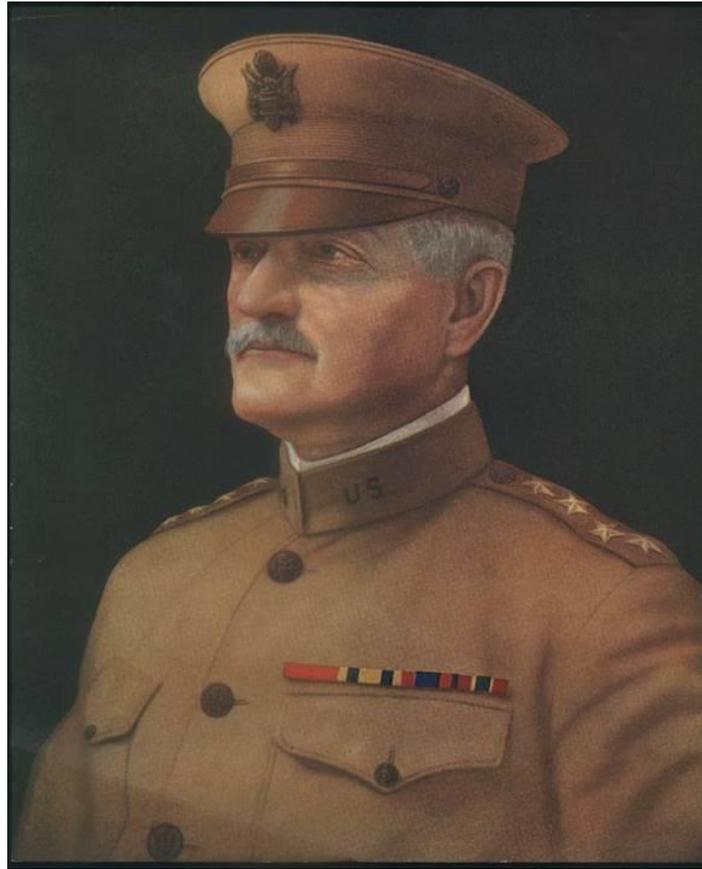
This is a story about these Inter-Allied Games being a superb diversion for some 'troops' while they awaited repatriation.

In the summer of 1919, Allied soldiers of the Great War gathered near Paris, France for a unique event - a 'Military Olympic Games'.

The Inter-Allied Games were held from 22 June to 6 July 1919 at the newly constructed Pershing Stadium just outside Paris. The event was only open to participation by military personnel who were currently serving or had formerly served in the Allied Armies during the Great War.

The Games were the culmination of a broad range of sporting activities designed by the Allied leadership to keep troops gainfully occupied while they awaited repatriation home after the Armistice.

An early advocate for the Games, argued that "such an athletic meeting would unquestioningly be a great factor in cementing on the field of sport those friendly ties between the men of the Allied Armies that have sprung up on the common field of battle."



In January 1919, General John J. Pershing the Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces invited **29** Allied nations, colonies and dependencies to participate in the Games. His letter to Allied military commanders, in this case the French Armies, read:

*The officers and men of the American Expeditionary Forces, being keenly appreciative of the splendid relations which exist among those who have borne arms in a great, common cause, and which, in the present instance, have so happily developed into such deep feelings of mutual respect and admiration, are most anxious to preserve and strengthen this relationship in every way possible.*

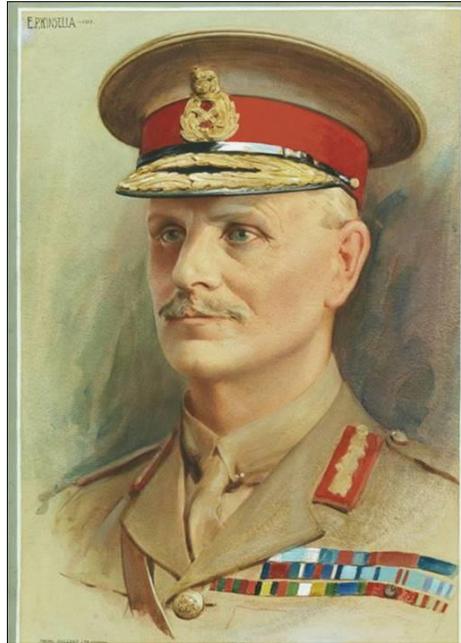
*Now that active military operations have ceased, they believe that nothing could be more conducive to this end than to gather in friendly competition on the field of sport, with representatives of the Armies of each of the nations which have so long been associated together in the stern struggle for right.*

*Accordingly, they have decided to organize an Inter-Allied Athletic Meeting, to be held in the Colombes Stadium, Paris, during the month of May or June, 1919, in which the officers and men of all of these Armies shall be eligible to take part.*

*As Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, I have the honor, therefore, to invite, through you as their Commander-in-Chief, the officers and men of the armies of France to participate in these contests and to express the earnest hope that many of them may do so, so that the ties of the much cherished spirit of comradeship which have sprung from the gallant joint effort of our forces on the battlefield may thus be even more closely cemented.*

*Respectfully,  
John J. Pershing.*

Eighteen of twenty nine acceptances were received. General William Birdwood, the Commander of the Australian Imperial Force, replied to General Pershing as follows:



*My dear General:*

*I have to thank you very much for your kind letter... which I have not answered earlier as I have been away from my Headquarters seeing outlying detachments of the Australian Forces, and, I am glad to say, bidding Godspeed to some half dozen transports of men returning to their homes, in the knowledge that they have accomplished that which we all set out to do.*

*I so fully agree with all you say as regards the splendid relations which have existed between all our troops throughout this great fight for freedom, and I am very glad to know that you are so anxious, as we all are, to strengthen the ties which have been formed in the field. I quite agree that Inter-Allied Games of the nature you are organizing will do much to foster the good cause we have at heart, and I should be only too glad to do all that I possibly could to help in the matter in regard to the Australian troops whom I have the honour to command.*

*So many Australian athletes answered the call at the outbreak of hostilities - in a great number of cases unfortunately making the supreme sacrifice - and so many also have been away from home so long, and are above all things anxious to return, that I fear our team of athletes will not be as strong as we would all like to send you; but every effort will be made to send the most representative athletes in the A.I.F. to compete at this classic gathering of warrior sportsmen.*

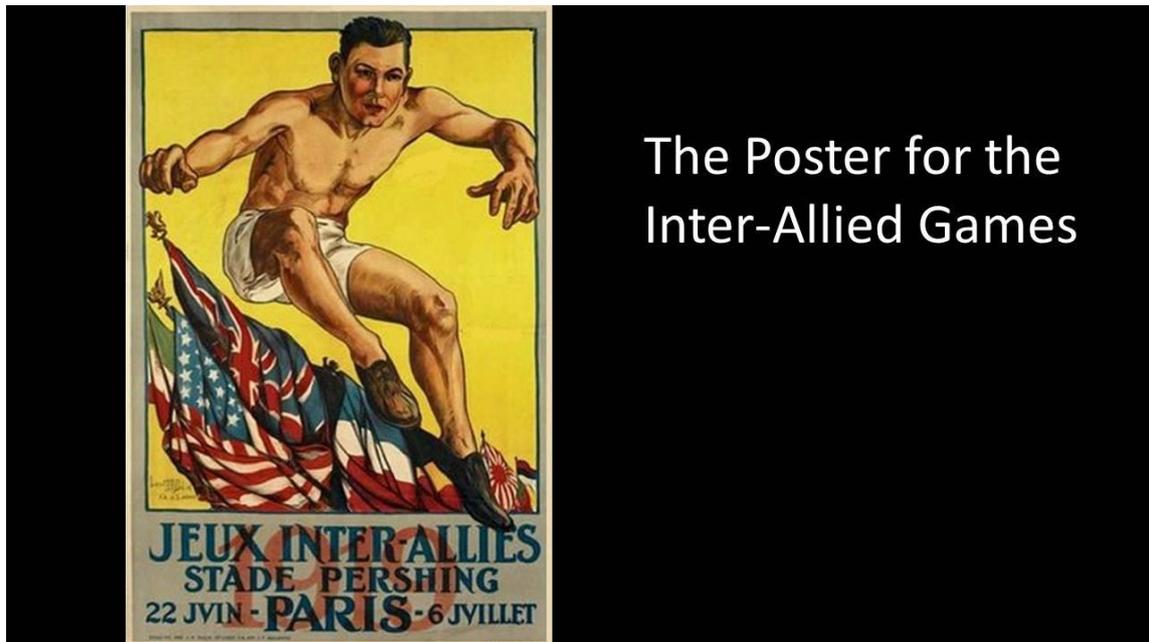
*The matter of selection of teams will be immediately taken up by my Sports Control Board, and I think we can count on being represented in some of the events under Boxing, Cross-Country Running, Rowing, Rifle Shooting, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Field Sports, and possibly Wrestling.*

*In accepting the invitation on behalf of the officers and men of the A.I.F. I wish to express my belief and sincere wish that this great sporting venture will be the unqualified success it so richly deserves.*

*Yours sincerely,  
W. R. Birdwood*

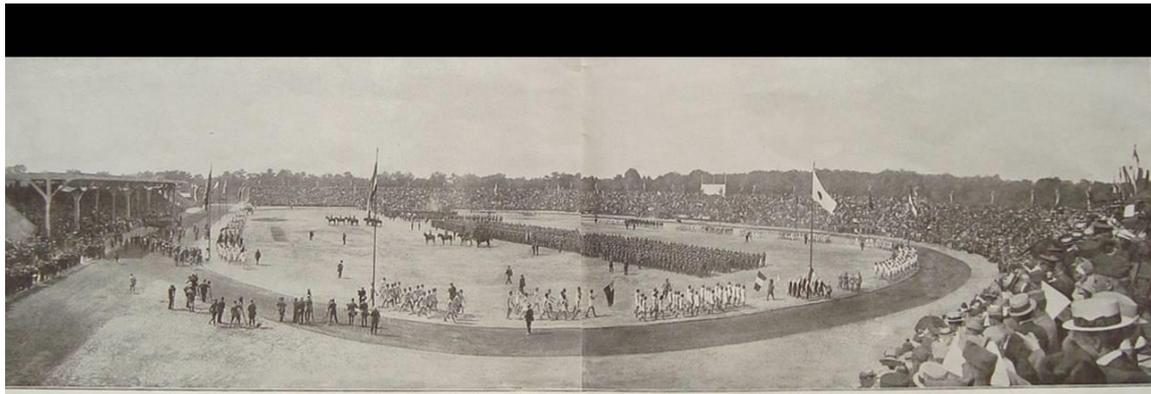
An Advisory Committee (including Australians Lt. Col. C.V. Watson DSO, Lt. Col. Norman Marshall and Maj. S.A. Middleton DSO) determined the sports and events to be contested; they included: track and field events, cross country running, swimming, water polo, fencing, soccer, rugby, baseball, tennis, basketball, boxing, tug-of-war, rowing, horse riding, golf and wrestling.

Given the unique qualifications of the participants, the Games also included rifle and pistol shooting competitions and a hand grenade throwing contest. In one of the early meetings of the Committee the suggestion was made that bayonet competition be included in the list of events. This was a form of warfare that had been highly developed during the Great War and it was a part of every infantryman's training. After due consideration, however, it was decided that there could be no satisfactory manner of judging such a competition and the Advisory Committee rejected it as an event in the Games.



Many of the participating nations conducted their own sporting competitions to select individual competitors and teams for the Games. For example, “huskies” from all parts of the A.I.F were picked by Lt. C. Keliher for the tug-of-war squad. The nine men who represented Australia averaged 213 pounds (97 kilograms) per man. The squad was picked early in May and on 25 May went into training at the Queens Club in London. During the conditioning process a match pull was held with the London Police team, the Australians winning all five pulls of the competition. Several nations came to realise that “even those ultimately selected...found that the years spent in trenches and in camp had sapped their strength and stiffened muscles which formerly responded electrically to the demands of strenuous competition.”

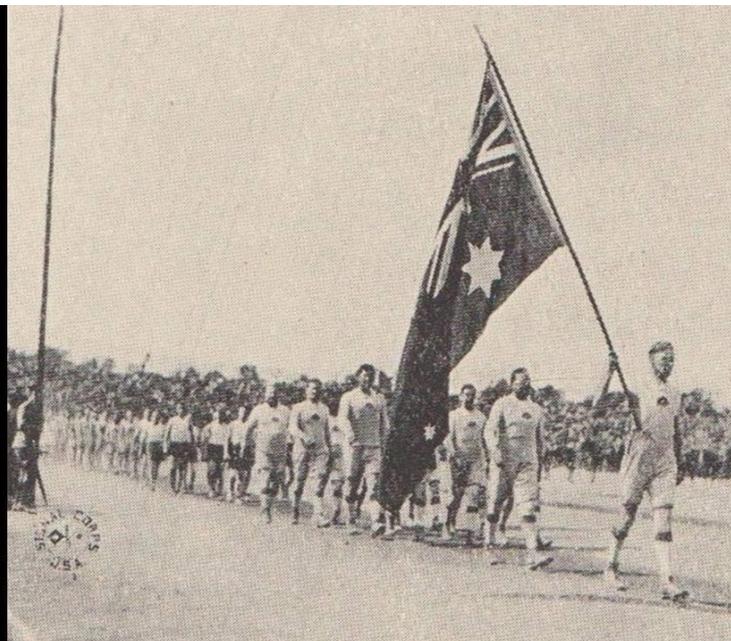
The main forum for the games, Pershing Stadium, was built near the Bois de Vincennes by the U.S. military in cooperation with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and French military engineers. Other existing sporting stadiums and facilities around Paris were also used to host events. Competitors were quartered in wooden barracks and tents arranged in national lines and an extensive social program complemented the sporting agenda.



## The Opening Ceremony of the Inter-Allied Games, Pershing Stadium, 22 June 1919

The Games were opened by French President Poincaré and General Pershing on a sunny Sunday afternoon on 22 June 1919 with distinguished guests from all of the Allied nations (including General Sir Charles Rosenthal of the Australian forces), numerous military delegations and 90,000 spectators. Nearly 1,500 athletes participated in the Games and organisers estimated that the Games were watched by nearly half a million spectators over all venues.

The Australian  
Team at the  
Opening  
Ceremony.  
(Note the  
'Rising Sun'  
badge on their  
chests)



There was to be no winning country of the Inter-Allied Games, only the winners in the separate events being recognised. Each nation therefore could enter only such events as it wished. Australia was relatively well advanced in its repatriation arrangements and as a consequence only entered 63 contestants into nine events including the track and field events, cross country running, swimming, tennis, boxing, wrestling, tug of war, rowing and hand grenade throwing. Australia did not compete in the other nine events, namely shooting, water polo, horse riding, fencing, basketball, golf, baseball, soccer and rugby.



A Group of Australian Contestants and Officials at Pershing Stadium. (Note the bandaged soldier in the second row from the front)

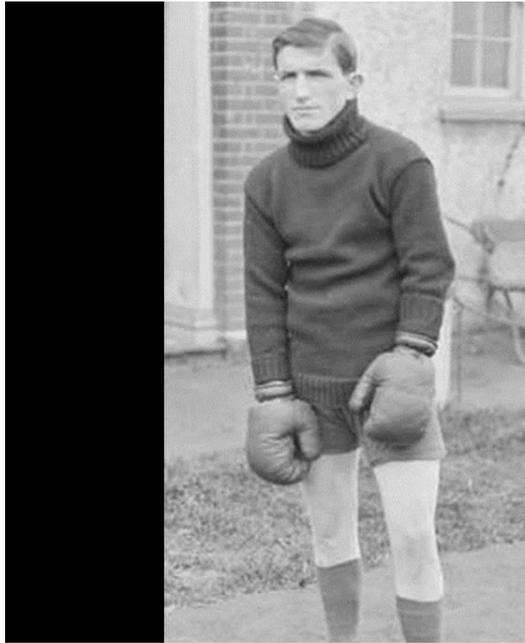
The spirit in which the Inter-Allied Games were carried out reflected great credit upon the sportsmanship of the nations involved. Not only did it demonstrate how wholeheartedly the nations that had striven shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield could turn to friendly rivalry in the stadium, but it showed the indomitable spirit surviving more than four years of war which had drained the very lifeblood of almost every nation involved. An example of the tremendous spirit of the Games was characterized by the action of such men as Jean Vermeulen of France, who won the cross country and modified Marathon in spite of numerous wounds - one of which practically paralysed an arm and rendered it limp and useless.

Group portrait of the Australian swimming team.

The amputee is Sgt A.W. Barry, the champion swimmer over 100 yards at the Games (AWM D00657)



Australia performed strongly in the swimming and boxing competitions.



Private Albert 'Digger' Evans  
(AWM D00158)

Private Albert "Digger" Evans cleverly boxed his way to the bantamweight title. His good-natured sportsmanship, his winning and cheerful smile, made him a decided favourite with the ring-side fans of all nations. He was far and away the cleverest boxer in the tourney. The fact that his punches lacked steam was overbalanced by the fact that he hit almost at will and where he wanted to hit. His favourite trick was to wait for his opponent to lead and then to step in with a fusillade of rights and lefts to the head or body. All of Evans' bouts were won on judges' decisions; all but one was won by a wide margin.

Striking a boxing pose  
Captain Gordon Coghill  
MC, 35th Battalion (left)  
and Second Lieutenant  
Matty Smith, Australian  
Flying Corps, who  
represented Australia in  
the heavyweight and  
lightweight boxing  
divisions respectively  
(AWM D00691)



Gerard Patterson  
circa 1922

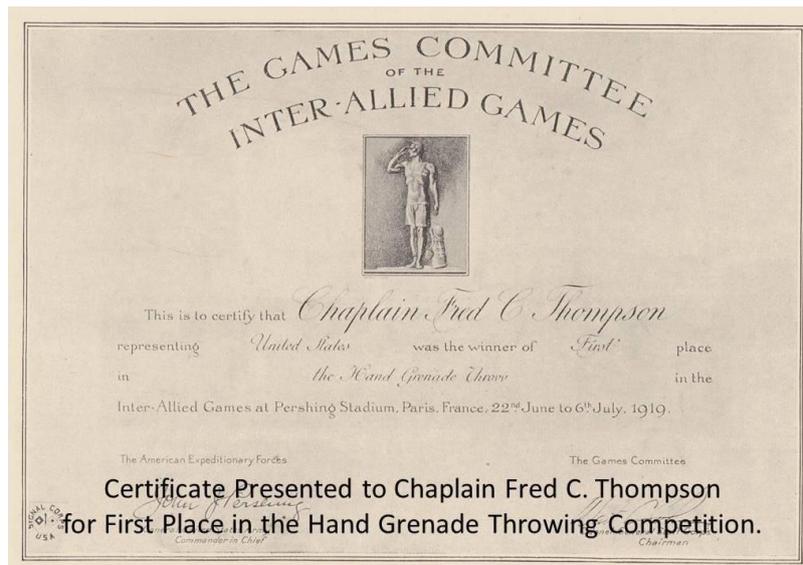


Three noted Australian tennis players, Capt. Pat O'Hara Wood, Lt. Gerard L. Patterson and Bomb. Randolph Lycett, threatened to make a clean sweep on the courts, but ultimately had to settle for the doubles title, team championship, and runner-up honours in the individual match. Wood and Patterson were responsible for the singles victories and Wood teamed with Lycett, defeated all opponents in doubles. Gerald Patterson went on to win Wimbledon twice in 1919 and 1922 and was famed for his powerful serve, gaining the nickname "The Human Catapult". He represented Australia many times in the Davis Cup.

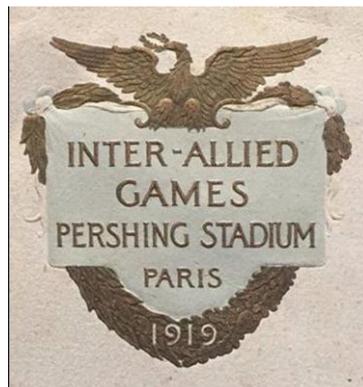
The front side of the Games medal bears the Latin inscription "corporis robur et habilitas" meaning 'person of strength and ability'. The rear side of the medal had a space for engraving the event, place finish, name and country of the medal winner.



First, second and third place winners in each event were presented with a medal and a certificate. Trophies were donated by prominent officials of the competing nations in the majority of sports.



The winner of the new hand-grenade throwing event was Chaplain Fred C. Thompson from the 143<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Regiment of the American Expeditionary Forces with a throw of 245 feet 11 inches (74.9 metres). After the war, Fred Thompson became a star actor in over 30 silent western movies. He died at age 38 of tetanus after stepping on a nail in late 1928.



The concluding ceremony of the Games took place on Sunday 6 July 1919 when the medals were presented to the winners by General Pershing, the Allied flags lowered and the French standard left to float alone over Pershing Stadium - presented as a gift to the people of France from the United States of America. The area, still known as Le Stade Pershing, continues to be used as an open air recreation park to this day.

The Inter-Allied Games were unique, for it is hardly conceivable that ever again can there be held a sport contest with the eligibility requirement that every man competing should have earned the right to wear his country's colours in the stadium by having first borne them in her service as a soldier.

As one historical account of the Games recorded “that an athletic tournament of any sort could have been held after fifty-two months of devastating war, with the Allied countries impoverished by heavy losses, exhausted by long-sustained effort, weary after a seemingly interminable period of fighting, was in itself a remarkable exhibition of the sportsmanlike spirit which had distinguished the peoples leagued against the Central Powers.”

As stated at the beginning; these unique Inter-Allied Games created a superb diversion for many of the troops while awaiting repatriation to their respective homelands.