

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

By Chris Brown

The pioneers of Australian Rules football began playing a team game that was a physical contest and a game of attrition, for the enjoyment of all.

When footballers enlisted for World War I they brought with them the players' traits of toughness, endeavour and refined teamwork with moments of individual brilliance. All these qualities are befitting those who serve our country in the armed forces. In an unlikely but historically-significant event on Saturday, 28 October 1916, Australian Rules footballers in the war service of our country assembled at the Queen's Club in London to play what was dubbed the Pioneer Exhibition Game of Australian Football. It was the first exhibition of Aussie Rules outside our country.

The assembled footballers were no rag-tag muster of the willing. Rather, they were elite footballers of the day. Most had played at senior level in their home states. The Australian Training Units team squad included footballers from Norwood, Port Adelaide, Geelong, South Melbourne, Fitzroy, Essendon, Melbourne, Collingwood, Fremantle, the Union FC in northern Tasmania, Mines-Rovers (WA Goldfields), East Fremantle and even two players from NSW and North Queensland. The Third Australian Divisional squad included players from Melbourne, Perth, Richmond, St Kilda, Collingwood, Geelong and South Melbourne. A handful of players in both team squads were from other clubs and competitions around Australia.

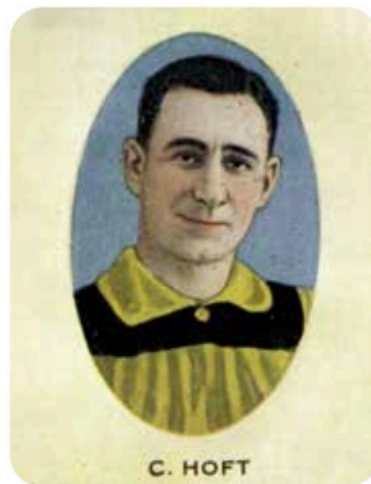
The prospects of a good game were evidenced by the credentials of the players taking the field. Sadly, the players' prospects in the field of battle were not good. The contrast of playing a familiar game among familiar accents on foreign soil in the midst of the Great War could not have been lost on players or spectators alike. Six players in this game would ultimately lose their lives in the Great War.

South Australia had three



Captain Charles Perry skippered the Australian Training Units team in London in 1916.

representatives in the Australian Training Units team. They were Captain Charles Perry (Norwood and later North Adelaide), Corporal Ernest Beames (Norwood) and Lieutenant Alf 'Mac' Moore (Norwood). Port Adelaide's Lance Corporal William 'Roy' Drummond was also a member of the squad but did not play. Perry was a Minister. Beames was a labourer. Moore was an orchardist. Drummond was a painter. But they all enlisted – and they could all play football. Perry did not just hold the rank of Captain – he was also captain of the Australian Training Units team and his side wore a red guernsey with a white kangaroo motif on the left breast. Their opponents, the Third Australian Divisional team, were captained by South Melbourne's Bruce Sloss. They wore a blue strip with a white map of Australia on the front – minus Tasmania! Less than three months later, Sloss was killed in action. Crowd estimates vary between 3000-6000, many being fellow servicemen. The wind heavily favoured the northern end and the Divisional Team stormed home with it to win 6.16 (52) to the Training Units' 4.12 (36). These footballers were all in the service of their country and yet they came together



Future Glenelg captain-coach Cyril Hoft played in the Australian Imperial Force 3rd Division team.

for this 'Pioneer' game of football for the cause of a different kind of service – the British and French Red Cross. During active war service, Perry was attached to a brigade positioned near the Somme River in France when the distinctive red triplane of Germany's renowned flying ace Baron von Richthofen, better known as the Red Baron, was shot down. Australian soldiers arrived at the crash scene and started souveniring anything they could from the wreckage. It is reported Perry intervened and calmly explained to the men von Richthofen's death should be treated with respect. However, much of the wreckage disappeared. Beames served in Egypt and France. On April 25, 1918, he was congratulated for extinguishing a fire of burning ammunition ignited by enemy aircraft. Moore served with the 27th Infantry Battalion AIF in Gallipoli and at the Western Front. He had been shot and wounded in action in France in 1916, just seven weeks before this game. Moore was awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre for bravery and acts of courage against the enemy. Drummond played in Port Adelaide's 1913 and '14 SAFA premierships and Champions of



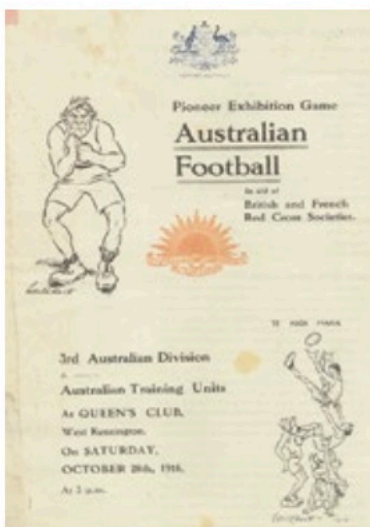
The Australian Training Units team for the pioneer exhibition game in London in 1916. There were three South Australian representatives in the side.

of Australia teams. He was awarded the Military Medal for heroic services rendered near the French town of Hamel.

Of the three South Australians who played in the Pioneer Exhibition game, Perry was the standout footballer. He was retrospectively awarded a Magarey Medal in 1998 for his 1915 season, after the count that year had ended in a three-way tie. Perry's service ethos lasted a lifetime. After retiring as a player, he was a member of the umpires' board and a deputy commissioner of the League. He served as a committeeman at Norwood and was the first chaplain at Prince Alfred College.

There was another player shining on the unlikely stage at London who was to later earn a place in SA football history. The formation of Glenelg Football Club was still more than three years away when Perth's Cyril Hoft represented the AIF Third Division team but the 1921 Sandover Medallist was captain-coach of the Tigers when they finally won a league game in 1925 – in their fifth year in league ranks and after 56 successive losses. Hoft was twice injured fighting in France, firstly suffering wounds to the legs and arms, then hit by a bullet in his right foot but, thankfully for Glenelg supporters, his pace and uncanny ability to boot a place kick goal

were not diminished. Football and war may be seen to have a lot in common, yet ultimately, they have very little in common. Football is Australia's great winter pastime enjoyed by players and spectators alike. 'Pulling on the jumper' is a privilege. Serving one's country in a time of war means 'pulling on the jumper' that puts your life in peril. Anzac Day is a time for reflection, for gratitude, and for recognition – there is always a price paid for war. The war service of our forebears includes the service of thousands of men who, ordinarily, were Australian Rules footballers on winter weekends. Perry, Beames, Moore and Drummond survived their war service. Perry and Moore went on to serve their country again, in World War Two. In death, coincidentally yet fittingly, the three former Norwood team-mates are interred at Centennial Park Cemetery, while Drummond was buried close to Alberton Oval, at the Cheltenham Cemetery. Today, we give thanks for the service of all veterans, whether footballers or not. We get to celebrate the game of football hat brings us together. Win or lose today, we are all thankful for both these things. Lest we forget.



This souvenir program from the pioneer exhibition game was brought back to Australia by Glenelg great Colin Churchett's father Joe, who was serving in the War and watched the historic match.

FOOTAGE of the Pioneer Exhibition game can viewed on YouTube by searching WWI soldiers playing football London 1916