

FRANCE'S MILITARY DEAD IN AUSTRALIA AN HISTORICAL SURVEY¹

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In most cultures where burial is practised for the dead, there are sensitivities and concerns when remains are disturbed or threatened with disturbance. When the graves of servicemen and women lying in foreign fields are involved, the emotions can be deeply provoked. On 15 November 2001, news broke of a French Badgery's Creek²: a proposal to build a third airport for Paris at Chaulnes on the former battlefield of the Somme. Over the next few months, anger grew in Britain and Australia at the prospect of marked and unmarked war graves being disturbed and a 'sacred' landscape being defiled.³ Australia had somewhere between sixty-one and ninety-eight graves that were potentially vulnerable to disturbance in cemeteries at Fouquescourt, Bouchoir and Rossiers. Furthermore, it was possible that the WW2 cemetery at Méharicourt might be affected. On 11 March 2002, there was a joint press release from Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Veterans Affairs Minister Dana Vale (the then Federal Member for Hughes), demanding full French consultation with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.⁴ William Fisher, Australia's Ambassador in Paris, was ordered to register Australia's concerns directly with the French Government.⁵ Closer to home, on 13 March 2002, the Member for Miranda, Barry Collier, told the New South Wales Parliament that 'each resting

¹ This is an edited version (with notes) of an address given to the Francophone Association of Southern Sydney, at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Gymea, NSW, on 12.4.2014.

² Site of the controversial new airport proposed for Sydney.

³ Paul Daley, 'Don't move diggers' graves Australia Implores', *The Age*, 15.3.2002, p. 5.

⁴ The Australian representative on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was Australia's High Commissioner in London, Michael L'Estrange.

⁵ Alexander Downer and Dana Vale, 'Australia must be consulted on airport's war graves impact', 11.3.2002, http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2002/fa032j_02.html

place is part of our nation. Each of those graves is a part of Australian history, culture and heritage, and each must be preserved and remain undisturbed'. He also stated that he was 'appalled that the French Government would contemplate even for a moment building an airport on the graves of Australian war dead.'⁶ Cliff Raatz, President of the Miranda RSL sub-branch, called the proposal 'outrageous' and circulated a petition 'opposing the building of the airport and the subsequent insult to our war dead, their descendants and all Australians'.⁷ The following month, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson also flew to Paris to make strong representations on the matter.⁸ Repeated assurances of respect for war graves were given by the French Government, but fell on deaf, sometimes Francophobic, ears. Ultimately assurances were unnecessary: plans for the airport at Chaulnes were abandoned in favour of enlarging Paris Charles de Gaulle. Undoubtedly local concern for war graves was a significant factor; one only has to visit this part of France to know that the declaration *N'oublions jamais l'Australie* (Let us never forget Australia) is no mere slogan.

During World War 1, 59,342 Australian soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice and contributed to a profound national trauma of loss and bereavement. Among these Australian servicemen killed on the Western Front was a member of my grandmother's extended family and a member of my wife's grandmother's family.⁹ I also feel a broader sense of kinship with one of the Australians whose remains were discovered after ninety-two years in an unmarked grave at Fromelles in 2009: Alfred Victor Momphlait. His father was Mauritius and his niece on Kangaroo Island was a close family friend.

Although there can never be any question of arithmetic symmetry, we too are the custodians of French servicemen's graves here in Australia and our soil is the emotional focus of equally distant families. In most cases these

⁶ Hansard, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 13 March 2002, p. 398.

⁷ According to Barry Collier, Member for Miranda, see Hansard, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 13 March 2002, p. 398.

⁸ Peter Fray, 'Respect But No Guarantee on Somme War Graves', *Sydney Morning Herald* (henceforth *SMH*), 18.4.2002, p. 4.

⁹ My grandmother's second cousin, Vyvian Rees (brother of the Australian landscape painter Lloyd Rees), is buried at the Hooge Crater Cemetery, Passchendaele, in Belgium. My wife's great-uncle, Cooper Stubington, is buried at Wirreux Communal Cemetery, Plot 6, row D, grave 25.

young men died of disease rather than as a result of violence in the service of their country or as allies engaged in the same desperate struggle. Nevertheless, Australia is also the last resting place of French immigrants who were allied veterans of the First and Second World Wars.

Despite this, we Australians have sometimes been guilty of the same actions that our politicians have accused the French of merely contemplating: disturbing and moving the remains of servicemen. Others have simply been lost or forgotten. We often use the words 'Lest we forget' to reiterate and reinforce historical memory and underline the tragedy of lives lost in our nation's military service. As we approach the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, I would like to provide an historical overview of these French servicemen's burials in Australia and suggest that we have a reciprocal obligation to honour and respect their graves and acknowledge their place in our history. Indeed I could easily adapt Barry Collier's words of March 2002: 'each resting place is part of our nation. Each of those graves is a part of Australian history, culture and heritage, and each must be preserved'.¹⁰ So who are these individuals?

The first Frenchman to be buried in Australia was an assistant-gunner named Massicot.¹¹ We know that he was buried in the sand at the foot of the cliffs near Cape Levillain, on the north-eastern tip of Dirk Hartog Island, Shark Bay, on 30 March 1772, by a burial party under the command of a Sergeant Lafortune. Massicot died of scurvy aboard Louis Alesno de Saint-Alloüarn's vessel of exploration, the *Gros Ventre*, which had crossed the Indian Ocean and sailed north along the Western Australian coast after separation from Kerguelen's vessel *La Fortune* (Godard & Kerros 2002, 228 & 248). The site of Massicot's grave has not been found. There were two unsuccessful attempts to find it in early 1998, one a private expedition, the other by the Western Australian Museum. Instead, a 1766 Louis XV coin and two eighteenth-century French wine bottles (disappointingly without any wine or documents inside!) were found (Godard & Kerros 2002, 311–342).

The next Frenchman to die in Australia was also in naval service, but he was buried 3,600 kilometres away on the coast of New South Wales. This was Claude-François-Joseph Receveur, a Franciscan friar and former soldier serving as a naval chaplain and naturalist on Lapérouse's expedition. He died

¹⁰ Hansard, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 13.3.2002, p. 398.

¹¹ His first name has not so far been identified.

here on 17 February 1788, not yet thirty-one years of age. A number of historians have suggested that Receveur was killed by indigenous people. I don't accept this explanation. Like Governor Arthur Phillip and Watkin Tench, I believe that Receveur died as a result of a head wound he received earlier in Samoa. I have argued elsewhere that he probably had a fatal, slowly accumulating subdural haematoma, possibly complicated by scurvy (Duyker 2011, 17–18).

Receveur was born in Noël-Cerneux, just a few kilometres from the Swiss border, and was the first Catholic priest and the first scientist to be buried in Australia. His grave on the northern shore of Botany Bay (near the present Lapérouse Museum) remains one of the oldest European monuments on the east coast of Australia. It was originally marked with a painted epitaph fixed to a tree trunk. A little less than a month after Lapérouse's departure, Lieutenant William Bradley (c.1757–1833) visited Botany Bay and found that the grave marker was 'torn down by the natives'. The inscription was 'copied' and Governor Phillip ordered that it be 'engraved on a piece of copper and nailed in the place the other had been taken from' (Bradley 1969, 99). The accounts of Governor Phillip (Phillip 1970, 46), Watkin Tench (Tench, 98) and Surgeon John White (c.1756–1832) all confirm this was done (White 1790, 163–164).

When Louis-Isidore Duperrey's (1786–1865) expedition arrived in New South Wales on the *Coquille* in 1824, a number of the officers—including Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville (1790–1842) (Duyker 2014, 123) and Victor-Charles Lottin (1795–1858)¹²—went in search of Receveur's grave on Botany Bay. Lottin recorded meeting the garrison of a corporal and two soldiers and asking them whether they knew of 'a French tomb in the neighbourhood of their fort'. The corporal took Lottin and his companions to a place where the earth was raised and was covered with grass. They found no inscription, so on the trunk of an enormous eucalyptus which shaded the site, they decided to carve the words: 'Near this tree lie the remains of Father Receveur, visited in March 1824.'¹³ The tree was later used as a windbreak for a fire, but the carved inscription was saved thanks to the efforts of Simeon Pearce (1821–1886), later the first mayor of Randwick (Gamble & Phillips 1977, 60). It was then

¹² See E. Duyker., 'Lottin, Victor Charles (1795–1858)', *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*, n° 61, April 2012, pp. 2364–2367.

¹³ 'Près de cet arbre reposent les cendres du père Receveur, visité en mars 1824.' See Bellec 2006, pp. 37–38.

exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, in 1854.¹⁴ Soon after it became part of the collection of the Louvre and thence the nascent Musée de la Marine in Paris. Although the inscribed stump was loaned to the Lapérouse Museum in Sydney on its inception in 1988, it has since been 'returned' to Paris and replaced with a brass replica.

When Hyacinthe de Bougainville (1781–1846) visited Botany Bay in 1825 he found the inscribed tree trunk and the grave marked by a pile of stones holding up a cross. It was he who commissioned the present tombstone and the monument to Lapérouse in 1825,¹⁵ designed by Government Architect George Cookney (1799–1876).¹⁶ In 1876 the New South Wales Government enclosed the grave when the cable servicing telegraphic communication between New South Wales and New Zealand came into operation (Selkirk 1918).

A new metal fence was installed in 1906 and the badly rusted iron crucifix on the grave was replaced with one of bronze in 1930.¹⁷ In 1920 Premier William Holman (1871–1934) even drafted a bill to cede more than five acres of land around the grave to the Republic of France, but this was found to be unconstitutional. Nevertheless, unfounded public anxieties over the issue of sovereignty persisted for decades.¹⁸ In 1938 a monument reserve was proposed for the grave,¹⁹ but, presumably because of the distractions of war, this was not officially gazetted until 1950.²⁰ To this day the grave remains

¹⁴ 'Paris Exhibition', *SMH*, 9.10.1854, p. 5, and 'New South Wales Branch of the Paris Exhibition', *SMH*, 15.11.1854, p. 4.

¹⁵ For details, see 'Appendix 4: The La Pérouse Monument at Botany Bay: Bougainville's Legacy to Australia' in Rivière 1999, pp. 244–250.

¹⁶ See E. Duyker, 'George Cookney (1799–1876): Colonial Architect', *Doryanthes*, vol. 4, n° 1, February 2011, pp. 14–19.

¹⁷ J. C. Kelly, 'Pere Louis [sic] Receveur: Man of Letters and Genius', *SMH*, 29.4.1933, p. 9.

¹⁸ B. T. Dowd, 'La Perouse', *SMH*, 12.11.1942, p. 3; see also G. A. King, 'In 1917 They Nearly Gave La Perouse to France', *SMH*, 4.1.1947, p. 2. For more on the proposed donation of land to France that never happened, see: F. R. L. Carleton, *Terre de France à La Perouse: a study of the historical foundations of a local myth; with an index of French warships*, Kensington, NSW, 1995.

¹⁹ 'Reserve Proposed at La Perouse: Scheme for Marine Drive', *SMH*, 4.2.1938, p. 9.

²⁰ T. H. Compagnoni, (Managing Trustee, La Perouse Monuments), 'La Perouse', letter to the Editor, *SMH*, 9.6.1951, p. 2.

a tangible link with Lapérouse's visit and a focus for community cultural and religious commemoration in New South Wales.

After leaving Botany Bay in March 1788, Lapérouse was never seen again by Europeans. (We know now that his expedition came to grief on the coast of Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands.) The year after his disappearance, France was engulfed in revolution; nevertheless, the new National Assembly found time to debate the fate of their missing compatriot and to dispatch an expedition, under the command of Rear-Admiral Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, to search for him. It was the first humanitarian mission on a global scale. In the course of this mission, d'Entrecasteaux made two visits to the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and to Recherche Bay in Tasmania, both discovered by the expedition (Duyker & Duyker 2001). During his second visit, on 3 February 1793, Jacques-Laurent Boucher (or Le Boucher),²¹ a 22-year-old former barber serving as a gunner, died (Galipaud *et al.* 2007, 60) of a 'chest complaint', presumably tuberculosis or pneumonia (Plomley & Piard-Bernier 1993, 157). He was the first European to be buried in Tasmania.

Although the exact location of Le Boucher's grave is not known, on the basis of information in the journal of Jane, Lady Franklin, who visited Recherche Bay in 1838,²² and the location of a tree marked on a survey map of 1833 by James Erskine Calder (1808–1882), the Tasmanian Heritage Council believes his grave is probably 'located within the coastal reserve between Cockle Creek and Snake Point, approximately 225m southwest of the *Espérance* Observatory and 725m northeast of the Cockle Creek Ranger

²¹ There is only fleeting mention of Le Boucher in the expedition journals. Ironically, Josiane Piard-Bernier did not realise that Le Boucher was this sailor's surname and made reference to 'the butcher' when she translated extracts from Louis Ventenat's journal for Appendix 2 of the book which she co-authored with Brian Plomley. (See Plomley & Piard-Bernier 1993, 356).

²² G. Mackaness, *Some Private Correspondence of Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin*, (Tasmania 1837–1845), Sydney, Review Publications, 1947; see also P. Macfie, *The Evolution of Some Historic Sites, North-East Peninsula and Western Shore, Recherche Bay, Tasmania 1792–2006 Associated with the d'Entrecasteaux Expedition 1792 and 1793*, report prepared for Heritage Tasmania (DTAE), 2006, p. 55.

Station'.²³ The Council also noted evidence of erosion (since the eighteenth century) and commented that 'burial remains may still exist at this place and may become evident with further erosion of the coastline'.²⁴ So poor Le Boucher's remains might yet see the light of day again, if predictions of global warming and rising sea-levels prove correct!

During the explorer Nicolas Baudin's (1754–1803) visit to New South Wales in 1802, a number of sailors from his expedition died in Sydney.²⁵ St Phillip's Parish Register²⁶ records the burials of at least three Frenchmen on 26 and 27 June and 16 August 1802. However, another six men, with unknown names, were recorded buried between 30 June and 8 July. This seems more than coincidental given the large number of scurvy cases aboard the corvettes the *Naturaliste* and the *Géographe* on arrival. One certain name among these French servicemen is that of Romeo Rassel; but well may we ask: 'wherefore art thou Romeo?' Between September 1792 and September 1819 there was only one cemetery in Sydney, known variously as the Old Burying Ground, the Cathedral Close and later the Town Hall Cemetery, on George Street. Baudin's sailors must have been buried there. In 1869 most of the remains in the Old Burial Ground on George Street, possibly including those of Baudin's sailors, were exhumed and re-interred at the new Rookwood Necropolis.²⁷ One reason we can't be certain where these French sailors are now, is that there was no burial plan and many other graves were found near Town Hall during various excavation works in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and during the

²³ Approximately AGD66 E491854 N5174706; see Tasmanian Heritage Council 2010, 3.

²⁴ Tasmanian Heritage Council, D'Entrecasteaux Expedition Sites Recherche Bay & Adventure Bay: Provisional Entry to the Tasmanian Heritage Register, Hobart, 1 April 2010, p. 3.

²⁵ See death certificates, Archives nationales, Marine, 5JJ 24; formerly these were available on a microfilm at the Mitchell Library (FM4/2238), but in 2013 I was informed that this series of microfilms had deteriorated to such an extent that all the reels had been disposed of.

²⁶ St Phillip's Parish Register, Sydney, vol. 4, chronological baptisms, burials & marriages, 1787–1809; see also T. D. Mutch Index, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

²⁷ K. A. Johnson & M. R. Sainty, *Gravestone Inscriptions, N.S.W.*, vol. 1, Sydney Burial Ground, North Sydney, Genealogical Publications of Australia, 1973, pp. iv & vi.

twentieth century. As recently as 2007 still more graves and human remains were discovered.²⁸ Sadly, no gravestones were taken from George Street to Rookwood.

There were other French military veterans who died in the greater Sydney area during the early years of the nineteenth century. One of the most colourful was Pierre Lalouette de Vernicourt [*aka* de Clambe] (1754–1804).²⁹ He was born in Paris, in 1754, the son of Pierre Lalouette (1711–1792), regent of the Faculty of Medicine, distinguished anatomist who described the structure of the thyroid gland and inventor of a highly successful method of treating syphilis with mercury vapour (Delaunay 1935; Dupont 1999, 375; Lalouette 1750, 159–174). In the wake of his father's ennoblement in 1773, Pierre adopted the name Lalouette de Vernicourt and joined the army, serving initially in the Île de France regiment. While in Mauritius he married and had children (Duyker 2006, 2072–2075). During the American War of Independence, he apparently took part in three campaigns in India. By August 1793, when France and Britain were again at war, Lalouette de Vernicourt was a captain of grenadiers in Pondichery.³⁰ However, in the wake of Louis XVI's execution he reportedly surrendered to British forces under John Floyd, then joined the military service of at least one Indian rajah, before growing vines at Chengalpattu, near Chennai, and then seeking asylum in England as an émigré. Refusing to bear arms against France, but 'disgusted with a life of indolence', on 25 July 1800 he sought permission from the Duke of Portland to settle in New South Wales.³¹ Calling himself 'Chevalier de Clambe', he

²⁸ 'Graves unearthed under Sydney Town Hall', *SMH*, 6 .8.2007; W. Frew, 'Town Hall yields secrets', *SMH*, 15.1.2008. Some fifty-three graves were identified. Thirty-nine had evidence of coffins, but only a few contained bone fragments.

²⁹ E. Duyker, 'Lalouette de Vernicourt, Pierre (1754–1804)', *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*, n° 58, December 2006, pp. 2072–2075.

³⁰ État nominatif des officiers cote D2/C/143 - CAOM Aix-en-Provence; État de Service, Service Historique de la Défense, Château de Vincennes; Gaston Sarré, *Recueil de renseignements généalogiques sur les familles de l'île Maurice* (typescript circa 1944), Duyker Papers, National Library of Australia.

³¹ Portland Papers (PI C 7/9), University of Nottingham; see also F. Watson (ed.), *Historical Records of Australia*, series 1, Governors' Despatches to and from England, vol. 3. 1801–1802, Sydney, Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1915, pp. 109, 406.

arrived in Port Jackson on 14 December 1801 and six weeks later was granted 100 acres of land at Castle Hill by Governor Philip Gidley King, and assigned six convicts. At Castle Hill he called himself Lieutenant-Colonel Declambe, although he was later referred to as 'Vernicourt de Clamb' in his obituary in the *Sydney Gazette*.³² The zoologist François Péron (1775–1810) who met him when Nicolas Baudin's expedition visited Port Jackson found him *presque nu* (almost naked), like his convict labourers. At Castle Hill, he built a house called the 'Hermitage' (now 340 Old Northern Road, Castle Hill) which Péron described variously as a *modeste habitation* and a *manoir champêtre* (rustic manor) (Péron 1807, 431–432). Lalouette de Vernicourt neither returned to France nor was reunited with his wife and family in Mauritius. He died, of what appears to have been a stroke, on the night of 4 June 1804, on his way to a dance at Government House³³ and was buried, at his own request, among the coffee trees he had planted on his estate.³⁴ Once again, the exact location of this grave is now unknown. Pollen and phytolith studies might yet provide evidence where these coffee trees once grew.³⁵ Local historian Karlene Dimbrowsky has reviewed a number of local opinions relating to the location of the grave, several suggesting it was on Old Castle Hill Road.

Unfortunately, there is strong historical evidence that it has been desecrated. On 4 December 1875, the *Cumberland Mercury* reported that his grave was vaulted with brick sides and a stone top. It was forgotten and buried until a herd of foraging pigs exposed it years later. Then the tombstone was 'uplifted' by 'mischievous persons [. . .] in search of rings and gold'. They found neither, but 'portions of the poor fellow's bones were carried from their resting place as curiosities' (Dimbrowsky 2004, 45). According to a letter

³² *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, vol. ii, n° 67, 10.6.1804, p. 1.

³³ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, vol. ii, n° 67, 10.6.1804, p. 1.

³⁴ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, vol. ii, n° 73, 22.7.1804, p. 2.

³⁵ *Coffea arabica* leaves yield 0.24% silica; see A. L. Carnelli, M. Madella & J.-P. Theurillat, 'Biogenic Silica Production in Selected Alpine Plant Species and Plant Communities', *Annals of Botany*, vol. 87, 2001, pp. 424–434; see also D. R. Piperno, *Phytoliths: A Comprehensive Guide for Archaeologists and Paleoecologists*, Lanham, MD, AltaMira Press, 2006, p. 10.

published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 1 September 1923, even a piece of the coffin was souvenired.³⁶

I am aware of at least one former French convict buried in Australia, who asserted he was a veteran of the Napoleonic army. Originally from Normandy, his name was François Girard (although he apparently also used his mother's maiden name De Lisle as an alias). He arrived in New South Wales on the convict transport *Agamemnon* in September 1820 (Waldersee 1968, 238–255). He was tried twice in the Old Bailey for the crime of stealing two watches while living in London. On the first occasion he was found not guilty, but on the second, when reference was made to him being a foreigner, he was not so lucky. K. R. Dutton has suggested that Girard might have been smeared as a Jacobin sympathiser (Dutton 2005, 5–6). Surprisingly, despite a seven year sentence, a mere month after his arrival in Sydney he was freely giving French language and dancing lessons. We have a partial explanation for his extraordinary change of fortune. In a memorial he addressed to Governor Ralph Darling, on 31 January 1826, Girard wrote: ‘Your Memorialist is a native of France and came to this country in misfortune, but in consequence of having served under Napoleon against the English, was recognized by an officer resident in the Colony, and indulged in his liberty as soon as he disembarked’ (Waldersee 1968).

K. R. Dutton has also suggested that he might have worked with British officers after the battle of Waterloo identifying the bodies of the dead and then been recognised later in Sydney (Dutton 2005, 4–5). I am not convinced. There are so many possibilities: we don't know exactly when Girard arrived in London; he might have been an émigré or he might have been a prisoner-of-war released in Britain as early as the Peace of Amiens, or as late as Napoleon's first abdication in 1814. He could easily have come into contact with numerous British officers long before the Battle of Waterloo. Indeed one might have been *his* prisoner. In any case, the officer who recognised him might have been French rather than British. Girard does not give a nationality for the officer in question. Gabriel Huon de Kerrilleau (1769–1828), a royalist military veteran and émigré who served in the New South Wales Corps between 1794 and 1807

³⁶ See the letter from John Black, *SMH*, 1.9.1923, who wrote that among his late mother's ‘belongings is a piece of wood labelled in her own handwriting, “Frenchman's coffin”’.

and was then granted 400 acres of land at Narellan, is just such a possibility (Walsh 1966, 573; Guillou 1994, 17–34). What is certain is that Girard was for a time a successful Sydney baker and miller. He owned a famous windmill in Woolloomooloo and also a produce store, hotel and quarry, and had cedar-cutting interests on the Macleay and the Clarence Rivers. Ultimately, however, his businesses began to fail and he put his most important assets in the name of his wife Mary (a sister of the Irish rebel Michael Hayes). In 1844 Mary Girard purchased 'Branga Park' in Walcha in northern New South Wales. Girard died there on 16 November 1859 and was buried in old Walcha cemetery (Dutton 2005, 26). Unfortunately, the headstone no longer survives and we do not know the exact location of his grave.

Having mentioned Gabriel Huon de Kerrilleau, it is perhaps appropriate to state that his last resting place is even less certain. On a Sunday in mid-December 1828 he set off on foot from Narellan for his son's property in Campbelltown, but disappeared in one of the gullies on the way (Walsh 1966). Although a search was mounted and human remains were discovered, they were never positively identified as his (Guillou 1994, 30).

A decade later the French explorer Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville made his penultimate visit to Tasmania. This was in late 1839, just prior to his second Antarctic descent and the discovery of Terre Adélie. During this visit, eighteen of his men were hospitalised with dysentery. Seven of these men died in Hobart. They were the first mate of the *Astrolabe* Félix Balthasar Simon (1788–1839), apprentice-sailor Jean-Baptiste Beaudoin (1820–1840), master-carpenter Joseph Couteleng (1796–1840), a courageous young cabin boy named Pierre Moreau (1825–1839), the expedition artist Ernest Goupil, the second mate Honoré Argelier (1791–1840) and finally a sailor named Alexandre Deniel (1817–1840). All these men were buried in the Catholic cemetery in Barrack Street, Hobart.

Ernest Goupil died just as the expedition was about to leave Tasmania. His funeral was a bleak affair during pouring rain. Nevertheless, Lieutenant-Colonel William Elliot (1792–1874), commanding the Hobart garrison, led a disciplined troop of redcoats who formed a guard of honour (apparently with the regimental band playing all the way to the cemetery) on the rough and sodden road. Then, after a dignified silence, four French officers removed the tricolour from Goupil's coffin and his remains were lowered into the grave to the sound of several volleys of rifle fire. This British Protestant involvement

seems to have been too much for the sectarian Irishman Father John Terry (1790–1864). He absented himself in favour of the English Benedictine James Cotham (1810–1883), who was educated in Douai in France and probably spoke French. The skippers of two visiting French whalers were also present (Duyker 2014, 430–433).

Goupil and Couteleng received their own tombstones,³⁷ but the officers of the expedition subscribed to a joint monument in Hobart for all who had died during the expedition. By the mid-1860s, all the wooden crosses on the French graves had rotted away and the stone monument was in such a poor state that it was replaced by King Louis-Philippe's grandson, Pierre d'Orléans, duc de Penthièvre (1845–1919), during his visit to Hobart aboard the *Omar Pacha* in September 1866 (Beauvoir 1869, 233–234). Unfortunately, d'Urville's men were not to rest in peace.³⁸ In 1915, the Christian Brothers—seeking to expand St Virgil's College on Barrack Street—were granted permission by the Parliament of Tasmania to relocate the remains to Cornelian Bay Cemetery.³⁹ There, another monument, with a large marble plaque, was erected in honour of the French dead. To this day it lists the surnames, ranks and death-dates (although not always accurately) of all the expedition members who succumbed at sea or ashore—including the unfortunate Tongan crewmember, Mafi Kelepi, who died at sea before the expedition reached Hobart but was aboard while it was anchored in the Derwent. I say he was aboard because his body was placed in a barrel of arrack and taken back to Paris as a museum specimen! (Duyker 2014, 421–423)

Although France failed to colonise any part of Australia or New Zealand, in September 1853 a French penal colony was established in New Caledonia. Over the next forty-five years, about 22,000 criminals and political prisoners were transported to New Caledonia, eventually including many members of the Paris Commune. The establishment of this French colony brought numerous French naval vessels with troops and supplies through Torres Strait and sometimes to northern Australia ports. One such vessel was

³⁷ Joseph Seureau recorded the inscriptions on both Goupil's and Couteleng's graves; see Méhaud & Richard 1995, p. 117.

³⁸ See Anon., 'Stories in Stone: Scotch Settlers and French Circumnavigators', *The Mercury* (Hobart), 13.5.1910, p. 7.

³⁹ See Anon., 'Notice', *The Mercury* (Hobart), 20.7.1915, p. 1, & Anon., 'Removal of Bodies', *The Mercury*, 20.9.1915, p. 1.

the steam-powered *aviso* or dispatch vessel *Coëtlogon* (687 tons).⁴⁰ En route from Townsville to Nouméa, on 7 August 1876, her helmsman, Eugène Marie Quillien, died (of an as yet unknown cause) and was buried with full military honours at Cooktown.⁴¹ Although there were probably earlier French nationals buried in Queensland, Quillien was very likely the first French serviceman to be buried in the state.

A little less than three years later, on the evening of Sunday 9 February 1879, another French naval vessel arrived in Cooktown: this was the new steam-powered French dispatch-transport the *Allier* (1650 tons).⁴² She had left France the previous November bound for New Caledonia with a crew of 102 men and 228 soldiers. En route she visited Java and, there, a fever, either malarial or typhoid (later even described as smallpox), was contracted and quickly began to infect those on board. By the time the *Allier* diverted to Cooktown for medical supplies, twenty-one deaths had occurred and 157 others were ailing.⁴³ Almost certainly ship-handling had also become seriously impaired as a result of so many sick cases. Facing Cooktown was a pre-existing quarantine area on the north shore of the Endeavour River and the *Allier's* captain, Félix-Guillaume Coulombeaud (1832–1909), later Rear-Admiral Coulombeaud,⁴⁴ established a temporary hospital camp there and also sought fresh provisions.⁴⁵ During his stay of some weeks, there were at least thirteen deaths: Augustin Nicot, Jean-Marie Foucault, Jean-Adolphe Bernard, Emmanuel-Jean Allat, Jean-Marie Pouly, Jules Boulanger, Valentin Maze, Louis-René Desmos, Victor Letourneau, Jean-Marie Urban, Louis Drouillet, Louis-Marie Le Floch and

⁴⁰ In March 1875 she was apparently the first French warship to visit Brisbane. This was on a semi-diplomatic mission in the wake of the escape of Henri de Rochefort and five other communards from New Caledonia; see *The Queenslander*, 27 March 1875, p. 2.

⁴¹ Personal communication (including a photograph of the burial plaque) from Arnaud Gougeon, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, Queensland, 31.3.2014.

⁴² Later renamed *Bougainville*, she was launched in Lorient in 1878 and saw service until 1920; the Queensland press inflated her displacement to 2000 tons.

⁴³ 'Cooktown', *Brisbane Courier*, 11.2.1879, p. 3.

⁴⁴ See his Légion d'honneur dossier, Archives nationales, Fond Léonore, LH/606/51.

⁴⁵ 'Cooktown', *Brisbane Courier*, 12.2.1879, p. 2 & 'Arrival of French War Steamer at Cooktown', *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 13.2.1879, p. 3.

Jean-Marie Duret.⁴⁶ These mainly young men in their twenties were buried on the north shore, about a hundred metres from the beach, and a monument to their memory was erected and enclosed by a fence. The initial enclosure, apparently constructed of wood, had been destroyed by fire (for which indigenous people were blamed) by the time the French cruiser *Volta*⁴⁷ visited Cooktown in December 1887 en route to Noumea. Her commander Raymond-Victor-Ernest Bigant (1840–1909)⁴⁸ apparently replaced the monument and fence,⁴⁹ but within two years, according to journalist Archibald Meston (1851–1924), who visited the site in 1889, it was already half-buried in drifting sand.⁵⁰

Then, in early 1905, a young local man named Douglas Hall (whose mother ran the Courthouse Hotel in Cooktown) made twelve trips to the site (near Mount Saunders), found exposed bones, dug holes, found a gravestone, found shirt buttons and a brass button manufactured in Lyon and a gold Napoléon coin (which he kept). Youth might have been a mitigating factor, but he seems to me to have been little more than a grave robber. After a dozen expeditions, Hall apparently thought it was time to notify the police of the human remains that he had found. Either that, or news of his treasure-hunting desecrations finally reached the ears of the local authorities.

In April 1905, the police magistrate and gold warden, Mr W. M. Lee-Bryce (apparently acting at the behest of the Catholic Bishop of Brisbane, Dr Murray, and the French consul-general Georges Biard d'Aunet in Sydney), supervised the removal of the remains of one officer and nine sailors from the north shore of the river to Cooktown cemetery. On the morning of 3 May, they were reburied after a solemn requiem Mass at Saint Mary's, Cooktown. Over 500 townsfolk escorted the hearse to the cemetery. These included 250 school children from both the State and Catholic schools. The police attended

⁴⁶ Deaths, 1879, registration numbers 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 691, 695, 699, 708, 710, 711; Cooktown Court records, courtesy of Marge Scully, Cooktown Historical Society.

⁴⁷ Launched in Cherbourg in 1867 as an *aviso*, re-designated as a *croiseur 3^e classe* in 1876.

⁴⁸ See his Légion d'honneur dossier, Archives nationales, Fond Léonore, LH/236/28.

⁴⁹ 'Cooktown', *SMH*, 28.12.1887, p. 7; 'Cooktown', *The Queenslander*, 28.12.1887, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Meston, A., 'Reinterment of French Sailors', *The Brisbane Courier*, 19.4.1905, p. 5.

in full uniform. The pall bearers included the mayor, the police magistrate, the federal member of parliament, the Waterside Workers Federation delegate and the German Honorary Consul Dr Helmuth Korteum (a native of Schleswig, who also happened to be the government medical officer who supervised the quarantine arrangements back in 1879). The *Marseillaise* was played and French and British flags were flown at half-mast. The 'discoverer' of the remains, Douglas Hall, also took a prominent part in the funeral.⁵¹ Then in 1907, a new stone monument was erected in honour of these French servicemen.⁵²

Further research of the service records of the soldiers aboard the *Allier* might reveal whether any were veterans of the Franco-Prussian War eight years before. I am aware of a number of naval officers who fought on land during this conflict. One was Edmond Marin La Meslée (1852–1893) who apparently took part in the Battle of Sedan in September 1870. After the disaster he resigned from the navy and taught in Mauritius for a number of years before settling in Australia. He was living in McMahon's Point when he and his wife drowned in a yachting accident on Sydney Harbour on 17 December 1893. He is buried in Rookwood Cemetery, but I have not yet located his tomb. Marin La Meslée was a keen observer of his adopted land and published a penetrating (although at times racist) study entitled *L'Australie nouvelle* (1883). An English translation by Russell Ward was published in 1972.⁵³

By 1914 and the outbreak of World War 1, France, Britain and Australia had effectively been allies for almost a century. In the horrific conflict that followed with Germany, Austria and Turkey, 1.5 million Frenchmen lost their lives. These heavy casualties diminished both the young male population and the pool of potential emigrants to Australia. A significant proportion of French arrivals after the First World War were women who married Australian servicemen. Despite the significant number of immigrants who returned to France, there was a net increase of 864 French-Australians between 1915 and

⁵¹ 'A Public Reinterment: An Incident of 1879 Revived', *The Brisbane Courier*, 18.4.1905, p. 4; 'In a Strange Land', *Freeman's Journal*, 6.5.1905, p. 16; 'Reinterment of French Marines', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 4.5.1905, p. 5; 'Remains of French Seamen: Discovery at Cooktown', *The North Queensland Register*, 24.4.1905, p. 7; 'Honouring French Dead: A Solemn Ceremony: Remains Reinterred at Cooktown', *The Brisbane Courier*, 4.5.1905, p. 5; see also Guillou 1994, pp. 71–77.

⁵² 'A Melancholy Story', *The Brisbane Courier*, 16.7.1907, p. 4.

⁵³ For biographical details see Marin La Meslée 1979.

1939. Among them were almost certainly men who had previously served in the French Army. Similarly, between 1947 and 1954, in the wake of the Second World War, there were veterans among the 1034 French immigrants who arrived in Australia.⁵⁴ It is my hope that we can further identify and record the last resting places of these veterans.

There were, however, other French citizens who had arrived in Australia long before the First World War, but went back to fight for France and then returned to family in Australia. One was Jacques Playoust (1883–1947), the son of a wool-buyer from Tourcoing, in Northern France, who arrived in Melbourne in 1889, and then settled in Sydney. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Playoust returned to France to serve with the French Army and saw action in the bitter years of trench warfare at Ypres, Verdun and the Somme (where he earned the Croix de Guerre). He also served with Australian units. His brother Marcel, who was commissioned as an officer, was killed in the first battle of the Somme, along with most of his company (Dwyer 1998). Jacques Playoust died in Sydney in February 1947 and is buried in the former Northern Suburbs Cemetery, now the Macquarie Park Cemetery, North Ryde.⁵⁵

Another impressive example is Vicomte Guillaume Charles Baptiste de Pierres (1880–1954), who arrived in Melbourne in 1902 before settling in Western Australia. He served as a sergeant with 33rd French Artillery Regiment between September 1914 and February 1919, but was seconded as a French interpreter to the British Army's Royal Horse Artillery (until he was court-martialled for striking a British officer who made a derogatory comment about a censored letter to his wife). His French-born brother Charley joined the British

⁵⁴ See Stuer 1982, 170–171, 195. I knew one of these First World War veterans who emigrated to Australia. He was a Père Le Clercq, a Carthusian monk, who came from France in the late 1950s at the invitation of Bishop Fox of the diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes. He was from Tourcoing and had served as a *brancardier* (stretcher bearer) during the First World War and I don't think he ever really got over the trauma of the war. Shortly before coming to Australia he had a mental breakdown. Bishop Fox had him in mind as chaplain to the Carmelite nuns in Parkes, New South Wales, but he did not stay there. I remember him saying Mass for my great-grandmother on her 90th birthday in Melbourne in 1961. I still have a small French flag embroidered with the Sacred Heart which he carried in the trenches and which he gave to my grandmother before he returned to France.

⁵⁵ In the Catholic Monumental Section (H11–0050).

Army (probably because he had deserted from the French naval sloop *Bayonne* in Tasmania during national service in 1903 and had become an Australian citizen). He was commissioned as an officer in the 5th Dragoon Guards, British Army, and was wounded in the eye on the Somme. Guillaume's son Henri-Jacques-Stanley de Pierres (1918–1989) served with the Free French in Indo-China during the Second World War. Both are buried in Derdebin in Western Australia (de Pierres 2003), Guillaume interred in 1954 and his son in 1989.

The stories of these servicemen demonstrate, even more intimately, how the histories of France and Australia are inseparably linked. Still more French veterans are buried here. According to Paul de Pierres, besides his grandfather, there are three others buried in Western Australia.⁵⁶ Like Australia's Mauritian-born First World War veterans, including three who were mortally wounded at Gallipoli,⁵⁷ they provide yet another dimension to the francophone and multicultural history of Australia.

Lest we forget!

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⁵⁶ P. de Pierres, 'Allies Forever' . . . 'Alliés pour toujours': *A Record of War Service by Frenchmen and Belgians from Australia 1914–18*, in press, Wyalkatchem, W.A., 2014.

⁵⁷ See E. Duyker, 'Bonnetin, Charles Adrien (1878–1915)', *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*, n° 61, April 2012, pp. 2333–2334; E. Duyker & P. M. Currien, 'La Nauze, Charles Andrew (1882–1915)', *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*, n° 58, December 2006, pp. 2032–2035; E. Duyker, 'McGuire, Albert John Joseph George (1891–1915)', *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*, n° 63, April 2014, pp. 2592–2593.

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