LES PLAYOUST AU BOUT DU MONDE: A CASE STUDY OF TWO FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

PART 2: APPENDICES

Jacqueline Dwyer

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy of The Australian National University

May 2015
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APPENDIX 1: THE PLAYOUST FAMILY

FAMILY OF GEORGES PLAYOUST AND MARIE-THÉRÈSE LEPLAT

Parents

Georges Playoust

Born 16th January 1855 in Tourcoing, France.

Died 31st October 1918 in France.

Married Marie-Therese Leplat on 2.8.1881 in Tourcoing.
They came to Melbourne, Australia in 1889.

Marie-Thérèse Leplat

Born 1859 in Tourcoing.

Died 1944 in Sydney, Australia.

Children

Georges Emile Joseph

Born 7th May 1882 in Tourcoing.

Died 2nd July 1939 in Sydney.

Georges married Edna Adet in U.S.A. They had one child, who became a Jesuit priest in California.

From his second marriage in 1921 to Ellen Youren, a daughter (Marcelle) was born, who married an Australian. Their language of their children was English.

Jacques Emile Eugène

Born 23rd July 1883 in Tourcoing.

Died 21st February 1947 in Mosman, Sydney.

Jacques married Evelyne Delvas in Roubaix. They had two daughters Annette (Mezo) and Jacqueline (Dwyer) who were given an Australian education but their parents strongly encouraged them to continue to speak and read the French language. French was always spoken at table, and there were French books on the shelves, which enabled them to enjoy the benefits of two compatible cultures in addition to a dual nationality.
Marie-Thérèse (Marie) (Polin)
Born 9th March 1885 in Tourcoing.

Marie had two daughters from her marriage to the Australian, Peter Ernest Polin, and a strong attempt was made to retain the French tongue, never easy with only one French-speaking parent. The attempt was successful, but though they had grown up entirely in Australia, their daughters could only produce the letter R in a guttural French manner when speaking English.

Marguerite (Decouvelaere)
Born 17th August 1886 in Tourcoing.
Died 9th March 1964 in France.

Marguerite had three children from her marriage to Alfred Decouvelaere, who spent all their early childhood in Australia. Her husband lost his life in battle in 1915. She followed her husband's desires that they should be educated in France, so in the 1920s they relocated to France. These adolescents were fluent in Australian English, but less at ease in French, and traces of their Australian variety of English were to show through even in their extreme old age. The descendants of these three take pleasure in seeing their Australian cousins, whether in France or in Australia.

Stéphane Playoust
Born 13th July 1888 in Tourcoing.
Mort pour la France 16th April 1917 near Juvincourt, France.

He earned the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre.

Eugénie (Ninie) Playoust
Born 6th December 1889 in Caulfield, Melbourne.
Died, 14th July 1955 in Sydney.

Eugénie (Ninie) did not marry. She lived with her mother and looked after her in her old age.

Marcel Emile Playoust
Born 18th August 1891 in Hawthorn, Melbourne.
Died 4th September 1916 near Barleux, France. Mort pour la France.

Marcel and his company of French Colonials, attacked the German trenches at Barieux near the Somme. Of the 180 men who attacked, 140 did not return, and Marcel's body was not found.

René Charles Playoust
Born 26th September 1894 in Melbourne.
Died 22nd September 1923 in Sydney.
René enlisted first in the Australian Army in 1914, and was mobilised by French army. He died from complications from diabetes.

**Maurice Joseph Playoust**
Born 21\(^{\text{st}}\) October 1896 in Sydney.
Died in Sydney in 1975.

Maurice married Marie-Antoinette Lamerand (Nin), in Sydney in 1926, a French-Australian from a wool-buying background. Though they could both speak French, the household language was either French or English. They had no children.

**Roger André Playoust**
Born 14\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1900 in Sydney.
Died 14\(^{\text{th}}\) August 1962 in Sydney.

Roger, the 10th child, married an Australian, Olga Burrell and they had 2 sons. He returned to his wife and sons after his years as a World War II prisoner of war in Germany. Their household language was English. One son, after training to become a Jesuit priest, was killed in a car accident on the eve of his ordination. The other son married an Australian, and they had one daughter who chose to retain the name of Playoust in her surname when she married.

From Georges Playoust’s branch of the family there will be no male descendants to revive the family name.

**FAMILY OF JOSEPH PLAYOUST AND BLANCHE LEMETTRE**

**Parents**

**Joseph Playoust**
Born 30\(^{\text{th}}\) April 1866 in France.
Died 10\(^{\text{th}}\) June 1947 in France.

**Blanche Lemettre**
Born 1868.
Died 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) December 1937 in France.

One of their children was born in France. Eight others were born in Australia.

**Children**
Maria Playoust
Born 29.3.1892 in France.
Died in France/Belgium.

Blanche Playoust
Died in Australia.

Jean Joseph Playoust
Born 29.10.1895 in Melbourne.
Died 1918 near Soissons. Mort pour la France.

Marie-Antoinette (Toinette) Playoust
Born 10.10.1897.
Died in France/Belgium.

Fernand Playoust
Born 25th March 1899.
Died in Australia.

Fernand married Rita Adams in 1924.

Charles Playoust
Born 3rd January 1901.
Died in Australia.

Charles, too young to have participated in the war, after living in France for a time, married a French woman and went with her to Melbourne to work as a wool buyer. Charles' wife could not adapt to living in exile and the couple separated. Their Melbourne-born children lived on in Paris and have since discovered much more to interest them in Australia than they had been led to believe, and one of them, of Generation 5 has returned to embark on a career in Queensland.

Gabrielle Playoust
Born 20th February 1903.
Died in Verviers, Belgium.

Gabrielle had graduated in medicine at Sydney University. She married a Belgian wool buyer, Paul Lamboray, and returned with him to Verviers in Belgium where many of their descendants live. This marriage may have been the magnet which drew her parents and her sisters back to France.
Marthe Playoust
Born July 1904.
Died in France/Belgium.

Maria, Toinette and Marthe continued to communicate with each other in English, read English books, and the letters they wrote to Australia were also in English. In Verviers they were known as 'The English ladies' though a visiting Australian nephew reported that their accents were rather 'ocker'.

Paul Playoust
Born 10th May 1906 in Sydney.

He performed his military service between the World Wars and was mobilised when World War II broke out. Like other Frenchmen in Australia, he was ordered to report to the French Army base in Indo-China, then a French colony. After the defeat of France in 1940, and the Japanese invasion, these men were left to their own devices to find a passage back to Australia (See Flanders in Australia, chapter on Indo-Chine).

Final comments

From the two families, the only males who were to continue the Playoust name in Australia into the following century are the grandsons of Fernand and Paul. Charles' sons and daughters live in France.

The Georges, Marie-Thérèse, Joseph and Blanche, and their children are no longer alive, but Australian members of the third generation still arrange to meet and find values in common, but expressed in the English tongue.

Of the 23 people in two generations of the two families, 3 lost their lives on the Western Front, 8 died in France or Belgium, and 12 died in Australia.
APPENDIX 2: SPEECHES AND LETTERS OF GEORGES PLAYOUST
(INCLUDING TRANSLATIONS)

29 July 1899: Foundation of the Chamber of Commerce Banquet

LE BANQUET DE LA CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE FRANÇAISE ¹

Messieurs,

Nous devons des remerciements à l'honorable M. Carruthers, le ministre du Commerce de New South Wales, et ses remerciements nous les lui devons sincères, chaleureux.

Non content de nous avoir ce soir honorés de sa présence, il a bien voulu porter le toast de la Chambre de Commerce française de Sydney, à peine éclose, et il s'est exprimé dans des termes qui nous ont causé un sensible plaisir et que nous pouvons aussi interpréter comme un encouragement.

Je dis un plaisir. N'est-il pas agréable en effet de se voir offrir une hospitalité aussi large en pays étranger, de se voir en quelque sorte octroyer le droit de cité? Et ici, messieurs, je profiterai de la circonstance pour me faire l'écho de vos sentiments. Si nous conservons au fond du coeur gravé en lettres indélébiles le nom de Patrie, rien ne saurait affaiblir les liens qui nous attachent, nous français à la France, nous n'en avons pas moins le respect des lois, des institutions à l'abri desquelles nous vivons et qui font la gloire de l'Australie, nous n'avons pas moins l'amour de cette terre privilégiée et par son climat, et par le caractère de sa race, de cette terre australienne, appelée infailliblement à tenir une large place dans le monde.

J'ai dit aussi: un encouragement. Notre œuvre est d'agrandir, d'accentuer dans la mesure modeste de nos moyens et nos relations commerciales entre les deux pays, du moins de les faciliter en nous tenant à la disposition des maisons françaises désireuses d'importer et d'exporter.

Or, n'est-ce pas un réel encouragement que de se voir tendre la main par le Ministre du Commerce du pays même a qui nous voudrions en échange des laines et autres produits que nous lui prenons en quantités considérables, à qui nous voudrions dis-je, faire goûter les fruits bienfaisants de nos vignes, faire apprécier les produits si multiples de nos fabrications, sous la garantie de travail honnête, intelligent, artistique qui pendant plusieurs siècles a fait de ces industries françaises les premières de l'Europe, et leur a valu l'insigne honneur de servir de modèle d'inspiration chez les autres nations.

Je ne puis maintenant passer sous silence l'accueil que nous a accordé la Chambre de Commerce de Sydney; la présence au milieu de nous de son inestimable Président en fournit la meilleure preuve.

¹ "Le Banquet de la Chambre de Commerce", Le Courrier Australien, August 5, 1899, 2.
Loin de nous toute idée d’antagonisme contre notre ainée! Ce que nous voulons, et ici je serai d’accord avec les idées si éloquemment exprimées par le très Hon. M. Reid, ce que nous voulons, c’est dans la lice ouverte au commerce de toutes les nations,

- la lutte pacifique et courtoise,
- la lutte dont les cris de ralliement sont: Paix et bonne volonté;
- la lutte dont les seules armes sont: Progrès et civilisation; la seule lutte digne en un mot digne du siècle dans lequel nous allons entrer.

Aussi, Messieurs, s’il nous est permis, ce que nous espérons, de marcher la main dans la main et en complète harmonie de sentiments avec la Chambre de Commerce de Sydney, et nous en serons heureux et fiers.

Je terminerai, Messieurs, en faisant appel à tout l’enthousiasme dont vous êtes susceptibles pour accueillir le toast que l’on m’a confié, le toast de la Chambre de Commerce de Sydney, si dignement représenté par son éminent Président, M. Brunton.

Translation by Le Courrier Australien:²

Gentlemen,

We owe our thanks to the Hon. Mr Carruthers, the Minister for Commerce of NSW, and those thanks should be sincere and warm.

Not content with having honoured us with his presence this evening, he has been good enough to propose the toast to the new-born French Chamber of Commerce in Sydney, and he expressed himself in terms which have given us extreme pleasure and which we may also interpret as encouragement.

I say a pleasure. Is it not indeed a pleasure to see so generous a hospitality offered us in a foreign land, to see ourselves as it were presented with the rights of citizenship? And here, gentlemen, I will take the opportunity of voicing your sentiments. If we retain at the bottom of our hearts, engraved in indelible characters, the name our country, if nothing could weaken ties which bind us, as Frenchmen, to France; none the less have we the deepest respect for the laws and institutions under which we live and which are the glory of Australia; none the less do we love this land which is so favoured in its climate and in the qualities of its people, this great land of Australia which is undoubtedly called to take a great place in the world.

I said also an encouragement. Our work is to enlarge and emphasize, within the modest limit of our means, the commercial relations between the two countries, at least to facilitate them by holding ourselves at the disposal of these French firms which are desirous either of importing or exporting.

Now is it not a real encouragement to see the hand of friendship extended by the Minister of Commerce of the very country which, in exchange for the wool and other productions which we take from it in considerable quantities, we should like to see tasting the kindly fruit of our vines and appreciating the manifold products of our manufacturer, with the guarantee of the honest, intelligent and artistic labour that for several centuries has made our French industries the first in Europe and has won for them the distinguished honour of serving as a model and an inspiration to other nations.

I cannot pass by in silence the kindly reception which has been accorded us by the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, and the best proof of which is the presence of its worthy president.

Far from us too, be any idea of antagonism of our elder sister. What we desire, and here I shall be in harmony with the ideas so eloquently expressed by the Right Honourable Mr. Reid - what we desire is the field open to the commerce of all nations, the peaceful and courteous contest whose rallying cries of peace and goodwill; the contest whose sole arms are progress and civilisation; in a word, the only contest worthy of the century upon which we are about to enter.

If therefore, gentlemen we are allowed, as we hope we shall be, to advance hand in hand and in complete harmony of sentiments with the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, we shall be proud and happy to do so.

I shall conclude, gentlemen by appealing to all the enthusiasm of which you are capable, to honour the toast which has been entrusted to me, the toast of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, so worthily represented here by its distinguished President, Mr. Brunton.

14 July 1902: National Day Speech

FÊTE NATIONALE FRANÇAISE

Comments by Le Courrier Australien:

Notre distingué et respecté compatriote s'est acquitté de cette tâche avec une éloquence, un bonheur d'expression et une élévation de pensées qui ne justifient nullement les réserves pleines de modestie dont il a fait précéder son discours:

Speech by Georges Playoust:

"On m'a offert, il y a quelques jours avec beaucoup d'amabilité, mais non sans une certaine insistance, de prononcer l'un des discours d'usage en cette traditionnelle circonstance."
J'ai accepté l'honneur, cédant peut-être, je l'avoue à un petit sentiment de vanité, mais quand je me suis recueilli pour me préparer à cette ingrate fonction, je me suis aperçu un peu tard que j'avais présumé de mes forces et que mes occupations journalières ne m'avaient guère prédisposé à un rôle d'orateur.

Je me vois donc forcé d'avoir recours à votre indulgence et je m'efforcerai de suppléer au défaut d'érudition, de remplacer les artifices de la théorie [sic] par le simple langage du cœur.

Très fier je me sens de prendre la parole au sein d'une réunion aussi remarquable tant que par le nombre que par la distinction. Dans ce sentiment je compte trouver le stimulant qui m'est nécessaire, et puiser mon inspiration.

De quoi vous entretiendrai-je avec plus d'à propos que de notre France, de la patrie absente? Je sais combien la fibre de patriotisme est délicate à faire vibrer. On a déjà tant usé et abusé de ce noble sentiment qu'il est difficile en y touchant d'éviter les redites et les phrases.

Le patriotisme est une religion absolument du domaine intime; il se manifeste par des actes et non pas par des paroles. Il ne souffre pas la déclamation, mais en ce jour que nous célébrons, ne nous est-il pas permis de sortir de notre réserve?

Ne formons nous pas une petite famille, ne sommes-nous pas entourés d'amis, ne sommes-nous pas accourus des quatre coins de Sydney au rendez-vous annuel de Cabarita afin de nous grouper autour de notre digne représentant, le Consul-Général et fêter a l'ombre de nos couleurs tricolores le glorieux souvenir de la Révolution française, en un jour dont l'anniversaire marque la première étape de notre nation envers de légitimes revendications, en un jour qui a été officiellement proclamé celui de notre Fête Nationale.

Nous sommes séparés de la Patrie par quatre mille lieues de mers, mais la distance ne saurait empêcher nos coeurs de battre en unisson de ceux des trente-huit millions de nos compatriotes qui oublient dans la célébration de ce jour, désormais consacré, les dimensions de partis pour ne se souvenir que des gloires de la Patrie commune.

Et ces gloires ne gravitent pas seulement autour de la période de la Révolution Française, elles remontent plus haut, et s'étendent plus loin.

Si la France de Clovis nous apparaît éclairée par le flambeau du Christianisme naissant, si la France de Saint-Louis nous montre le modèle des rois, et le héros du Moyen Age, il n'en est pas moins vrai que la France Républicaine et démocratique de 1902 demeure digne de notre amour et de notre dévouement, de notre respect et de nos fiertés.

Et pourquoi? À travers les siècles, malgré les jours sombres et des défaillances momentanées, s'est perpétué cet esprit chevaleresque typique de notre race, qui comme dans la bonne, comme dans la mauvaise fortune a forcé l'admiration de nos ennemis.

Et pourquoi encore? Parce que plus que jamais notre pays est amoureux de justice et de liberté, parce que soucieux de sa dignité et de la dignité des autres, il se maintient fort par un
travail incessant tendant à un double but: à l’extérieur, l’estime des autres nations, à l’intérieur l’amélioration des classes.

Certes, nous ne revendiquons pas le monopole des gloires et des qualités, nous les reconnaissons au même degré, et nous les apprécions au même titre chez les autres, mais en pareille circonstance on nous excusera de donner libre carrière à l’exubérance de nos sentiments.

Car l’amour de Patrie n’est pas un vain mot, n’est-ce pas, Messieurs, vous qui m’écoutez, quel que soit votre Nationalité dont je vois les yeux briller d’un éclat tout particulier à la seule mention du sol natal.

L’amour de la Patrie n’est pas une chimère, n’est-ce pas, Mesdames, vous qui pouvez a si juste titre vous enorgueillir des sublimes exemples dont la femme a parsemé les annales des peuples depuis Lacédémone jusqu’à nos jours.

Et cet amour, aujourd’hui, pour nous est rendu plus intense par l’idée de la patrie absente, par le ressouvenir de ce coin du sol natal où s’est écoulé notre enfance, de ce modeste foyer où nos cœurs se sont épanouis sous les chaudes affections de sa famille, de ce collège où ces amitiés de jeunesse ont pris racine, de ce régiment où nous avons compris la vraie démocratie, où surtout nous avons contracté le culte du Drapeau.

Les circonstances de la vie nous trouvent réunis sur un sol étranger, mais hospitalier, nous sommes heureux de le constater en toute sincérité.

Cette terre d’Australie est devenue pour un grand nombre d’entre nous comme une Patrie d’adoption, nous y jouissons de tous les bienfaits d’une civilisation portée à ses dernières limites, sous un régime large de tolérance et de liberté.

Mais pourrait-on garder rancune si nous conservons la religion de la mère patrie?

Non, certes. D’ailleurs, si, m’adressant aux enfants et aux jeunes gens qui m’entourent, à ceux qui sont appelés à devenir des citoyens de la libre Australie, je leur dis, "N’oubliez pas que vous avez du sang français dans les veines". J’ajouterai "Vous aurez, vous, un devoir à remplir, celui de faire aimer la France en vous faisant aimer vous-mêmes, en vous montrant citoyens respectueux des lois du pays, en sachant aussi à vous dévouer à la chose publique, en suivant les exemples de vos aînés qui ont su conquérir l’estime et l’amitié de la nation à laquelle ils ont demandé l’hospitalité par l’honnêteté dans les affaires, la sincérité et la cordialité dans les rapports, par la pratique des vertus civiques.

J’oserai prendre à témoin de ces dernières paroles ces amis nombreux qui ont répondu à notre appel, les hôtes éminents qui ont bien voulu nous honorer de leur présence.

Dans ce pays où le Patriotisme est une vertu de race des plus accentuées, nos sentiments à nous, Français, pour la France, tout en resserrant les liens sympathiques qui nous unissent déjà aux Australiens, constitueront à leurs yeux, j’en suis certain, la meilleure garantie de notre loyauté.
Je termine, Messieurs et Mesdames, de lever vos verres et de boire à la prospérité de notre pays.

Applaudissements unanimes, Marseillaise, Hourrahs.

Translation by Jacqueline Dwyer:

Our distinguished compatriot acquitted himself of this task with an eloquence, a felicity of expression and an elevation of thought which in no way justifies the reserved modesty which preceded his speech:

"I was asked a few days ago with much friendliness, but not without a certain insistence to deliver the customary speech for this traditional circumstance.

I accepted the honour giving in, I must admit, to a little feeling of vanity, but when I collected my thoughts to prepare for this thankless task, I perceived that my daily occupations scarcely predisposed me to the role of orator.

I see myself obliged to crave your indulgence, and I will attempt to make up for my lack of erudition, to replace the artifices of theory by the simple language of the heart.

I feel very proud to take up the word at the heart of a reunion which is as remarkable for its numbers as for its distinction. Within this sentiment I am counting on finding the stimulus which I need, and to draw from for my inspiration.

What could be more appropriate to speak to you about than our France, the absent country? I know how delicate the fibre of patriotism is to make vibrate. This noble sentiment has been so used and abused that it is difficult to avoid hackneyed phrases.

Patriotism is a religion of an entirely intimate realm; it is manifested by acts and not by words. It does not suffer oratory. But on a day such as we are celebrating, is it not permitted to emerge from our reserve.

Do we not form a little family, are we not surrounded by friends, did we not flock to the annual meeting at Cabarita from the four corners of Sydney so as to gather round our very worthy representative, the Consul General, to celebrate under the shade of our flag the glorious memories of the French Revolution, on a day whose anniversary marks the first lap of our Nation's legitimate claims a day which has been officially proclaimed our National Day.

We are separated from our Fatherland by 40,000 leagues of sea, but the distance could not prevent our hearts beating in unison with the 38,000,000 of our compatriots who, in the celebration of this day, henceforth consecrated, forget the dissension of parties, so as to remember only the glories of the common Fatherland. And these glories not only gravitate around the period of the French Revolution, they go back higher and extend further.
If the France of Clovis appears lit by the torch of the newborn Christianity, and the France of Saint Louis shows us the model of Kings and the hero of the Middle Ages, it is none the less true that the republican and democratic France of 1902 remains worthy of our love and our devotion, of our respect and our pride.

And why? Because through the centuries despite the sombre days and our momentary failures there was perpetuated a chivalrous spirit, typical of our race which in our good or ill fortune has won the admiration of our enemies.

And why again? Because more than ever our country loves justice and liberty, because more concerned with her liberty and the liberty of others she maintains herself strong by her unceasing work towards a double goal, abroad, the esteem of other nations, at home the betterment of (social) classes.

We certainly do not claim the monopoly of glories and we recognize qualities to the same degree and appreciate them in the same way amongst others, but in the same circumstances we would be excused for giving free rein to the exuberance of our sentiments.

For the love of the Fatherland is not a vain word, gentlemen, you who are listening to me, whatever your nationality, and in whose eyes I see shining with a particular glow at the very mention of your native land.

For the love of the Fatherland is not a chimera, is that not so, Ladies, you who could justly take pride of the supreme examples of which Woman has strewn the annals of people since Lacedemone till our own days.

And this love, today, is rendered more intense by the idea of the absent country by recollecting our corner of our native soil where our childhood slipped away, of the modest hearth where our hearts gladdened in the warm affections of our family, of the college where our young friendships took root, of the regiment where we understood true democracy, where especially we contracted the cult of the Flag.

The circumstances of life find us all assembled on foreign soil but, as we are happy to establish in all sincerity, hospitable. This land of Australia has become for a large number of us a Fatherland of adoption where we enjoy all the benefits of a civilization carried to its ultimate limits, under a regime great in tolerance and liberty.

But could one maintain ill-feeling if we keep the religion of our mother country? Certainly not. Besides, if addressing the children and young people who surround me, to those who are called to become citizens of free Australia, I say to them "Do not forget that you have French blood in your veins". I will add "you will have a duty to perform, that of making France loved while making yourselves loved, while showing yourselves to be citizens respectful of the laws of the country, in knowing how to devote yourselves to public affairs, following the example of your elders who were able to win the esteem and the friendship of the nation from whom they have asked hospitality, by honesty in business, by sincerity and cordiality in relations and the practice of civic virtues.
I would dare to call to witness of these last words the numerous friends who responded to our appeal, the eminent guests who were willing to honour us with their presence.

In this country where patriotism is the most prominent virtue, our sentiments as Frenchmen towards France while tightening the sympathetic links which unite us already to Australians, will constitute in their eyes I am sure, the best guarantee of our loyalty.

I end these words, ladies and gentlemen by asking you to lift your glasses and to drink to the prosperity of our country."

26 January 1905: Valedictory Banquet in honour of M. Biard d'Aunet

LE DEPART DE M. BIARD D'AUNET

Messieurs,

Vous avez entendu et compris la sonnerie de drapeau. Vous êtes accourus en grand nombre et je vous remercie.

En vous voyant, je ne puis me défendre d'un certain sentiment de fierté, car vous êtes notre phalange d'élite et appartenez à cette race de travailleurs qui puise sa vigueur à la source des saines traditions.

Nous nous sommes donné rendez-vous ce soir pour manifester et notre manifestation, toute française, vise le représentant de notre pays, M. Biard d'Aunet, notre Consul-Général pour l'Australie. Il va nous quitter à bref délai pour retourner goûter dans la patrie un repos d'ailleurs bien mérité.

Vous m'avez choisi pour prendre la parole en cette circonstance. Je n'ai pas décliné l'honneur car je connais vos sentiments qui sont aussi les miens. Mais si l'interprète ne se montre pas à la hauteur de sa tâche, que notre consul se tienne compte plus de la bonne volonté que des moyens, plus de fond que de la forme.

Quel est notre but, messieurs? Quels sont nos sentiments? Nous désirons faire à notre Consul des adresses telles qu'il ne puisse les oublier; nous voulons exprimer publiquement tous les regrets que nous cause son départ prochain, nous voulons qu'il sache que ses labours et ses efforts ne sont pas passés inaperçus parmi nous et qu'il laisse derrière lui de durables et excellents souvenirs.

Douze ans comme consul en pays étranger, lorsqu'on est animé du feu sacré, si rare de nos jours, lorsqu'on a conscience de sa mission, représentant un champ d'action bien vaste, n'est-ce pas? Ce champ a été dignement et vaillamment exploité par M. Biard d'Aunet. Avec quel succès et quel prestige! Je n'en veux d'autre preuve que la présence parmi nous de tous ces

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4 "Le Depart De M. Biard D'Aunet", 2.
notables citoyens de la libre Australie qui ont voulu assister à notre banquet, et de la présence surtout de l'Honorable George Reid, Premier Ministre du Commonwealth.

Ils ont tenu à affirmer leurs sympathies [sic] pour notre Consul, et à lui apporter un témoignage tout spécial de leur estime. C'est un honneur dont M. Biard d'Aunet peut se sentir légitimement fier, et qui n'est pas sans rejaillir un peu sur nous.

Et certes, si nous nous reportons quelques années en arrière, nous sommes forcés de reconnaître qu'il a bien mérité de tous. Les circonstances étaient particulièrement délicates et difficiles. Il a fallu toutes les qualités d'un diplomate consommé pour manoeuvrer à travers les écueils des susceptibilités nationales émoussées et éveillées à un pénible degré pour maintenir les rapports corrects et courtois avec les autorités du pays.

Grâce à Dieu l'horizon politique s'est éclairci et deux grandes nations se donnent la main pour travailler à l'oeuvre commune de la paix et du progrès.

Notre petite colonie Française n'a pas l'avantage du nombre, mais il existe de la cohésion et de la solidarité entre nous. L'union fait la force. Ce résultat très appréciable, nous le devons en grande partie à notre Consul qui chaque année présidait à notre fête du quatorze Juillet. Vous savez avec quelle distinction et avec quelle éloquence! C'est, groupés autour de lui, qu'une fois par an nous sentions nos cœurs battre à l'unisson à la seule évocation du mot de Patrie, que nous nous rappelions nos devoirs, celui entre autres, de faire aimer en Australie, d'y faire respecter et estimer les Français et la France.

Des œuvres diverses, Messieurs, resteront pour conserver et perpétuer le souvenir de M.Biard d'Aunet.

C'est sous ses auspices qu'a été fondée la Société de Bienfaisance, pour venir en aide de nos compatriotes indigents; tout récemment la voix de notre sympathique et dévoué Président vous disait en termes touchants le développement et les progrès de cette oeuvre de charité. Je ne puis passer sous silence l'Alliance Française, cette institution prospère dont M.Biard d'Aunet a été l'âme et le zélé propagateur. Ses succès ne sont plus à compter. Les examens qu'elle fait passer sont en honneur; les diplômes qu'elle décerne sont des plus appréciés; les prix spéciaux de langue française, accordés aux écoles sont l'objet de la plus vive émulation. Il me suffira d'ajouter que tous ceux ou celles qui parlent notre langue à Sydney, et ils sont de plus en plus nombreux, qui goûtent les beautés de notre littérature aiment déjà ou sont à la veille d'aimer le pays qui a été son berceau.

N'est-ce pas un résultat dont on doive se féliciter?

Se rattachant à l'Alliance Française, une bibliothèque déjà complète et très variée est tenue à la disposition de nombreux abonnés. Sa popularité s'accentue tous les jours. Les efforts de notre Consul ne se sont pas arrêtés là.

Dans la dernière Assemblée générale de la Chambre de Commerce française, le titre de Président honorifique fondateur lui a été décerné; à la nouvelle de son départ, les membres de la Chambre, spontanément, voulant rendre à César ce qui appartenait à César, reconnaissaient ainsi qu'il avait été le véritable fondateur, qu'il avait dès l'origine guidé la Chambre de ses
conseils, qu'il l'avait maintenue par ses encouragements, et ceci soit dit en passant, nous qui l'avons approché de plus près savons combien la prospérité de nos négociants lui était à cœur, combien il travaillait et se dépensait en vue de nos intérêts commerciaux.

Je voudrais être court, Messieurs, et de ne pas abuser de votre bienveillante attention, mais permettez-moi une dernière allusion à la plume de l'écrivain émérite qui dans le modeste organe français, dont grâce encore à lui, nous avons l'avantage de jouir, nous a tenus souvent sous le charme de son esprit, de ses idées larges, de ses sentiments généreux. Il nous a prouvé que lorsqu'il s'agissait de l'honneur national il n'était capable d'aucune faiblesse, d'aucune compromission. L'amour de la vérité le faisait voler au combat éveillant en lui la jeune ardeur de lieutenant de vaisseau.  

Et puis cette plume, n'était-elle pas au service du faible et de l'opprimé. N'avait-elle pas des frémissements indignés sur la défense d'une noble cause. Ne (illegible)-elle pas d'une note tendre et émue quand elle se consacrait à la mémoire de nos chers disparus?

Messieurs, on peut juger un homme par sa plume. Eh bien, je prétends que nos sympathies et nos regrets s'adressent ce soir non seulement à un homme de talent, mais à un homme de cœur, et surtout à un bon Français.

Ces sympathies, et s'il le permet, notre amitié, basées sur l'estime et la juste appréciation des services rendus, nous les offrons comme tribut de gratitude, nous les offrons au Consul qui nous quitte et qui pendant douze ans a maintenu haut et fermement le drapeau de la France. Et si la joie de retourner vers la patrie et dans sa famille est tant soit peu atténuée par la tristesse du départ, car on ne reste pas douze ans dans un pays sans (ill.) des liens pénibles à briser; s'il en est que nos regrets en dissipent les ombres et en adoucissent l'amertume. Nous faisons des vœux pour que son étoile brille en France du même éclat qu'en Australie, qu'il conserve longtemps encore une santé robuste la plénitude de ses (ill.).

Privilégié, comme il l'est, au point de vue talent et intelligence, avec ses trésors d'expérience précieusement accumulés... sera facile et nous en caressons l'espoir ... continuer dans l'avenir à la grande cause nationale, les services qu'il lui a rendus dans le passé.

Translation by Jacqueline Dwyer:

You have heard and understood the trumpet call, you have come in great numbers and I thank you. Seeing you, I cannot excuse myself from a certain feeling of pride, for you are our elite phalanx and belong to that race of workers which draws its strength from the source of healthy traditions.

We have met tonight to manifest, and our very French manifestation targets the representative of our country, M. Biard d'Aunet, our consul-general for Australia. He
will be leaving us in a short while to return, moreover, to enjoy a well-earned rest in the homeland.

You have chosen me as your spokesman on this occasion. I did not decline the honour for I know that your sentiments are also my own. But if the interpreter does not demonstrate that he is equal to the task, may our consul take into consideration good will rather than the means, substance rather than form.

What is our aim, gentlemen? What are our sentiments? We wish to direct our words to our consul, words that he cannot forget; we wish to express publicly all the regrets caused by his coming departure, we want him to know that his toil and his efforts have not passed unnoticed amongst us and that he leaves behind him lasting and excellent memories.

Twelve years as consul in a foreign country, when one is animated by the sacred flame, so rare nowadays, when one is conscious of one's mission, representing a field of action so vast, is it not? This field has been worthily and valiantly exploited by M. Biard d'Aunet, and with what success, and what prestige! I wish for no other proof than the presence amongst us of all these eminent citizens of free Australia who have been willing to take part in our banquet, and of the presence of the Honourable George Reid, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth.

They desired to affirm their good feelings towards our Consul and to bear him a special testimony of their esteem. It is an honour of which M. Biard d'Aunet can legitimately feel proud, and not without it reflecting a little on us.

And certainly, if we take ourselves back a few years, we are forced to recognize that he has deserved credit from all. Circumstances were particularly delicate and difficult. It required all the qualities of an accomplished diplomat to manoeuvre across the shoals of national sensitivities, blunted and aroused to an acute degree, to maintain cordial and courteous relations with the country’s authorities. Thanks to God, the political horizon has brightened and two great nations link hands to strive towards the common task of peace and progress.

Our little French colony has not the advantage of numbers, but there exists cohesion and solidarity amongst us. In unity lies strength. This very appreciable result we owe in great part to our Consul, who each year presided at our Bastille Day celebrations. You all know, with what distinction and with what eloquence he accomplished that! It was at his side that once a year our hearts beat in unison at the very mention of the word 'Patrie', that we remembered our duties, in particular, to make Australia love, respect and esteem France and its people. His legacy of good works, gentlemen, will preserve and perpetuate the memory of M. Biard d'Aunet.

It is under his auspices that the Benevolent Society to aid our indigent compatriots was created; quite recently the voice of our kindly and devoted President (Dr. Rougier) told you in touching terms about the development and progress of this charitable work.
I cannot pass under silence the Alliance Française, this prosperous institution of which M. Biard d’Aunet has been the soul and the zealous propagator. Its successes are there for all to see. The examinations held under its auspices pay it honour; its diplomas are highly appreciated; the special prizes in the French tongue awarded to schools are the subject of the most lively emulation.

It suffices to add that all those, men and women, who speak our language in Sydney, and their number is ever increasing, are more and more numerous, who enjoy the beauty of our literature, love already or are on the verge of loving the country which is its cradle. Is this not an outcome for self-congratulation?

Attached to the Alliance Française, an already complete and very varied library is at the disposal of a great many members. Its popularity is increasing every day, but the efforts of our consul did not stop there.

At the last Annual General Meeting of the French Chamber of Commerce, the title of Honorary Founding President was conferred on him; at the news of his departure, the members of the Chamber, spontaneously, wishing to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, recognised that he had been the veritable founder, that it was he who had from the very beginning guided the Chamber with his advice, that he had maintained it through his encouragement, and, may this be said in passing, we who were privileged to be close to him know how much he cared for the prosperity of our traders, how much he worked and devoted himself selflessly to the well-being of our commercial interests.

I would like to be brief, gentlemen, and not take advantage of your kind attention, but permit me a last allusion to the pen of the emeritus writer who, in the modest French organ which, again thanks to him, we have the advantage of enjoying, has often held us under the spell of his wit, of his wide-ranging ideas, of his generosity of sentiment.

He has proved that when it was a matter of national honour he knew of no weakness, no compromise. Love of truth made him fly into combat, rousing in him the ardour of a young ship’s lieutenant.

This pen, then, was it not in the service of the weak and the oppressed? Did it not tremble with indignation in the defence of a noble cause? (ill.) it not a tender and emotional note when dedicating itself to the memory of our dear departed?

Gentlemen, one can judge a man by his pen. Well, I claim that our feelings of affection and of regret are directed not only to a man of talent, but to a man of heart, and especially to a good Frenchman.

This regard, and if he will allow, our friendship, based on esteem and a just appreciation of services rendered, we offer as a tribute of gratitude, to the consul who is leaving us, and who for twelve years has firmly held high the Flag of France.

And if the joy of heading back towards the homeland and his family is a little attenuated by the sadness of departure, for one does not stay twelve years in a country without
(ill.) forging links painful to sever; if it is so, then may our regrets dissipate the shadows and soften the bitterness.

We pray that his star will shine in France with the same brilliance as in Australia, and that he will keep his robust health for a long time (ill.)..... the plenitude.

Privileged as he is from the point of view of talent and intelligence with his ... of experience preciously accumulated...will be easy and we cherish the hope ... to continue into the future to render to the great national cause the services that he given in the past.

14 July 1908: National Day Speech

FÊTE NATIONALE FRANÇAISE

Mr Georges Playoust then took the floor, again speaking in French:

Pourquoi sommes-nous réunis ici ce soir? Je vais essayer de vous le dire, Messieurs. Nous sommes réunis parce que cette date du 14 Juillet a battu le rappel dans nos coeurs Français; parce que nous savons que là-bas sur le sol natal les coeurs sont tout à la joie, tant aux champs qu'à la ville; que nous couleurs flottent à toutes les demeures, riches et pauvres, et en particulier à l'humile toit de nos ancêtres, rappelant les gloires du passé, affirmant les fiertés du présent, et accentuent les espérances de l'avenir; parce que nous sentons que les liens qui nous rattachent à la mère patrie sont plus forts que jamais; parce que pour tout dire, nous nous souvenons.

Ah! Messieurs, que nous rappelle le Pays à qui pour la plupart en sommes séparés depuis des années.

Il nous rappelle le foyer, c'est à dire le berceau de l'enfance, les caresses d'une mère, d'une sœur, et les exemples d'un père, le collège et les premières ardeurs, nos jeunes poitrines s'ouvrant à l'amitié, notre adolescence enfin, et nous rappelle le régiment. Et nos regards tournés vers l'Alsace-Lorraine et nos beaux rêves de revanche, hélas irréalisables. Ceux d'entre vous, Messieurs, qui appartiennent à notre génération comprendront mon langage.

Le Pays nous rappelle encore nos débuts de carrière, et nos premiers amours; il nous rappelle tout ce qui a fait de nous des hommes, tout ce qui nous encourage et nous soutient dans la vie parfois bien ingrate.

Non, Messieurs, nous ne pouvons laisser passer un jour de notre Fête Nationale sans tressaillir dans notre âme de Français, et nous avons éprouvé le besoin de nous grouper pour fêter, bien que sur un sol étranger, ce glorieux anniversaire, devant lequel tous les partis s'inclinent, oubliant leurs rancunes pour ne penser qu'à la Patrie.

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6 “Fête Nationale Française”, 2.
Oh! En vous regardant, Messieurs, je vois bien que j'ai touché chez vous la corde sympathique, et que vous accueillerez avec toute l'enthousiasme qu'il comporte le toast que je vous propose, celui de la France.

Qu'elle soit toujours heureuse et prospère, puissantes et respectée, au premier rang dans la littérature, les arts et la science, à l'avant-garde de toutes les idées, de toutes les découvertes qui peuvent bénéficier l'humanité!

Et nous, soyons et demeurons toujours fiers et dignes enfants!

Translation by Jacqueline Dwyer:

Why are we assembled here together tonight? I will attempt to tell you why, gentlemen.

We are assembled because this date of the 14th July has beaten the drum in our hearts of Frenchmen; because we know that over there on our native soil hearts are full of joy in the fields, as well as in the city, that our tricolour flies on every dwelling, rich and poor and in particular the humble roof of our ancestors, recalling the glories of the past, reaffirming the pride of the present and emphasising the hopes of the future, and because we feel that the links which bind us to the motherland ('mère patrie') are stronger than ever, because, to say it all, we remember.

Ah! Gentlemen, What does the 'Pays' (Home) remind us of, from which most of us have been separated by several years? It reminds us of the hearth, that is to say the cradle of our childhood, the caresses of a mother and sister, and the example of a father, the College and the first ardours, our young hearts opening to friendship, our adolescence. Finally it reminds us of the regiment and glances turned towards Alsace-Lorraine with our beautiful dreams of revenge, alas, unrealizable. Those of you who belong to our generation will understand my language. Home reminds us all of the beginning our careers, and our first loves; it reminds is of everything which has made men of us, everything which encourages us and sustains us in a life which is sometimes quite thankless.

Now, gentlemen, we cannot let this National Day of ours pass without a flutter in our French souls, and we have felt the need to get together to celebrate even on foreign soil, this glorious anniversary before which all the parties bow, forgetting their grudges to think only of the Fatherland.

Oh, I can well see, looking at you, gentlemen, that I have touched in you a sympathetic nerve and that you will welcome with all the enthusiasm that it requires the toast of that I propose, that of France.

May she be always be happy and prosperous, powerful and respected, in the first rank of literature, arts and sciences, in the avant-garde of all the great ideas, of all the discoveries which can benefit mankind.
As for us, let us be and always remain proud and worthy children.

Toasts to France, the Consul-General, to Australia and particularly to New South Wales.

**14 July 1909: National Day Speech “This Fairyland”**

Comments by *Le Courrier Australien* are translated: 7

M. Georges Playoust, président de la Chambre de Commerce Française, a été accueilli par des applaudissements chaleureux et prolongés. Lors que le silence s'est rétabli, il a prononcé en anglais d'une voix vibrante, le discours suivant, qui a été fréquemment interrompu par les marques d'approbation des convives.

Translation by Jacqueline Dwyer

Mr. Georges Playoust, President of the French Chamber of Commerce, was greeted by warm and prolonged applause, and when silence returned, he pronounced in English in a vibrant voice the following discourse, which was frequently interrupted by marks of approval.

*Speech continues in English*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was told: "Make a short speech, and try and be as nice as you can to our Australian friends". As far as being nice to my friends, how can I help it when I look at so many gentle ladies, such a fine display of bright and soft eyes as would entertain the most exacting man possible? How can I help it when I look at so many distinguished citizens of free Australia? I bow to Mrs. Hughes, the wife of the chairman of the Executive Council. I bow to all the ladies.

I welcome heartily all our visitors to that great national gathering of the French in Sydney, and I am proud to see such a large gathering of the citizens of free Australia. In coming in such large numbers to take part in our national picnic Australians are doing our nation a great honour, which is fully appreciated. By their presence they are extending to the French colony in Sydney a real mark of friendship and sympathy, and it is only right and proper that I should extend a hearty welcome to Mr. Waddell, the State Treasurer. I have not the pleasure of personal acquaintance with this gentleman, but I know that he has a great reputation both as a private citizen and as a public man, and the wealth of New South Wales may well be trusted in his hands. I greet with pleasure the Lord Mayor of Sydney who so worthily enjoys the confidence of his fellow citizens. His task is big, but we all know that the bigger the task the better he likes it, and he is enjoying this proud position for the third term. Nature has given you a beautiful harbour, and (?) if he is allowed, the Lord Mayor will make of Sydney the prettiest city under the southern sky. (Applause)

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7 “Fête Nationale Française”, 2.
Every country has an anniversary or a national fête. Today we feel rather inclined that way. Surely you will forgive the excess of national vanity. If it is a failing, surely it is one of yours too, and one for which people admire you, a young fast-growing nation.

Who would blame children because they are over-fond, over proud of their own mother? Now who can deny that France has contributed much to the emancipation of modern races and done a great deal in the cause of humanity and civilization? Glorious is the scroll of great men in all branches - Art, Literature, Sciences!

In the history of nations as in the life of individuals, there are many ups and downs. They evolve and take turn in the supremacy of the world. I must say our country has had its days of glory and reverses, but we must be satisfied that we must occupy still a dignified place in the ranks of nations and that we can still be proud of our Fatherland.

We have special qualities and faults. Taken as a whole, although I say it myself, we deserve your friendship. When we love, we love well, and we know how to be loyal to our friends. Ladies and gentlemen, we are happy indeed to live in this land. We admire the people we are mixing with and we endeavour to show ourselves to be good citizens.

No doubt some of us will end our days in Australia and, when the time comes, lie down for the eternal rest but better than our bones, we will give you our children, children of our own flesh and blood, whom we have taught to believe in God, to obey the laws of the country, to fulfil all their obligations and duties to society; we will leave behind our boys and girls, who may, for love is universal and knows no special Fatherland, who may marry your girls and boys and shall, if they follow traditions, prove good husbands and wives.

Therefore I trust that in years to come, when Australia has become the great nation she promises to be, I trust that on the list of celebrated citizens, in that list that should be written in golden letters to be transmitted as an example to posterity, will be found some French-spelling names of which people will say: "they belonged to the grandsons of those Frenchmen whom our fathers years ago welcomed in their midst.

Also, if some enemy threatened the shores of this fairy land, I am sure that the blood of those who, fifty five years ago, fought side by side with the English, on the banks of the Alma and at Inkerman, will run just as good, just as valorous in the veins of their progeny.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think I cannot do better in concluding, than to call on you to drink to the prosperity of France and Australia together, united by the most cordial ties of friendship and sympathy.

1 October 1909: Letter to the Editor regarding Wool Brokers Dispute

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir- Why are the buyers so stubbornly resolute in upholding what they consider their rights?
Allow an old buyer to try and answer that question for the sake of all concerned, for
the Information also of outside people who take an interest in the welfare of the country,
and, judging by the facts exposed by the press, cannot understand how such a seemingly
small difference between sellers and buyers has led to a very much regretted deadlock. I
will give here some preliminary explanations.

The wool staple, on account of its special nature, cannot be treated as other commodities; it
varies to infinity. Its purchase is very complex, based on quality, fineness, and yield. Buyers are
shown a very small proportion of what they buy and ship. The fullest competence, the greatest
circumspection, are expected from them on the part of their principals and clients, and
mistakes meet with very little indulgence at home. Consequently, any neglect in the way of
showing the wool, any error or inaccuracy, or indifferent condition, may cause grave
disappointment and serious loss, as the buyers are guided only by a few sample bales.

They must, therefore, be protected by some regulations, protection upon which rest
the security and confidence absolutely necessary in the greatness of their operations. Is
it vulgar boasting to say that 1,450,000 bales were bought last season in the
Commonwealth for a sum of about £25,000,000? Our body has been entrusted with such
considerable interests, and does it look abnormal that we, the responsible people, should
defend them? Of course, if sellers could understand the necessity of showing the whole of the
offerings, some of the regulations could be dispensed with. They are unable to do so now, so
we must abide by the present state of things.

Those regulations have been the result of careful study and yearly gained experience on the
part of buyers and sellers. Contrary to what outside persons think, they are not In any way
liable or subject to common law, and that Is the principal reason why we dread
the introduction of the lawyer element.

If buyers are deprived now of their right of control, which was granted to them by the means of
a joint committee in the disposal of penalties, according to articles 19 and 50 of their
constitution, it means that the protecting regulations remain without the proper sanction, and
may become a dead letter.

The sellers say, let an independent arbitrator only sit in judgment in all litigious questions, and
determine the flues. To that we reply, our regulations are of such a technical nature that
ordinary business people not acquainted with the wool trade may not (the same would apply
to us outside of our staple) gauge the necessity, the opportunity of them, and judge the
infractions in the proper spirit.

I think I am justified in summing up the situation as follows:- On the one side of the scales, the
care of the interests of buyers' principals and clients, which amounts to a sacred duty; on the
other side, the mere objections of the sellers, sprung up unexpectedly, which, as far as we are
aware, belong to the sentimental order.

The latter talk about the indignity of the fine inflicted by the joint committee. Still, they know
the fines are mostly insignificant, and inflicted especially as a caution and warning. How can
such fines reflect upon the integrity and honour of a firm unless that firm chooses to break the
regulations over and over again in a malicious manner? In that case no consideration should be shown, nor deserved.

Besides, the buyers feel (just as well to be candid and plainspoken) that the sellers want to throw off the yoke that some of them have been writhing under the existing regulations. Then a series of reforms doing away with what are supposed to be the buyers' privileges will be brought forward, and forced upon them, their restricting power once broken under cover of special solicitude for the poor squatters.

I refer my readers to the wool report of the "Sydney Morning Herald," Saturday, 25th ult. If that article does not reflect the ideas of the associated sellers, let them say so; it will help much in the present acute situation. If, on the other hand, I am not mistaken, let them come forward like men and ventilate all their grievances.

We are not biased by self-interest and self-love. We don't object to reforms if they are for the good of the trade. We are ready to meet in conference with sellers and squatters, and prove to the latter that we are their true friends, as well as, if not better than, some others. But we want to safeguard the great interests entrusted to us, to retain to that effect our share of joint control, to have a say in the conduct of the wool business, in which we are so deeply involved.

A few more words to finish. During the winter pourparlers our executive had consented to give one preponderant vote to the sellers' side in all matters concerning them. Not later than last Saturday they consented to the narrowing down of the judicial committee to the two chairmen, with the addition of some independent gentleman, the three to have an equal vote. Are not those two proposals, which were refused without even discussion, sufficient proof of our spirit of conciliation, at the same time of our confidence in the impartiality of the sellers'? Did we not thus show that in our mind the question of supremacy takes second place after the good understanding, and harmony of both associations when or where the welfare of the trade is concerned?

I am, etc., GEORGES PLAYOUST.

14 July 1911: National Day Speech

The following is a copy of the English speech from Le Courrier Australien, and Jacqueline Dwyer's translation from the French of the newspaper's interspersed comments.9

He firstly thanked his Australian friends for their presence:

A tout seigneur tout honneur (Honour to whom honour is due). Firstly Mr Holman who, notwithstanding his many occupations, has come to give us proof of his good feelings towards France. And I will remark here with gratefulness that whoever has been the political party at the head of affairs, we have always found the same kind support and courtesy on 14th July.

Then General Gordon and this elite of businessmen:

9 "Fête Nationale Française", 2.
who by their presence render testimony to the sound principles which guide our transaction.

Then the everyday friends:

We feel that they have got a soft spot for us French people, and through their channel we hope to take root deeper and deeper in the heart of the Australian young rising nation.

Then the ladies crowded around Mrs. Holman, and he gives to Australian women the tribute of grace and beauty, which they merit:

There has lately been a rather lively discussion about the beauty and charm of Australian women. I am not prepared to say that they possess the artistic perfection of figure, the classical purity of form, and beauty of eye that would secure for them the prize in the contest for the championship of the world. My experience in these matters is too limited. But there is one thing I do know for certain; and that is that mentally and physically they can hold their own in every way, and they are in fact a splendid illustration of what the better half of the human kind should be.

There is no doubt that you Australians have a great future before you. I remember reading an account of what was said at one of the Coronation banquets in London. Lord Chelmsford called your country's land of infinite variety and possibilities. Possibilities call forth responsibilities, and Mr. McGowen added that Australia required people for the interior if they wanted to hold Australia for the Empire. Nobody can deny the authority of those gentlemen. Immigration is very good; but don't you think there are some means more simple and more natural to obtain that national object.

Well I don't think that this is the proper time or the proper spot to discuss a problem of such importance. I do not dare to have the boldness to suggest any measure to Ministers, but if I were one of them I am afraid I should be tempted to put a tax on those horrible incorrigible bachelors. They don't understand their own happiness and most likely they have made more than one beauty's eyes shed tears. And don't forget that General Gordon wants a regular supply of cadets. What would you do if the supply were to run short? This sally caused an explosion of laughter.\(^\text{10}\)

Continuing, Mr. Playoust asks himself what are the reasons for so much friendship and sympathy on the part of Australians.

"I will not be far from the mark if I say that you are fond of us because, very proud of your origin, ready for all sacrifices if needed to maintain the greatness of the Empire, and to safeguard the integrity of your own land, you know that we are fully justified in remaining attached for our dear old France, because bound, many of you, by strong family ties to the land of your birth, you understand so well that our hearts beat, our eyes moisten, when we remember our childhood, our youth, the college life, the proud time spent under the national flag, when we remember our French houses, however humble they may have been, because you understand so well that we could not, and would not deny the blood that runs in our veins.

\(^\text{10}\) A century later no-one would have laughed at this naivety.
I will not be far from the mark if I say that we have got another love in common, the love of liberty, the liberty for which our ancestors fought so hard.

Mr Playoust extends himself on the great future that Australians have before them, and he closes by congratulating them on their ideal, which he discovered in the epitaph of one of their young academics:

"SCHOLAR, ATHLETE AND GENTLEMAN."

Four words only but how characteristic. They have all the facilities to obtain the first two qualities, As for the third, which crowns the two others, that of 'gentleman':

A man of refined feelings, full of consideration for others, the stuff of a first class citizen'. It is within the reach of everybody; it is self-taught, a matter of self-will, and self-control. Some may be fair scholars, indifferent athletes, but all, rich and poor may be gentlemen.

Mr Playoust then proposed the toast:

"The future and bright prospects of Australia and New South Wales in particular."

14 July 1913: National Day Speech¹¹

Georges Playoust expressed himself in English, and he was fully reported by Le Courrier Australien. Translation of French comments by Jacqueline Dwyer:

Two years have elapsed since I had the pleasure on the 14th July to stand in your midst. Looking over this brilliant gathering I feel happy to recognize many familiar faces. We may show more signs of wear and tear but I am sure our feelings have not undergone any change; hairs may turn grey or get thinner, good looks may be impaired. It does not matter so long as the heart remains young, keeps warm and beats in the right place.

It is my privilege to address you today. You have to endure my beautiful French accent. I can certify it is not by choice that I inflict on you such a punishment.

I see round those tables a good few French people. Some have lived a long time in Australia and some have become, as a matter of fact, Australian citizens. Some have been born in this country and have been claimed as British subjects. By the by you might have noticed that more than one little Frenchy in the ranks of the cadets, when some weeks ago they were marching through the streets of Sydney, eliciting wonder and admiration by the splendid showing they made. Some also, at the call of business, travel to and fro from one hemisphere to the other, and continue to make tighter the bonds between Australia and France.

But we have not been left to ourselves. We are surrounded by a little crowd of Australian and English friends. To them will be due in great part the success of our national fête. I would

¹¹ "Fête Nationale Francaise", July 18, 1913, 2.
reproach myself severely if I did not find a special word of gratitude for the ladies, whose sweet
presence and captivating charms we appreciate fully.

I need not ask why you are taking part in our rejoicings. I can read it in your eyes, I can see it in
your smiles. You have availed yourselves of the opportunity offered to show your good feelings
to us, the children of France.

Therefore on behalf of the French colony of Sydney, I welcome you all heartily and thank you
for such a magnificent display of sympathy. I only wish I could do it in more adequate and
suitable terms.

You will admit that we are really indebted to the Honourable D.R. Hall, the Minister for Justice,
for having come in person, accompanied by his wife. Surely we can only feel flattered to see
one of the most prominent figures in NSW sitting by the side of the consul.

It was the kind intention of the Premier, the Hon. W.A. Holman to honour us by being here
today. We regret that he was prevented from doing so, for we know for certain he does not
dislike dear old France. At least we will find a valuable compensation in the presence of his
worthy wife, to whom we are pleased to present our respects.

And now I have fulfilled the most agreeable part of my task, I must fall back on topics which
have previously been more or less exhausted on similar occasions. Well it seems to me that
certain things can be repeated over and over again without causing satiety.

Allow me to make a very simple comparison. Do children ever get tired of praising their
mother? Even suppose that on some special anniversary or birthday, they be guilty of
exaggerating too much, would any friend take it in bad part? I do not believe it, so I can without
great apprehension run the risk of your indulgent criticism and declare loudly that if two years
ago we were justly proud of our motherland, we are still justified in being proud of her today.

Of course it would be absurd and ridiculous to try and monopolize virtues and qualities which
belong to all nations. Tell me, if I go too far, that France still keeps the lead in fine arts, that she
is not the last in letters and sciences. Indeed, numerous are the French artists, physicians and
learned men of all branches who shed a glorious light over their native land. Does not France
hold the place of honour in the long sad list of those brave aviators who have lost their lives
and still die every day in the bold attempt at conquering the skies?

And then politically speaking. Is France not listened to in the so-called Concert of Nations? Does
she not cooperate with all the great nations for the maintenance of peace and the settling of all
the troublesome questions?

I come to the more delicate point. I was asked some little time ago by an Australian friend "You
pretend that France is a peaceful nation. How can you explain the increase of her army and
those recent extraordinary measures which may be considered a threat and a provocation?
That question which has a certain appearance - only the appearance - of justice makes me feel
somewhat sore, the more so because I remember having just read the same insinuations in
some English newspaper extracts. I will leave it to you to judge.
France is imbued as well as any other civilized nation with those undeniable truths that peace is a boon, the source of prosperity; that on the contrary war is a curse, something nowadays horrible, the enemy of moral progress, dragging behind all sorts of evils. That being understood, follow me further. Is not existence the first duty of man? Is it not his duty to provide for his own existence, the existence of his dear ones, to work very hard all his life for that purpose?

Is it not also the first duty for a nation to exist and try and keep intact the patrimony transmitted by her makers, to maintain the glorious traditions of her history? Well how can she exist without independence - independence which alone can secure dignity and self-love. How can she obtain it without strength?

Do not believe, dear friends, that it was on some secret desire of conquest on the spur of some irresistible longing for fresh laurels that France some months ago was stirred up to a climax when the whole nation in a body accepted without hesitation or murmur increased and quite unexpected military burdens.

We were told by those who held the supreme power, those who knew and were responsible for the safety of the Republic; they were told that the adoption of the new military law had become an absolute necessity in order to be and remain a great nation, that she had to rely upon her own efforts and resources first before she could rely upon others. And then what took place?

A feeling of self-preservation shook the masses, a wave of patriotism swept over the whole territory. Numerous voices were heard through the medium of the press, (that wonderful and serviceable instrument of human thought), voices of young men on the threshold of life, of boys till at college and school: "We don't like to spend the three best years of our youth in military barracks, but if it is needed for the good and safety of the Fatherland, then we will accept readily our new obligations, for before all we want our France to exist, proud and free."

Listen to the voices of the mothers: "We have brought up our boys from the cradle to manhood at the cost of innumerable cares and troubles. We love them greatly but if the country calls them to defend the flag, let them go and do their duty."

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, France is peaceful. She loves peace, but peace with self-respect and dignity. Her children hate war, but they would rather die than live with shame.

This is the true answer to the question which put to me, and if I give it publicly it is because I consider it our duty as Frenchmen living in foreign parts to try and dissipate at every opportunity all prejudices and wrong interpretations which may lessen the sympathy of our friends and cause misunderstanding.

I will not impose any longer on your patience. However, as a dinner speech is not complete without a toast, I will propose one which my countrymen are ready to receive with a hearty welcome, the toast of Australia, whose people are so kind, so generous and so hospitable.

To them indeed one can talk of patriotism. They will understand it because they have it in the blood. Let them be of English, Scottish or Irish stock, it does not matter. A new race has been
born in Australia. Even they have a tendency to believe that the old country profits more by Australia than Australia by the old country.\textsuperscript{12}

No doubt Australia, as it has been said often, offers splendid resources and has the greatest possibilities and, mind, there are breakers ahead, and difficult social and industrial problems to solve. Strife between classes should be avoided by all means. Let people realize that labour and capital are not forcibly antagonistic. They are necessary to each other for the development of the country. Instead of fighting they should join hands.

Surely in a country like this, democratic to the core, in which people are respectful of the laws, in which every citizen can rise from the ranks, in which one is considered and treated according to one's personal merit, it should be so easy to attain that merit and strike a ground in common where the best men will meet and combine all their efforts out of pure love, in a true spirit of tolerance, justice and liberty for the happiness of rich and poor, and the greatness of the Federated states of Australia.

Then we will endorse the patriot's words of Mr Watt, the Victorian Premier in London: "Australia is good enough for the best, and the good are not too good for her".

Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink to the future of dear Australia.

\textit{1914 French National Day Speech by Premier Holman}

The happiness and the prosperity of the British Empire were linked with those of the great nation whose annual fete was being celebrated. Sympathy between the French and English races was a duty to the general interests and harmony of the world. It was the hope of every patriotic citizen of both nations that our present friendly relations should continue unimpaired, based as they were on a definite concord and harmony of the ideals of the two great countries, The French and the English had always been the pioneers and the supporters of civilization and it was always when they had worked together that civilization had advanced most rapidly. He referred, amid applause, to the general regret at the absence of Mr. Georges Playoust, and concluded by uttering a toast to the prosperity of France, and the French colony in Sydney.

\textit{1915 Speech for officers of the Zélée and the Kersaint}\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{DINER EN L'HONNEUR DES OFFICIERS FRANÇAIS.}

The Consul-General, Mr. Chayet, presided at the dinner and proposed the loyal toasts, followed by Georges Playoust who spoke entirely subjectively, displaying his own personal feelings:

\textsuperscript{12} He is most likely referring here to the increase of preferential tariffs favouring goods imported from Great Britain, a gesture of loyalty on Australia's part, not reciprocated by the 'Mother Country' till 1919. See The Economic relations between France and Australia. Report of the French Mission to Australia. 1918. p61.

\textsuperscript{13} "Dîner En L'honneur Des Officiers Français", 4.
Nul doute, Messieurs, que nous ne conservions de cette soirée un agréable souvenir. Vous ne serez pas surpris si j'ajoute qu'elle n'a pas été organisée en vue de réjouissance.

Mais n'avons pas précisément le coeur à la joie, ni à la fête. Si nous avons parfois le sourire aux lèvres, nous n'en portons pas moins le poids de nos anxiétés et de nos détresses intimes, mais nous cherchons à le porter bravement, nous voulons ne pas céder en courage à nos enfants qui nous écrivent du fond des tranchées: "Vous qui nous aimez, ne vous tourmentez pas à notre égard, nous ferons notre devoir, et vous n'aurez pas à rougir de nous. Quant au reste, à la grâce de Dieu, c'est pour la France."

Si nous savons encore sourire et sauver les apparences en public, nous ne pouvons pas retenir nos larmes dans l'intimité du foyer.

Oui, nous tous Français tant que nous sommes, par les temps terribles que nous traversons, nous souffrons, plus ou moins peut-être, suivant notre tempérament, suivant l'étendue de nos intérêts matériels compromis, surtout suivant la somme des affections engagées et menacées dans ceux qui nous sont chers, si vous le voulez, suivant le degré des sacrifices que réclame de nous la Patrie en danger.

Mais quoi qu'il en soit, tous nous souffrons, beaucoup, directement ou indirectement, ne serait-ce qu'en vertu de cette solidarité qui unit les hommes du même sang, de mêmes traditions, de mêmes intérêts, et dont nous voyons tant de preuves touchantes éclater tous les jours.

Et dites-moi, pourrait-il en être autrement, quand notre pauvre France est envahie, souillée, martyrisée dans dix départements, quand le sang de nos soldats y coule à flots, quand le sol natal, où s'est écoulée notre enfance, où s'est formée notre jeunesse où reposent nos chers disparus, quand cette terre enfin que nous aimons de toutes les forces de notre être est menacée par des barbares dont les progrès modernes raffinent encore l'horreur des moyens.

Dans les grands cataclysmes qui parfois bouleversent le monde, les hommes se cherchent, se groupent dans un sentiment instinctif de conservation, n'est-ce pas notre cas ce soir dans la crise effroyable que nous subissons. Nous nous sommes cherchés et groupés entre Français et Alliés, nous avions besoin de réconfort et les circonstances ont permis que des membres isolés, éparis de la grande famille française se retrouvent aux Antipodes, pour se serrer la main de l'amitié, mettre en commun leurs anxiétés, échanger leurs espérances, en un mot se retremper au contact les uns des autres,

Et l'occasion, avouez-le, messieurs, se présentait belle, nous l'avons saisie avec empressément. Le Kersaint était dans nos eaux, la soeur cadette de notre belle armée nous tendait les bras. Ah! Avec quel bonheur nous lui souhaitons la bienvenue à 5,000 lieues de France. Elle nous apporte la confiance, non seulement en évoquant les gloires du passé, mais aussi en nous disant les héroïsme du présent. Faut-il nommer le Gaulois, le Bouvet, le Léon Gambetta et bien d'autres, hélas? Faut-il rappeler la conduite sublime de nos fusiliers-marins qui en Novembre dernier, à Dixmude sauvait l'aile gauche des Alliés en s'attachant, se cramponnant au sol labouré par la mitraille, malgré la pression d'un ennemi très supérieur en nombre, et tenaient dix jours au lieu des deux qu'on leur avait demandés pour donner aux renforts le temps donné pour arriver.
Nous l'aimons, notre brave marine de guerre, nous la saluons dans la personne de son Capitaine de Frégate Bonju, de ses lieutenants de vaisseau Roitel et Ladonne, de ces jeunes officiers si sympathiques, si brillants d'énergie et d'intelligence, si vibrants de amour de la patrie qui brûle dans nos veines et qui arrache de nos lèvres, dans un élan commun et irrésistible, le cri de "Vive la France".

Aussi, messieurs, c'est le toast de la France que je vous propose, de cette France qu'ont faite nos pères et que nous voulons conserver intacte. Buvons au courage de ses soldats, au succès de nos armes, et nous n'oublions pas le vaillant concours de nos alliés, concours si précieux et si apprécié, car boire à la France c'est aussi à ceux qui se battent à nos côtés, et mélangent leur sang au nôtre.

Privilégiés sommes-nous ce soir de pouvoir acclamer ce double toast sur le sol hospitalier de New South Wales en présence de son Premier Ministre !'impression encore chaude de ces glorieux exploits de ses enfants aux rives des Dardanelles,

A la France! Aux Alliés, A la Victoire".

Translation by Jacqueline Dwyer:

No doubt, Gentlemen, that we will keep an agreeable memory of this evening. You will not be surprised if I add that it has not been organized with rejoicing in mind.

We do not exactly have our hearts full of joy or of feasting. If we sometimes have smiles on our lips, we none the less carry the weight of anxiety and of our private distress in our hearts, but we seek to bear them bravely, we do not want to be outdone by the courage of our children who write to us from the depths of their trenches "You who love us, do not worry about us, we will do our duty, you will not have to blush for us. As for the rest, with the grace of God, it is for France.

If we can still smile and keep up appearances in public, we cannot always retain our tears in the intimacy of home. Yes, Frenchmen that we are, through these terrible times we are going through, we suffer, perhaps more perhaps less, depending on our temperament, depending on the extent of the compromised material interests, above all depending on the sum of the affections engaged and threatened in those who are dear to us, if you wish, following the degree of sacrifices claimed from us by the Fatherland in danger.

But whatever it may be, we all suffer very much, directly or indirectly, were it only by virtue of this solidarity that unites people of the same blood, the same traditions, the same interests, and of which we see so many touching proofs bursting forth every day.

And tell me, could it be otherwise when our poor France is invaded, defiled, martyred in ten departments, when the blood of our soldiers flows in streams, whenn the homeland where our childhood was spent, where our youth developed, where our dear departed
rest, when finally this land that we love with all the strength of our being is being threatened by barbarians whose modern innovations refine the horror of the means.

In the great cataclysms that sometimes overwhelm the world, men seek each other, form groups in an instinctive feeling of self-preservation. Is this not the case tonight in the frightful crisis we are enduring? We sought each other and grouped together, between Frenchmen and allies. We felt the need to be cheered up, and circumstances permitted that a few isolated members, strays of the great French family find each other in the antipodes to shake hands, break the bread of friendship to pool their anxieties, share their hopes, and in a word to be invigorated by the contact with each other.

And the occasion, you must admit, gentlemen, offered itself beautifully; we seized it eagerly. The Kersaint was in our waters, younger sister of our beautiful army, and stretched out her arms to us. Ah, with what joy we welcomed her at 5,000 leagues from France.

She brings us confidence not only in evoking the glories of the past but also telling us of the heroic deeds of the present. Should one name the Gaulois, the Bouvet, the Leon Gambetta, and many others, alas. Should one recall the sublime conduct of our marines who last November at Dixmund saved the left wing of the Allies by hooking on, by clinging to the land ploughed up by the machine-guns despite the pressure from an enemy largely superior in numbers and held out for ten days instead of the two days that had been requested to allow time for the reinforcements to arrive.

We love our brave wartime navy, we salute it in the person of its commander Bonju, of his lieutenants Roitel and Ladonne, all so likeable, shining in energy and intelligence, so vibrant with this love of the Fatherland which burns in our veins and which tears from our lips in a common and irresistible urge, the cry of Vive la France!

So, gentlemen, it is the toast of France that I propose, of this France that our Fathers made and that we want to keep intact. Let us drink to the courage of its soldiers, to the success of our armaments, and we do not forget the valiant cooperation of our allies, a cooperation so precious and so appreciated, for to drink to France is to drink also to those who those who fight at our sides, and who mix their blood with ours.

Privileged we are tonight to be able to acclaim this double toast on the hospitable soil of New South Wales in the presence of the Premier, still under the warm impression of the glorious exploits of his children on the banks of the Dardanelles.

To France, to the Allies, to Victory!
APPENDIX 3: LETTERS BETWEEN SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILY 1914-1918, EXCERPTS FROM THE WARTIME DIARY OF JACQUES PLAYOUST AND OTHER FAMILY WARTIME DOCUMENTS

All translations are by Jacqueline Dwyer. Spelling mistakes in the letters have been left as originally written.

CONSUL-GENERAL MOBILISATION NOTICE

AVIS

La mobilisation a été décrétée par le Gouvernement français et a commencé le 2 Août.

Tous les Français en état de servir doivent, par conséquent, rejoindre à leurs frais, leur corps d’affectation dans le plus bref délai.

Ceux qui n’auraient pas les moyens de s’y rendre à leurs frais devront déposer au Consulat Général une déclaration écrite à cet effet.

Ils recevront alors une requisit ion pour un paquebot français.

Le prochain départ pour MARSEILLE aura lien, à moins d’avis contraire, le 2° de ce mois, et celui pour NOUMEA, le 10 courant.

Sydney, le 2 Août 1914

Le Consul Général

A. CHAYET.

Translation:

Mobilisation has been decreed by the French Government and takes effect on the 2 August.

All Frenchmen capable of serving must consequently join at their own expense their assigned military corps as quickly as possible.

Those who have not the means to do so should deposit a written declaration to this effect.

The next departure for Marseilles will be the 29th of this month, and for Noumea on the 10th of this month.

Sydney, 2 August 1914

Consul General

A. Chayet

14 “AVIS”, 2.
LETTERS

22 August 1914: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

P&O. S.N.C S.S.
22 Août 1914.

My very dear Brothers and Sisters,

A line to wish you again good-bye & as elder brother permit me to give you a little advice. In a critical moment like this everybody has got to do his little best and I'm sure that everything is going to run smoothly at "Murrulla". If anything goes wrong ring up Uncle Joseph. He is a friend indeed I'm sure he will do everything for you. But I do hope that Father & Mother will not be delayed too long. If you get any news of his whereabouts wire me at Fremantle. As regards funds for the present at least you need not worry but the greatest economy "est a l'ordre du jour" (is the order of the day).

As for René, I cannot help but admire him for volunteering but I must say his underhand way of dooing [sic] it is not by any means praiseworthy. If I am right he will be called under the colours this year and in wartime there is no 'sursis' (deferral) and in France he would be considered a deserter. Anyhow, Uncle and Alfred will talk the matter over and in Father's absence he must abide by their decision as he is not yet 21 years old.

Wire me at Adelaide when all has been decided.
With very best love to you all.
I remain your devoted brother

Jacques

[Across the writing he added:]

My heartfelt sympathy is with Marguerite but let her bear up & think that her husband is dooing [sic] his duty. There is an exceedingly good chance that he will not go to the front & if he does there is only a very small percentage of them that get hurt."

Undated Letter from Jacques Playoust to his aunt by marriage, Mathilde Leplat (Mme Emile Leplat)

Un petit "piou-piou" Francais qui vient vous souhaiter le bonjour. Voila 15 jours que je suis arrive. J'ai ecrit souvent dans le Nord sans pouvoir obtenir de reponse.15 Pouvez-vous me donner des nouvelles? Est-ce que Stephane est en France? Il se trouvait en Amerique avec Pere et Mere lors de la mobilisation et je ne les ai pas vu avant de partir. Je m'habitue assez bien à

15 Le Nord is the name of a ‘Département’ in France of which Lille is the capital.
mon nouveau metier. Nous sommes environ 120 dans la companie, reservistes et
convalescents. On prepare un nouveau convoie qui doit partir sous peu. Si je dois partir avec
eux bien que je suis loin de connaitre le metier a fond je tacherai de me debrouiller et de faire
mon devoir en bon Francais.

Tres affectueux souvenir,
Jacques Playoust
Compliments a Marie.

Translation:
A little footslogger who greets you, It is a fortnight since I arrived. I have written
frequently to the North without being able to obtain a reply. Can you give me any
news? Is Stéphane in France? He was in America with Father and Mother when
mobilisation was declared, and I did not see them again before leaving. I am getting
quite used to my new trade. There are about 120 in the company, reservists and
convalescents.

A new convoy is being prepared which is expected to leave soon. If I am to leave with
them, even though I am far from knowing my job I will try to manage and perform my
duty like a good Frenchman.

With my affectionate good wishes.
Jacques Playoust
Compliments to Marie.

18 February 1915: Letter from Stéphane Playoust to his cousin and God-daughter,
Gabrielle Playoust

My dear little Gabrielle,

I was pleased to receive your letter and much appreciate the effort you made in writing it.

I am glad you think of me and I also do of you and your dear family. I am no more at Limoges
and if you or your family write again please address it to Mme Emile Leplat, 9 Rue Marbeuf,
Paris, who will forward it on to me. I left on the 2nd January and am now fighting for my
"chère Patrie" which I love, and also to liberate the north of France, and all our people there.

I have news from an uncle at Tourcoing. You will pleased to know that everything is in a normal
state, that the inhabitants are not lacking in food and are not molested. This is confirmed from
a second cousin of mine who has just arrived in Paris from Roubaix via Holland.

They need not be anxious about Antoinette. It is a pity the poor girl did not do as she was told
and return to the school in Paris.
Father and Mother are now in France. I have just got a letter from them. Poor Jacques is still in
the hospital sick with fever. He is better now they tell me. Your brother Jean saw father and
mother at Limoges. I would love to see them also. The weather here is awful: Rain and cold. I
am astonished at the way at I am bearing up. It must be the way to avenge my compatriotes.

I am much more pleased to be here rather than at Limoges. At least I am of some use. I fear
neither bullets nor shells. I only want to do a dozen times my share, and then happen what
may. So far the bullets have spared me. Many times they have stuck at my feet, or whizzed past
me and above my head. God spares me so far and I should not be astonished if I come out
alright in the end.

My dear little Gabrielle, you must pray hard that victory comes to us quickly for this war is
dreadful. Pray for the welfare of your dear brother Jean and if you can, for us all.

My little god-child, I love you and also your dear parents. My heartiest kisses to you all,

Stéphane Playoust

PS I have just received a first letter from your kind mother. Thank her for me.

1 April 1915: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his younger sister, Eugénie (Ninie)
Playoust

Hotel Metropole, 37 Rue Francois 1er
Champs-Elysees, Paris
1st April (1915)

Dear Ninie,

As you will see by the above address I am now in Paris. How pleased I am you can't imagine.
Liberty once more & finished with those horrid hospitals. Mother spoils and pets me like she
never did. Under this regime I am progressing satisfactorily. I'm putting on weight every day,
too quickly for my poor legs, which still give me trouble. A few days ago after a very
disagreeable night I called the doctor. He was very comforting. He could not do anything. I had
to grin and bear it, have patience & not take too much exercise. He told me that my thigh
muscles were more or less atrophied. I had a little épanchement de synovie (discharge of
synovial fluid). He called a lump I have on my ribs periostite etc. For the form he gave me some
medicine that tastes like wine. It's the most palatable I've had since the beginning.

It's simply wonderful with what rapidity my congé [leave] is going. Only 19 days more. I very
much fear I shall make a sorry soldier if I have to go back to the front at once. They have been
asking for more interpreters of late. Only last week I sat for a written exam. I must have got
through for I'm to go tomorrow & pass the oral. I think I'm pretty sure of a job. First my English
is very fair, then I've been to the front & am already fairly old. (I feel 100 some days now).

16 Blanche Playoust senior, wife of Joseph Playoust.
I got a tremendous lot of letters that have accumulated at my depot. I'm a very busy man answering them all. I don't think I could have managed only the Doctor says I have to be quiet. I got a long letter from Father from Gibraltar & was delighted to hear that he had given German submarines the slip. It's a pretty risky job travelling nowadays. I shall answer it next mail.

Mother appears to be a very busy woman. She has a frightful lot of correspondence. Parcels for her soldiers take time too. You ought to go through her wardrobe. She has a big stock of all sorts of things, biscuits, figs, caramels, butter and jam in tubes etc. A young grocers shop in fact. She gets things by the dozen. "It's cheaper", she says.

Then Aunt Mathilde comes every day for an hour or two. She is just as nice and kind as ever and thinks of nothing but to give pleasure to others. We see quite a lot of Marie too. She has not much to say yet & really wants more the company of young people. Father will have given you all the latest news by now so I'm going to conclude.

Give my love to everyone at Murrulla and Parisian. I'm quite keen to see my little godchild again. Won't she howl if she has the pleasure of seeing me again. Things are going satisfactorily here. Premylzs has fallen & the Russians are on the move once more. I have not the slightest doubt that we shall get through the Dardanelles. The English who have up to now done very little on land are sending reinforcements, 80,000 a week says Mr Moore. We will win without the slightest doubt but it's going to take months yet. I doubt very much that we will get back to Australia before the new year.

Kisses galore from

Jacques

21 August 1915: Letter from Jacques to his sister Marguerite Decouvelaere during the Champagne Offensive

Jacques’ letter to his sister Marguerite Decouvelaere was written on notepaper from a hotel in Bourganeuf, a small town near his army depot at Aubusson, where his unit appears to be on furlough, giving him more time to convalesce from his health problems in April.

Dear Marguerite,

Your letter of the 12th July came along with a letter from Marie & Ninie. Things are pretty good with me just now. I'm beginning to mix with the Bourganeuf higher circles. It all came about in this way. By chance my lieutenant asked me to come and have a game of tennis with him. In spight of my side that still gives me a little trouble and my entire lack of form I beat him fairly badly & became champion of Bourganeuf. Now I give lessons to the Captain's wife and daughters, the Doctor's wife, the lieutenant and several members of the Bourganeuf grand monde.

Its sometimes pretty trying but it all helps to pass away the time. Moreover it has got me quite a lot of little favours from the officers. 'Noblesse oblige' so I have had to get rid of my shabby
old uniform & get one made at my own expense. For here at the depot we get old clothes only & it is only when we go to the front that we get a new rig out.

I have just got a note from poor Paroissien¹⁷. He has earned the Croix de Guerre but paid very dearly for it. In an attack he got more than 14 wounds, his face disfigured, most of his teeth knocked out, his arms, hand and legs badly endomagés (damaged). After six weeks in bed he is again on the mend and has a morale excellent.

I don’t know whether I told you poor G. Wauquiez¹⁸ has died from Typhoid at Bar le Duc & poor Aristide Derousseaux is dead.¹⁹

Mother I suppose has written to you all details about her travels. She promised to return to see me in Bourganeuf but is now hesitating owing to an attack of neuralgia.

Love to all at Murrulla & Woodside. Kiss the kiddies for me. I suppose they have forgotten about poor uncle Jacques. They tell me that my little fieulle²⁰ (god-daughter) is very spoilt. Beware, Marguerite for you will have to pay dearly for it later on.

Best wishes from brother Jacques.

13th November 1915: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his younger sister, Eugénie (Ninie) Playoust

Dear Ninie

I’m afraid it will be some time before the North is rid from the Germans. We who are in front of this splendid combination and trenches and fortins²¹ have no longer any illusions specially after our last attack, we advanced t’is true and took prisoners but not without enormous losses. We are going to win, I have not the slightest doubt but its going to take sometime yet. It will not be a brilliant victory but by usure (attrition).

Winter has started. It is cold and it snowed all the morning

Love, Jacques Playoust.

Undated post card from Marcel Playoust to his mother, Marie-Thérèse Playoust

Dear Mother, arrived in Lyon yesterday. Nothing settled yet but we will probably go to Laval Bonne about 30 kilometres from here. We belong to the 6e Colonial. For the present it’s no use writing as we may be moving any time. I am in this photo taken in Marseille. I have put a cross against myself.

¹⁷ M. Paroissien was a fellow woolbuyer.
¹⁸ M. Wauquiez and Aristide Derousseaux were fellow woolbuyers.
¹⁹ All three of these men were part of the group of reservists who sailed with Jacques on the Malwa in 1914.
²⁰ Marcelle Decouvelaere, his filleule, god-daughter.
²¹ Small forts.
7 January 1916: Jacques Playoust to his cousin, Marie Leplat

Chere Marie,

Merci pour ta lettre du 3 Janvier. Ici nous avons vu le soleil de temps en temps mais son apparition a été très éphémère. Heureusement nous sommes au repos pour q.q. temps a une 10ne de kilomètres du front. Nous sommes logés dans des granges, dans des écuries. Mon logement est de ces derniers bien aéré, il y a des trous de tous les cotés. Les "totos" pourtant sont moins terribles. Ces braves petites bêtes n‘aiment pas beaucoup l‘engrais. Enfin nous nous reposons et nous nous organisons pour une nouvelle offensive.

Ce n‘est pas fort amusant mais puis qu‘il faut avoir du courage, nous tacherons d‘en avoir. Le courrier que je viens de recevoir n‘est pas fort gai. Cette pauvre Marguerite vient de recevoir ces tristes nouvelles, et combien de jeunes femmes se trouvent dans le même cas. Ne réfléchissons pas. C‘est mieux.

Je t‘embrasse bien affectueusement,
Jacques

Translation:

Dear Marie,

Thank you for your letter of 3rd January. Here too we have seen the sun from time to time its appearance was very ephemeral. Fortunately we are at rest for some time at about 10 kilometres from the front. We are lodged in barns and in stables. My billet is in one of the latter, well aired, there are holes on all sides. Still the 'Totos' [lice] are less terrible. These good little beasts don’t care much for manure. Anyway we are resting and are organising ourselves for a new offensive.

It is not much fun but since one must have courage, we will try to have some. The mail I have received from Australia is not too cheerful. That poor Marguerite has just received the sad news, and how many poor young women are finding themselves in the same case. Let’s not think! It’s better!

I embrace you very affectionately,
Jacques

21 January 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his sister, Marguerite Decouvelaere

Dear Marguerite,

What a brave little woman you are! May your sacrifice be of avail. We have still very heavy work in front of us & may the 'casse' [damage] not be too dreadful. We must screw our
courage to the sticking point and hope for the best. What a great consolation religion must be to you! As for me I've thought on matters seriously, in front of death too, & I'm quite satisfied, so please don't worry about me. It does not make me love you any the less.

Courage.
Jacques

18 April 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

This mail from Australia so far has only brought me Roger's letter of the 21st February. It has found me still safe & sound & at rest but after the most terrible week I have ever spent. Even now I can't realise how I'm still alive to tell the tale. This time we went into line at the now famous dead man hill (The Mort Homme). You will have read in the paper of the terrific fighting that has been going on there of late. Well I was in the thick of it all. Sunday the 10th I will never forget. Hardly had we got into position than a terrific bombardment started. For 12 solid hours it lasted, the schweins used nothing smaller than 105 & we remained crouched in our battered trench with our bags on our heads. We did not eat & even the heaviest smoker did not think of lighting his pipe. Towards 8 things quietened down & we immediately set to work feverishly to build up again our trench.

Scarcely had we started than the Boches attacked on our left with inflamable liquid & bombs. Our men had to give ground a little & for a couple of hours we did not know whether we would be cut off or no. Fortunately reinforcement came up in time. During the night we were relieved. As guide I had to go & get the fresh troops a couple of miles away. They only arrived at dawn & I had to hurry to get them in position before the Boches could see them. Personally I could not get away in time & had to remain another day in hell. I got away at sunset that night & it was only at 3 the next morning that I found my company. I had been 3 solid days with one meal, & 1 hours nervous sleep.

Our company was then in reserve about a kilometre from the front. It rained & shelled continuously for the next 3 days & we were on the alirt all the time as the Boches attacked time after time. We were indeed, what remained of us, in a sorry plight when 3 days ago we returned to rest covered with mud & haggard. I've cleaned up now & although already 3 days at rest I'm still, especially morally, upset. Many have gone mad at less. I wonder is it possible to get through this war unscathed?

Still good news from everyone at home. The Brothers with the exception of Stéphane is at the front. Mother & Father write anxiously from Paris for they know things are not well with us. J. Flipo's regiment has followed ours of late & must have had a rough time too. Rumours are that we go back on Good Friday but somehow I think they will have to leave us here a little longer to reform. Best wishes to all & my bon souvenir at Woodside.

From your brother,
Jacques
19 May 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust’s letter to his cousin, Marie Leplat

Chère Marie,

Reçu ton brève petit mot du 13 hier matin en arrivant a q.q. kilomètres en arrière des lignes ou nous sommes en reserve. Encore une fois je suis revenu. Toujours la meme chance. J'ai été enterré pendant quatre heures dans mon gourbis par un obus qui est tombée a l'entrée. Heureusement j'avais une pile et j'ai pu faire un petit trou pour l'air. Je venais d'être relevé de mon poste d'observation de 5 minutes lorsque un obus est tombé en plein dedans et tué celui qui me remplaçait et 7 hommes qui se trouvaient a proximité.

Love to yourself and mother.
Jacques

Translation:

Dear Marie
I received your brief little note of the 13th this morning, on arriving a few kilometres behind the lines where we are in reserve. Once more I have come back. Always the same good luck. I was buried for 4 hours in my dugout by a shell which fell at the entrance. Fortunately I had a battery and was able to make a little hole for air. I had just been relieved from my observation post five minutes earlier when a shell fell right into it and killed the man who was replacing me, and 7 men who were nearby.

Love to yourself and mother.
Jacques

Date: 14 June 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Your mail of the middle of May has brought a little sunshine in my little hole here in 1st. line. The only link that remains of our good life of long long ago. I did not appreciate how happy I was. Still I ought not to complain. We are now in the quietest of secteurs, just near the frontier in front of the famous Bois des Zeppelins near Lunéville which the Boches occupy. Just a few rifle shots & the exchange of a marmite\textsuperscript{22} intermittently to make us remember that we are still at war.

The secteur is wonderfully organised. Fine deep trenches everywhere, barbed wire entanglements in front of them to keep out noxious animals, & a sufficient amount of dugouts

\textsuperscript{22} Large shell.
proof against anything under a 210. Telephones are everywhere & even here though only at the Bon P. C. I have 8 lines to look after. Our gourbi is fairly comfortable, a little table, a bench, & untold luxury, beds of a kind. There is a spring close handy & we are able to get good water at nightfall & enjoy a daily wash. Mais la medaille a son revers [But each medal has its reverse side] & fleas, Totos & huge big rats insist on keeping us company. What a difference all the same with the Mort Homme! Furloughs are continuing though more slowly & I hope to get away middle of July.

Strange coincidence. The other day a soldier in my Cy. Got a letter from a North Sydney High school girl who wished to correspond with a French Poilu. I added a word to his letter. She will be astonished to find a Sydneymite in the same Cy. as her filleul (penfriend) Another funny one. Au repos (at rest) I met an English embusqué (soldier not at the Front) & I chatted up with him & told him I had lived for a long time in Australia. A fortnight later I got a letter from A. du Boisé, an old Riverview boy who is driving a car in the same oeuvre (work). He had come home to join the colours but was captured by the Emden & was only released on parole 6 weeks after but not before seeing 6 other ships sunk by the pirate. That is his reason for being embusqué.

Incidentally I got news from Mrs Hughes who is now in London with her 2 boys who are convalescent. A Melbourne friend who is with the Australians in France has also written to me. He was glad to get to France & leave Egypt but then he had not seen any fighting on this side.

The Boches are still hammering at Verdun. The Fort of Vaux is now in their hands. I'm afraid if they keep up their effort for another month they will have the town but by Gad they will have paid the price. Quite 600,000 men have fallen in the attack & defence of these ruins so far. Italy seems to have recovered herself some. Russia is doing wonders. If only the English can react sufficiently when Verdun is finished we might get a victory not a paix boîteuse (limping peace).

Love to all & bon souvenir to the cousins at Strathfield,

Jacques

16 June 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust letter to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Your mail of middle of April has reached me only a couple of days after the last & it was only a couple of days ago that I answered it.

What the dickens am I going to tell you. Life here in the trenches is monotony personified specially in a quiet secteur. I never leave my hole except to repair the lines (& they scarcely ever break) in my turn, once every two days go to the kitchen about one and a half miles from here to get our modest rations which consists of beef & beans, or beef & potatoes, or rice or macaroni, half a loaf of bread, a quart de jus [black coffee] a quart & a half of pinard (wine).

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23 Battalion Communications Post.
24 Possibly charitable work such as the Red Cross.
Mother sends me heaps of parcels & I assure with that regime they come very à propos. Another very important operation that I forgot is my daily hunt for totos (lice). They give one no rest & I catch a dozen or so every morning. Inconveniences of every kind are gone through now scarcely without a murmur.

First emotion in the secteur for me yesterday. In my turn I was returning quietly with the tucker. When one of the rare marmite that is exchanged during the day fell right in the boyau about 40 yards in front of me. A couple of minutes saved me & as it was I only had to duck down & let the splinters fly over me. Of course our telephone lines were cut & I repaired them on the way. But I had to return a few hours later for the pionniers who came to repair the trench cut it again.

Mother as you must know is going to Vittel on the 20th where with a little luck I will go & spend my furlough with them. I'm sorry it can’t be Paris but I don't want to mention it to them as it may make them delay their cure & its bound to do them good. What do you think of the lucky brothers who were all able to meet in Paris?

I am enclosing a card for little Marie. For a kid her size she writes very well. Keep her at it for its bound to come in useful later on.

Love to all,
Jacques

14 July 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his cousin, Marie Leplat

14 Juillet 1916
Chère Marie,

Vive la France! Elle nous paie aujourd'hui 3 quarts de pinard supplementaire, une bouteille de champagne pour quatre, 100 grammes de jambon, 1 cigar, des bisquits, des petits pois en conserve. Par contre, hier les Boches nous ont envoyé une dégelée d'obus de tout calibre pour la retraite. Nous avons amélioré le feu d'artifice avec nos pièces et de 10h à minuit les feux d'artifice etaient très jolis. Notre bon secteur n'existe plus. Depuis 4 jours on se bat tous les soirs. Les Boches ont pu faire sauter 4 mines il y a 3 jours. Une d'elle a fait un crater de 80 metres de diametre sur 25 de profondeur et nous a enterré 80 poilus vivant, Quelle terrible mort. Lorsqu'elle a sauté j'ai cru que mon gourbis allait s'ebrouer.

J'ai reçu ligne et hamecon. Merci. Pour toi et ta mere un baiser bien affectueux.

Jacques

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25 Connecting trench.
26 A spa town in the Vosges, therefore not very far away.
27 His niece Marie Polin, later McFadden.
Translation:

Dear Marie,

Long live France. She is paying us today with 3 quarts of supplementary wine, a bottle of champagne for 4, 100g of ham, 1 cigar, biscuits, tinned peas. On the other hand, the Boches yesterday sent us a hail of shells of all calibres for the retreat. We improved the fireworks with our guns, and from 10 o’clock till midnight the fireworks were very pretty. Our good old sector no longer exists. For the last 4 days we have been fighting every night. The Boches exploded 4 mines three days ago. One of them left a crater 80 metres in diameter by 25 metres in depth, and buried 80 of our soldiers alive. What a terrible death! When it blew up I thought my dugout was going to scatter.
I have received line and hook, thank you to you and your mother.

Very affectionate kiss,
Jacques

16 July 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

Your letters of the 25th June or thereabouts has just come to hand. I feel pretty tired & in no form for writing. For the last 5 days we have had quite an exciting time. The Boches suddenly woke up on the 12th by blowing 4 mines in front of our lines. These completely destroyed some 300 yards of our lines and buried the occupants, more than a 100 poilus. I was at the time at the telephone in my gourbis about 800 yds. away. The earth shook so that I thought everything was going to come down on top of me.

I went to the craters the next evening. One of them has a diameter of nearly 100 yds with a depth of 25 metres. Immediately the mines were off their was the usual tir de barrages (barrage of fire) & the rush to occupy the crater. We got there first & maintained our positions. Not as lucky the chasseurs on our left lost 2 lines of trenches. They counter attacked the next evening & retook the whole position. All the same it meant several hours excitement, the death of not a few, & some wounded & hell with all my lines. On the 13th July at 10 p.m. as a sort of cheering for the national day. They started to bombard us heavily. We answered with vim. The fireworks must have been splendid but I was quite content to stop at the bottom of my dugout. They may have had the intention of making a small attack but our cannons seemed to have made them more peaceful. Things quietened down towards midnight & we were able to celebrate our fête nationale.

Rations were increased, 3 quarts of pinard (wine, collq.) supplémentaire, 100 grammes de jambon (ham), 150 grammes of tinned vegetables, 2 biscuits, 2 ciggars, a bottle of sparkling wine for 4.

The Germans were not extra annoying. Most of us had managed to buy a little extra & we had a real jollification & yesterday some had a little mal au cheveu (sore head).
Maims c’est la guerre (But there’s a war on) & then you can’t help having the feeling. Today we live tomorrow we die. A current saying amongst the Poilus is ‘Encore une que les Boches n’auront pas’ (Another one the Boches won’t get) when they empty a bottle.

Furloughs still exist in this part of the world & my turn ought to come round soon.

Love to all,
Jacques

Thank Roger for Georges’ photo & his baby. 28

27th July 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Again in July from a new and quiet sector in a forest.

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Received a couple of days ago your mail of 6 & 17th & thereabouts. I thank you all specially Marie [Polin] who was the only one to remember my birthday. Since last writing to you we have again been on ‘The moove’ & occupy a secteur near (censored) 29 We did not waist must time. We started from the trenches at 2 at night, took the cars at 2 the next morning, arrived at destination about 9 & took up our positions at once. Our secteur comprises of a hugue forest about 9 miles square. It is an ideal spot for warfare on the defensive. Only in first line have we trenches & dug-outs. Further back we live in a little huts only in case of bombardment have we shelters. They cant see us & only fire blindly. And all the munitions they have to spare they can use more effectively in other secteurs. I am now telephone boy at the P.C. of a commandant de Sous Secteur. My quarters are very confortable (French spelling). The weather is delightful & the eternal shade is far from been out of place. Under the trees we have a little rustic table & benches were we take out meals & rest & read. We have a nice clean little barrack to sleep in, a bed of kinds, of course no sheets, & our blanket is that we always carry with us. That takes up half, the rest is our exchange (telephone exchange).

Our lines very seldom get out of order & we are about as happy as anybody could be under the circumstances & do you know what we appreciate the most is to be out of those dreadful holes & trenches. You can’t imagine how oppressive they get in the long run. Forest life gets fatiguing in the long run & I should immagine in wet weather very desagreable (French spelling).

I have got no news from René for some time. He is in the Somme & not far if not in the thick of things. 30 In this like all other offensives letters are held back but it is an anxious time for anyone. From all reports the fighting is on a tremendous scale & that means a lot. How many thousands must fall daily.

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28 Probably his nephew Alfred, Rev Alfred Playoust, S.J.
29 It was in the Forest of Parroy, east of Nancy, very near the border of what had been German Lorraine since 1870.
30 René was wounded several times during the war, but it is not known in which campaign.
I still hope to see the end of the war this year. I doubt that the Germans will be able to bear the strain of this general offensive. The Russians are exceeding expectations. The French have not said their last word. The English are putting up a grand fight at last before a very tough opposition. And the Italians are moving too. I think that if I'm still alive & kicking in 6 months I shall have still years to come & annoy you with my hair raising war experiences. These hardships have not made too ‘néfaste’ (disastrous) an impression on me as you will be able to judge by the photographs I enclose. Roger has asked me for one so please give it to him.

Best love to all,
Jacques

23 August 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Your letters of the 10th July have just come to hand. I am en route again. We are leaving the forest tomorrow. Already we gave up our telephone post to the telephonists of the relieve regt. We have come down further back & we are bivouacking as best we can for the night. My bed is a wire hamac (hammock) under a large tree. I've seen worse but hope all the same it does not rain. Things look pretty threatening.

Demain une étape (tomorrow a day's march) of 20 kilometres. Quite enough when you have to carry some 20 lbs. on your back & then we get no real training.

The day after we have a little more to do and then rest and training for a fortnight & then ‘attaque attaque’ for 3 months. Many of us will not see it through. Enfin espérons (Anyway, let us hope). It would not be so bad it was the last effort that would be required of us. Gad, people cant imagine the life that we are leading. At time the morale gets pretty low. What we would give for a broken leg, arm, now. Many would sacrifice either of them to be finished once & for all. I suppose it is right that the lives of millions should be sacrificed for the general welfare. Mais au point de vue personnel c'est atroce, c'est injuste (But from a personal point of view it is atrocious, it is unjust).

Thank you all for your kind wishes and sympathy.

Love,
Jacques

7th September 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

This mail of yours dated the 24th sees me very close to my return in line. Our period de rafraîchissement (refreshment) is drawing to a close, manoeuvres of all kinds every day. The weather too has had a say in the rafraîchir part of it & with the exception of today it has not
ceased raining. Result I have a bad cold & feel the work muchly. But its no good seeing the Major these days unless you have something serious so I battle on. The rumor that we are to entrain on Sunday is increasing. Destination of course 'inconnu' (unknown) but the odds are that it will be the Somme.

It looks as though I'm going up again as Signaleur but this time as Signaleur de Bon. [Battalion Signaller] I don't know that I don't like it better than Telephonist because when we attack we follow the '2nd wave' & of course are much longer in the open than the soldier who has only to reach the trench. When they get there nowadays, the enemy always surrenders. The only real trench fighting that goes on nowadays is in a Boyau de Communication (communication trench) when the enemy wishes to make a barrage & then only very few men are injured. The Signaleur de Rgt follows the Colonel & that is further back. Anyhow I won't do anything one way or the other & continue to trust in my lucky star. Poor Marcel is having a rough time & perhaps even more than me he does not like the game. Stéphane is more lucky & as Mother will have probably told you he is up at la Valbonne following les cours E O de R. He is still a l'abris (sheltered) for a couple of months & then he gets 8 days furlough. You can't imagine how it is appreciated by soldiers.

I'm sorry that Roger will not be able to write to us individually regularly. But les études avant tout (studies must come before everything else) & he must not forget that perhaps before the war is over he may be one of Father's only supports. It is by no means improbable but let us hope that our lucky star will not forsake us. You may only get stingy P.C. from now on for a few months. We expect a tough secteur next time after our comparative quiet.

Love to all
Jacques

10 December 1916: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This mail brings me a letter from Marie and Marg. of the 29th October. I am just back from furlough & have naturally the 'cafard' (depression) a little. Enfin (anyway) I cannot complain under the circumstances I had a splendid holiday, found the old people looking fine. Father was more proud of my Croix than I. He took me round to see our business friends, the Famille Tourquennoise (the Tourcoing family) insisted that I should get my photo taken. Of course there will be one for each and everyone of you. They will be ready in about 10 days & will get mother to send them on to you. It will give you a little patience to wait for the original but one thing can be certain, he will be more than pleased to see you.

I found my regiment in line on my return but this time in a very quiet secteur. Perhaps not so quiet as Parroy but what a change with the Somme. Those before us availed themselves of this to make their quarters as confortable as possible & we are living a trench life 'avec tous les confort moderne' (with all modern comforts). Our dugouts are not perhaps as solid as they

31 Officer's training Course.
32 Marie Polin and Marguerite Decouvelaere, his sisters.
might be but we have berths, tables, benches, and what is still more wonderful, electric light. We use the same force to send a current through the barbed wire in front of our trenches. Hot & cold water showers & a co-operative very well fitted indeed where you can buy almost everything a soldier wants. All this in trenches not more than 800 yards from the Boches. Are they going to leave us spend the Xmas here? In spight of rumors to the contrary I hope they would certainly never moove a division for so short a time.

The morale amongst the civilians is falling. He is beginning to feel the pinch of War. In Paris, coal, sugar & potatoes are hard to get. Everything is getting frightfully dear. Like us he was greatly disappointed with Roumania. He is beginning to realise that the Somme was not the success that could have been expected. The Allies have at last noticed that they want more unity of action, more direction. They have turned over a new leaf & going to have another try. Let us hope for the best.

Best wishes,
Jacques

21 December 1916: Letter from Stéphane [Faf] Playoust to his brother Maurice Playoust

The front of this prophetic postcard pictured a laughing soldier leading a charge calling the celebrated battle battle-cry of Verdun 'On les aura!' (We'll get them!).

21st December 1916

Dear Maurice

You will see by my address that I am now with my new regiment. At present the division is re-organising and reforming.

It will probably be at least another fortnight in our cantonnements (billet). The village where we are is quite decent, but as you say not gay in this rotten weather. I am lodged at the curé’s (parish priest) and have a fine room and comfortable bed. A happy Xmas, with love.

Faf

12 March 1917: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

I rejoined my regiment 2 days ago in line after an absence of 15 days. I found a huge Australian mail, letters from Georges, Marie, Marg, Roger. Thank you all.

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33 Bucharest had fallen to German forces on 6 December 1916.
34 His brothers and sisters.
I had been living at a grand centre d'aviation to do a little signalling with avions (aeroplanes) & observation balloon. The work was interesting, not too severe, and as soon as our work was finished we were as free as birds, sleep & eat where we like. Then we were all taken up for a ride in aero & able to see for ourselves our signals from below. It beats motoring out of sight. Not half as sensational as it's cracked up to be but talk about the view up above. On my way back here I was lucky enough to meet Faf. The first time I've seen him as an officer. He introduced me to his confreres & his Commdt. immediately invited me to stop & have dinner with them. I accepted & after dinner played a few rubbers. Steph & I played together. His extraordinary luck at cards has not left him & the Australians scooped the pool. Bye the bye, Faf is getting very fat.

Now I have settled down to rough times again. Our new secteur is not a pleasant one. The Boches are very (word omitted). They have seen a lot of movement behind our lines & give us no respite. I am here in a little dugout with shells falling all round. I assure I don’t feel too happy. I have only a metre of earth & bricks above me, just about enough to stop a 77. We have had quite a lot of snow lately. The thaw has set in and to make things worse we have mud & water right to the knees in places & when you have to walk through these fully laden as I had to yesterday you can guess the exertion. I am pretty hard now yet I was dead to the world when I arrived.

I saw my C1. Yesterday re a leave for Sydney. He is sending my demande de permission with avis favourable [request for leave with favourable consideration] In Paris they tell me I have a chance. If only I could get away before the next offensive. But it seems too good to be true.

Love to all
Jacques

Undated: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Dear Brothers & Sisters

I must be brief this mail. We are all very busy getting the spring offensive ready. Its only a matter of days now. The artillery is about to begin the ouverture and mighty heavy its going to be. We open the dance as soon as the bombardment finishes.

I'm going to try doubly to get out of this scrap as there is a good chance of getting a furlough to Australia. The joy of getting out of this frightful life & seeing you all again. John is leaving today. I should have left with him if it were easy for a soldier to get his rights. But a poor piou piou (foot-slogger) is less than nothing nowadays.

Love
Jacques

12 June 1917: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his cousin, Marie Leplat
He wrote on P&O writing paper to his cousin Marie.

Ma chère Marie,

Maintenant que je suis à l’aise, confortable et hors de danger je ne veux pas oublier mes bonnes amies qui ont été si fideles pendant ces durs moments et je me vois donc forcer de venir prendre un peu de ton temps. J’espère que ça ne sera pas trop trop désagréable. Si tout va bien nous devons arriver a Port Said demain vers 14 heures. J’ai bon espoir, nous sommes armés d’une piece de 150mm et encadrés de 2 contre torpilleurs et puis ce qu’il y a de plus depuis 3 ans j’ai toujours un veine de pendu.

N’empeche que je ne veux pas faire le malin & comme les autres je ne quitte pas ma ceinture de sauvetage.

Nous ne sommes qu’une 40ne de passagers en premiere et seulement une dame et elle est Turque. Elle voyage avec son mari & son bébé jusqu’a port Said. Les Anglais l’échange pour une famille Anglaise. Forcement nous sommends obliges de la boycotter puisqu’elle est notre ennemie. Peut-être pas plus que ça elle est Francaise.

Voila le danger de se marier avec un étrangers. Le voyage est monotone. Tu n’as pas d’idée comme les dames manquent. Même les vieux s’en plaignent. Le coiffeur est au desespoir. Non seulement il n’a plus de têtes a laver, mais il ne sait pas ecouler ses bonbons, ses bricoles. Les messieurs aussi sont moins coquets et soignent leurs barbes, leurs cheveux de moins près.

Repond moi a Sydney car je ne sais pas si j’aurai un bateau pour rentrer. To your mother and yourself my best love

Jacques

Translation:

My dear Marie,

Now that I am at ease, comfortable and out of danger I do not wish to forget my good friends who were so faithful to me during my difficult moments and I must therefore come and take up a little of your time. I hope it will not be too disagreeable for you.

If all goes well we should arrive at Port Said tomorrow towards 14 hrs. I am very hopeful; we are armed with a 150 mm. gun, and accompanied by two destroyers, and furthermore for the last three years, I have had marvellous luck. However, I do not want to pretend to be clever, and like the others, I do not take off my lifejacket. We are only about 40 passengers in First Class, and only one lady and she is a Turk. She is travelling with her husband and baby as far as Port Said; the English are exchanging her for an English family. Of course we are obliged to boycott her since she is an enemy. Perhaps more than that, as she is French. That is the danger of marrying a foreigner.
The voyage is monotonous. You have no idea how much we miss the company of ladies. Even the old chaps are complaining. The hairdresser is in despair. Not only are there no heads to wash, but he cannot sell his sweets and odds and ends. The gentlemen also are less fastidious, and care for their beards and their hair a little less well.

Reply to me in Sydney, as I do not know if I will be able to find a ship to come back. To your mother and yourself my best love,

Jacques

27 July 1917: Letter from Jacques Playoust to Marie Leplat

27.7.17
Chere Marie
Souvenir affectueux de Bombay. L'hotel ou je me suis echoue apres mon naufrage. Il y a des choses plus polichonne que 24 heures dans une barque en plein ocean! Mon temps n'est pas encore arrive et je suis toujours sain et sauf. J'ai tout perdu, vetements, mouchoirs souvenir de guerre. Love, Jacques.
Meilleur souvenir a ta mere.

Translation:

Dear Marie,

Affectionate remembrance from Bombay. This is the hotel I am stranded in after my shipwreck. There are more amusing things to do than to spend 24 hours in an open boat in the middle of the ocean. My number is not up yet, and I am still safe and sound. I have lost everything, clothes, handkerchiefs, war souvenirs. Love, Jacques
Remember me to your mother.

21 November 1917: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

Messageries Maritimes
Paquebot 'Australien'
21 November (1917)

Dear Brothers & Sisters

The last part of my furlough has started. I am now quite installed in this old tub and after all it is not so uncomfortable as all that. The food is not what it used to be. I have found quite a lot of friends of the family. The purser dined with us at Strathfield. The maître d'Hotel was our cabin steward when last we travelled. I have a large cabin to myself. Fans have been installed in them and they are big.
There is a fair crowd of passengers including a big % of ladies. I have already got a little flirt. Nothing serious but it helps to pass away the evenings. Of course all this is very fine as long as we don’t get submarined. If we do ‘il y aura de la casse’ (There will be considerable damage) for over and above the ladies & children we have more than 600 coolies on board. Fortunately we seem to have that problem well in hand. I have heard optimistic reports from people who ought to know. Anyhow there is one thing certain that there are not many leaf in the Mediterranean.

How are you all getting on? I hope the stay at the Riji is enjoyable. Souvenir affectueux to the Joseph Playoust & best love to you all.

Jacques

We arrive at Colombo this afternoon.

14 December 1917: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

14th December (1917)

Dear Brothers & Sisters

The chances look now very much that we will get to Marseilles after tomorrow. We have negotiated 2/3 of the Mediterranean safely and have just leaft Bizerte accompanied by two torpedoe and a sloop to pick us up in case of accident. A couple of Hydro-avions (sea-planes) went out to scour the seas for us. How much better organised everything seems now than in the month of May. Indeed our fleet had got so big when we leaft Malta that I got frightened & thought we might have secret orders to take Kiel Harbour. Just fancy 3 merchant ships, 6 torpedoe destroyers & a sloop.

The old Australien is vibrating hard and evidently smelling the stables. She has only been going so-so & even stopped twice in the middle of the trip. Fortunately their were no Boches about. Anyhow I shant travell on the Messageries again in a hurry. Everything is running short & when you grumble the eternal excuse is ‘C’est la guerre’ (Don’t you know there’s a war on). What laisser-aller (slackness) has had recourse to it.

The permission [leave] is now almost to an end. I suppose by the end of next week I shall have heard the cannon again. For I shall certainly have to go & get my orders from my regiment. I only hope I shall be able to see the old People on my way through Paris. I shall do my best.

Best love,
Jacques

14 December 1917: Letter from Jean Playoust to his brother, Fernand Playoust

35 Possibly the Ritz, a boarding house in Leura.
14/12/17

My Dear Fernand
Thanks very much for your kind letter and the cigarettes they pleased me very much. There is some time since I have received letters from home. I wonder what has become to them. The weather is not very cold now so it is not too hard here in the trenches. How are you getting on now at the barracks you must be a good artillery man now. Good-bye old man I close wishing you the best of luck. Your loving brother
Jean

13 May 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

The following letter was written in pencil:

13th March 1918
Dear Brothers & Sisters,
This last mail brought letters Dec. 20th to the 6th January. Thank you very much. I also got a nice long letter from Ernie which I shall answer as soon as I have courage (strength). It’s a funny thing, the least I have to do the less you do.

True I have been busy since last I wrote but have been home with the old Brigade for the last 3 days after a good fortnight’s absence. I was attached temporarily to an Aust. Infantry Bde, who was at rest so as to help settle up before they went in again & by jove they did make it a welter. All the nice boys tend to join the artillery in Australia & you can see it in their behaviour. Why they even broke into my room, picked one of the drawers, the sideboard & turned over my bed to see if I had left any money behind. But they got nothing but my British Warm. It’s the end of winter so I won’t have to buy any before some months.

What extraordinary weather we have had this year. A heavy snow in December & 1st January & after that no more winter. Why even now it’s quite spring weather, & the trees are budding for all their worth. In spight of this the German offensive is not starting. I think it is bluff. It is quite different to the Russian front that they have to pierce on this side. Things look pretty gloomy just at present however. Japan coming in at once seems the only thing to even things up. The end looks still far off.

Best love to all,
Jacques

13 May 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

FIELD POST OFFICE 13th May 1918

Dear Brothers & Sisters

36 Ernest Polin, Marie Polin’s husband.
37 British overcoat.
I have no more writing paper so you must excuse this short note. It is almost impossible to obtain any. I’ve written over to Paris for some. In spight of the month we are not having fine weather. It has some compensation. The Gothas don’t come out. They are very troublesome at night & bomb us pretty regularly, so far, anyhow as far as we are concerned, without any success (touch wood). They were dropping their eggs uncomfortably close last night. I’m in doubt where Robert Dervaux is. Mother says he is at the back of us in reserve. Father that he was (one) of those who defended themselves till the last man on Mt. Kummel. 39

Love
Jacques

2 July 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his family in Australia

2nd July (1918)

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Excuse this brief note to answer your last mail. Nothing but bad news. Brave little John is no more. Emile is gone too. Who is going to be next? Mother tells me that René had come to his senses and will take the soft job he has a right to. Still there is always a risk, a stray shell, a bomb & even gas. We have just returned to the Front after a 2 day rest. We were to be out for a fortnight but we were wanted so came back. I do want one so badly & am getting very stale.

Love
Jacques

28 Juillet 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to his cousin, Marie Leplat

Chère Marie,

Un petit mot pour t’annoncer mon arrivée sain et sauf au port. Le voyage a été assez fatiguant. J’ai passé la nuit sur un banc à Corbeil & ce n’est qu’a 7 heures 43 que j’ai trouvé un train pour le front. J’ai voyage toute la journée mais heureusement au terminus j’ai pu trouver un bon lit pour me reposer. C’etait la derniere fois pour combien de temps? Hier j’ai dormi par terre dans une tente. Les Boches sont venus nous sonner la nuit et je n’en menai pas large. Aujourd’hui je me suis fait un trou et suis maintenant a l’abris. Mes amitiés à ta mere et a toi. Jacques

And cross-wise over the writing was added:

N’oublies pas que tu me dois une lettre. Ton adresse à la campagne s.v.p.?

38 A cousin from Tourcoing.
39 Mount Kemmel was a strategic site in Belgian Flanders. Jacques confused its name with that of a favourite liqueur.
Translation:

Dear Marie

A note to tell you I have arrived safe and sound at my destination. The journey has been rather tiring. I spent the night on a bench at Corbeil and it was only at 7.43 that I found a train for the Front. I travelled all day but fortunately on arriving at the terminus I was able to find a good bed to rest in. It was the last time for how long? Yesterday I slept on the ground in a tent. The Boches came to announce it was night, and I was in a tight corner. Today I made myself a hole and I am now sheltered.

Love to your mother and yourself,
Jacques

Don’t forget you owe me a letter. Your address in the country please.

22 August 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to Marie Leplat

Chère Marie,

Seulement aujourd’hui m’est parvenue ta lettre du 12. Je suis heureux d’apprendre que tu es en train de profiter de ton repos bien mérité. Autant que je puis en juger il y a du monde là-bas et la société des Docteurs Américains doit être d’autant plus appréciée que les jeunes gens sont rares maintenant. Et le progrès en Tennis? Je n’oserai plus jouer avec toi bientôt. Tu me demandes ce que j’ai fait ces dernières semaines. J’ai mené une vie assez dure mais bonne et excitante. Couchant rarement plus de 2 nuits dans le même trou. Ne trouvant rien pour améliorer mon ordinaire j’ai mangé du singe comme un brave poilu seulement ennuyé par le bombardement par avions et canons.

J’ai suivi nos batteries 4-5 kilomètres à l’arrière avec les bagages. Le premier jour c’est à travers du terrain conquis de q.q. heures seulement que nous avons progressé. et les morts encore ou ils étaient tombés, les brancardiers encore à l’oeuvre. Des quantités de prisonniers leur donnant un coup de main. Des tanks Anglais amoché, des batteries boches abandonnées, souvent entourés de plusieurs chevaux tués en essayant de les ramener vers l’arrière, des combats d’avions par dizaines.

Les Boches se défendaient bien et arrosaient les grands routes avec des bombes même en plein jour. Par fois même de certains points avantagux je pouvai suivre le combat à l’oeuil nu, l’infanterie accompagné des tanks, et lorsque ils avaient avancé un peu, l’artillerie légere qui arrivaient au galop se mettre en action en plein champ.

Les Boches complètement pris par surprise n’ont commencé qu’à se reprendre que le second jour. Le secteur n’est jamais redevenu tranquille et nous continuerons a lui mordre des
morceaux et lui enlever des prisoniers. Aujourd'hui le cannon tonne depuis la première heure et j'ai vu passer des centaines et des centaines de prisoniers.

Toute l'après diner hier il nous avait bombardé ici au wagon lines mais aujourd'hui plus rien. C'est probablement qu'il a encore été forcé d'encore reculer ses pieces. Mon role official jusqu'ici n'a été que d'envoyer a la mission un compte rendu de l'état des villages reconquis que j'ai traversé.

Ca a été bien simple. Les boches avaient deja depuis longtemps evacuee vers l'arriere tout ce qu'il y avait de valeur et l'artillerie a completer leur ouvrage. En effet les communiqués sont epatants. Le Kaiser doir commencer à se gratter la tête. Mais c'est peut-être beaucoup attendre que la liberation du nord cette année.

Jacques

Translation:

Dear Marie,

Only today did your letter of the 12th reach me. I am happy to hear that you are making the best of a well earned rest. As far as I can judge, there seem to be plenty of people over there, and the company of American doctors must be all the more appreciated as young men are rare now. And your improvement in tennis? I won’t dare play with you soon.

You ask me what I have been doing these last weeks. I’ve led a rather hard life, but good and exciting. Sleeping rarely more than 2 nights in the same hole, not finding anything to ameliorate my ration I’ve eaten ‘singe’\(^{40}\) like a brave poilu.

Only pestered by the bombardment by planes and cannons, I followed our batteries 4 to 5 kilometres to the rear with the baggage. The first day it was through territory conquered only a few hours earlier that we progressed. The dead still where they had fallen, stretcher-bearers still at work, with many prisoners giving them a hand. Damaged English tanks, abandoned Boche artillery, often dragged by several horses trying to bring them back to the rear, dozens of plane fights. The Boches were defending themselves well and sprayed the highway with bombs even in full daylight.

Sometimes from certain vantage points I could follow the combat with the naked eye, the Infantry accompanied by Tanks, then when they had advanced a little, the artillery arrived at full gallop to get into action in the field. The Boches, completely taken by surprise, only began to collect themselves on the second day. The sector did not quieten again, and we are continuing to wrest pieces of territory from them, and to take prisoners. Today the cannon has been roaring since the early hours, and I have seen hundreds and hundreds of prisoners passing by.

The whole of yesterday afternoon they were bombarding us here in the waggon lines, but today nothing more. Probably they have been forced to withdraw their guns again.

\(^{40}\) Literally 'monkey', a type of tinned meat.
My official role until now has been only to send to the mission an account of the state of the villages which have been reconquered. It was very simple. The Boches had already long since evacuated towards the rear anything of value, and the artillery completed their handiwork.

Indeed the communiqués are marvellous. The Kaiser must be starting to scratch his head. But it is perhaps too much to expect the liberation of the north this year. Love to yourself & mother from cousin

Jacques

16 November 1918: Letter from Jacques Playoust to Marie Leplat

16 Novembre 1918

Chère Marie,

Premièrement laissez moi te remercier, ainsi que ta mere de l'affection que vous m'avez montré lors de ma dernière visite à Paris. Dans des moments terrible comme celui que je viens de traverser l'affection de ceux qu'on aime est la seule consolation qui nous reste. Je n'ai plus trouvé mon unité à mon retour. Elle était de nouveau en route. Je l'ai rattrapée enfin. Nous nous arrêtons pour permettre aux Boches de remplir les conditions de l'armistice avant de les suivre.

Nous passons notre temps à faire de l'aviation. Je suis monté en Hanly Page le gros avion de bombardement anglais. Tu pourras t'imaginer son ampleur lorsque je te dirai qu'il peut prendre 22 passagers. C'était épatant.

J'ai voulu essayer l'avion de chasse mais je m'en suis bien repenti. Le pilote m'a fait faire des spirales, des plongeons, des glissades sur l'aile etc. Je t'assure que je ne recommencerai pas de si tôt.

Maintenant un petit service. Ma prochaine permission je la passerai à Paris. Pour cela il me faudra un certificate d'hébergement. Demandes à ta mere de m'en faire un. Je regrette de ne t'avoir pas rembourser les piles que tu m'as envoyé. N'oublie pas de me les reclamer la fois prochaine.

Je te remercie de ta longue lettre. Je t'écrirai plus longuement la fois prochaine, Je n'ai pas encore le courage de t'écrire plus longuement.

Ton cousin dévoué
Jacques

Rien ne presse pour le certificat d'hébergement. Je ne compte pas arriver avant le mois de Janvier.
Translation:

Dear Marie,

Firstly allow me to thank you and your mother for the affection you showed me during my last visit to Paris. In terrible moments such as those I have passed, the affection of those one loves is the only consolation remaining. I didn’t find my unit on my return. It was on the move again, but finally I caught up with it. We are stopping to permit the Boches to meet the conditions of the Armistice before following them.

We spend our time flying. I went up in a Handley Page, the large English bomber. You’ll be able to imagine its size when I tell you it is able to carry 22 passengers. It was terrific. I then wished to try the fighter plane, but I soon repented. The pilot made me do spirals, dives, gliding on the wing etc. I assure you I will not be repeating the experience in a hurry.

Now, a little favour. I will spend all my next leave in Paris. For this I will need a certificate of lodging. Ask your mother to have one made for me.

I’m sorry I did not reimburse you for the batteries which you sent me. Don’t forget to claim for them next time.

I do thank you for your long letter. I will write to you at greater length next time. I still haven’t the spirit to write any more now.

your devoted cousin,
Jacques

No hurry for the certificate of lodging. I do not expect to arrive before January.

EXEMPLARY FROM JACQUES PLA YOUST’S 1916 VERDUN DIARIES

February
25 February 1916 Left Paris after delightful but too short furlough moved all night quite 6 inches of snow everywhere. It appears Paris has not seen so much for years. In the country more still. Misery and cold starts again. For how long? ”

April
“10th About 3 p.m. after hurrying to get in 1st line get in trenches (practically finished) just before renewed bombardment which did not cease till 7. No shelter at all we all lay down in bottom of trenches with bags on our head. Splinters & stones fly all round semi burried several times. Impossible eat or smoke besides no desire. Worst day I have ever speant. Immediately bombardment finishes get work build up again our destroyed trench & make little abris (shelter) Everybody à bout (at the end of their tether) We learn what happened the day before. The 2nd Bn (battalion) who was occupying a salient was surrounded & destroyed or taken prisoner. Ditto for Bn of 51 result: perte du Mort-Homme (Loss of Dead Man Hill). But
everywhere elsewhere the Boches attacked 6 times consecutively they were repulsed with heavy losses. At midnight we have to abandon work again. The Boches attack with inflammable liquid the 16e Chasseurs (light infantry soldiers) & bomb & win the two trenches. We are now in a critical condition. Fortunately we are able to hold them there. Bethincourt in flames.”

27th–31st April Same old routine, delightful weather, country looking magnificent in this new spring clothes, but when one thinks of the dreadful tragedy that is going on yonder & still what remains in store for us, really ‘le printemps magnifique a perdu son odeur’ a French poet once wrote (The magnificent Spring has lost its scent).”

May
1–2 May “Still au repos (at rest), but rumours are increasing. We are bound to be off soon & it looks towards that Godforsaken Mort Homme. Our division evidently has not suffered sufficiently.

3 May During the night get orders for departure for the 4th. Kitchens go at 8am. WE are off tomorrow for the same Godforsaken hole. I’m off as signaleur this time.

9th Germans attack and we counter attack cote 304 (Hill 304) on our right but cant get any information. Install 1st thing in the morning post optique from summit of Mort Homme to communicate with the brigade. Send my first official message. Get ready for attack next day. Pal comes up to help me.

11 May Our Bn is relieved today. They require unfortunately telephonist & are to remain another 7 days in hell.

12th Awaken at 4 o’clock after the 1st few hours sleep I’ve had for several days to repair the line. Coming back 150 falls a few yards from me. The 1st time I distinctly see the shell coming. Cannot get communications on my return. What has happened?

Later. Scarcely had we reached our post when a shell fell right at the entrance of post. Killed 3 telephone men, 2 signallers & 3 others & wounded three more, upset all our sap. Everything is disorganised and what a fearful thing this war is. Men in the prime of life are butchered what for? All peace loving men they were. Such situations drive one mad little by little & as for nerves!!! The wind is in the Germans favour and the stench of the dead come over our lines. How many corpses still between the (word omitted) how many still burried in the saps.

13th Get our ravitaillement (rations) at last. 1st since arrival in trenches. Much rested but bad attack of dysentery. Morning very quiet.

14th Lay out new lines in the morning. Rain and dull.”

June
8th June “We go through delightful country but towards the end go through German Villers scene of early atrocities. The Germans burnt and sacked the village on their arrival, killed and tortured old men, women and children. Outside see traces of heavy fighting & thousands of little crosses peep over the rising crops, protesting to heaven about the terrible butchery that has been going on for the last two years.”

August
2nd August “Very strong & well founded rumours that we are leaving for more active regions during the month. Will my turn of furlough arrive in time?”
Before Maurice Playoust left for France and war he visited the College to bid farewell to his old chums and to the various masters. He brought Ludo Lamerand with him who is also off to fight. Maurice was presented with a beautiful gold mounted cigarette holder in a case by the boys, whilst the College gave Ludo a handsome pocket book. In spite of the difficulties of speech-making, everybody felt happy about the whole affair, especially as school was dismissed at 1.15 p.m. for the rest of the day. We have since received two most manly letters from Ludo and Maurice in appreciation of their gifts. On the Saturday the cadets marched to see them off and sang The Marseillaise as the boat drew out from the wharf; and much was the patriotism thereof.

1916: ‘Soldat Marcel Playoust’

"I am balancing the ink-pot and this card on my knees, sitting on a paillasse in my tent. I am not going to be very long or very intelligible, but I hope to find you in the best of health. Expect to leave for the front during the week and am quite used to the idea. One can’t help it, the men of France are so splendid, so different from what they seem to be in peace time, so manly, so quiet over their exploits when they return for a rest from the front, so lacking in ‘swank’. They go back to the firing line after convalescence gazing grimly, without any fuss, without looking for praise or notice. I used myself to consider Frenchmen a trifle effeminate, half men, easily elated, easily discouraged. But these are men. Some don’t appear to be so. And yet these sickly looking wizened looking fellows carry their sixty to 70 lbs. haversacks and endure the worst of hardships just like the rest without a murmur.

There will be nothing doing in the way of a serious offensive by the Allies before the spring at the earliest. Great Britain who has just extended her front from 50 to 150 kilometres should then have at her disposal a war material equal to any. She will have a fine army, though the English “Officiers supérieurs” themselves don’t know how they are going to cope with the penury of capable officers. Excuse this if I am a bit disjointed. I have a very bad headache. I belong to the 22e compagnie du 6e Regiment d’Infanterie Coloniale, and am at present at La Valbonne, a big camp near a little village, 28 Kilometres east of Lyons."

1 July 1916: Excerpt of letter from Marcel Playoust to the St. Aloysius College 1 June 1916

Time is very scarce. Work is plentiful, too plentiful. We have adopted khaki. I mean we are so covered with mud that the light blue colour has disappeared. We are now ‘au repos’ [at rest] in a village two km. from the first line of trenches. Here, too, of course in the village is one interminable maze of trenches. I had an idea we were going to have our ‘repos’ in a village, where there would be inhabitants, where you could buy little things you wanted, and

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41 Playoust, Marcel. “Soldat Marcel Playoust”, Our Alma Mater, 1916. 61
principally where there would be no work to do. No such thing! The village is in ruins, all the inhabitants have left, and there are a hundred and one things to do during the night, such as making trenches, putting up barbed wire.

It was a pitch dark night, three weeks ago, when we came to relieve those whose trenches we were to occupy. The roads, or what was left of them, were muddy, and had nice little holes left full of water. You all know the pleasant surprise it is to splash into them unawares every now and then. I experienced it more than once. It was easy to see we were approaching the lines. No cigarettes, no light of any sort, no talking! We knew we were near before receiving these orders; you could hear the shells screaming, and the 'fusées', a kind of rocket you send up to give light so as to discover wanderers between the trenches, cast gleams over us. Then all of a sudden, before entering the wood, we entered the ‘boyau’ (zig zag communication trench, literally, intestine).

We released the others without mishap. Between 9 at night till daylight I took six hours guard in a ‘poste d’écoute’ [listening post] in the end of a ‘boyau’ which leaves your first line of trenches in the direction of the enemy, and the end of which forms a little hole more or less protected. You can see and hear better what is going on in front.

I had expected to rest next morning, but instead, I was given a pickaxe to help dig out a new ‘cagna’. A ‘cagna’ is really a cave dug out below the ground, where you sleep and rest when off duty. While in there working, a shell came over. It was a 105, which you hear come in the form of an uncanny whistle, just as I should imagine the cry of triumph of a vampire. I saw the men crouch down in the trenches. I did the same. It burst with much fracas about 20 yards behind us; stray bits of cast iron, copper, etc., fell a little nearer. Then, soon we heard the same wail a second time. It seemed quite triumphant this time. I had time to say a little prayer before it fell with a sickening thud two yards away from us. There was no detonation the shell didn’t burst. Thank God! or I would not be writing this.

B was as white as the snow which lay around us, his lips were trembling, he wasn’t able to utter a word. His cigarette somehow or other still was on his bottom lip. C, another of the ‘équipe’, (team) started to rouse like H; but he never did anything but grumble. When he tells you the weather is fine, it is a way of saying that it is sure to snow. He cursed the Germans and smiled contemptuously as the shells fell. M temporarily lost some of his usual rosy colour, but he is not a funk. F, our barber, was smoking his pipe. He continued to do so, and ducked just in time. He doesn’t lose his head, and times the shells well, P, who was there, too, stuttered generally for a while before being able to resume his conversation. He didn’t seem to expect just that. It is his first experience in the trenches.

Shells are most demoralising things, and they have the ‘rotten’ and most supernatural sound you can imagine, as they go through the air. We take the asphyxiating gases very seriously. We are never without our masks, even a few miles in the rear, where they seem to think they can do damage. The horses, too, have masks.

Two weeks of first and second line, and now we are in the third. The program is a little exercise during the day, and work from six o’clock in the evening till midnight. It is a bit of a rest all the same, as in first line you average five hours’ sleep daily at most. Excuse my ‘talking shop’, and if I am uninteresting, I am so tired that my head can’t be working too well.
1 November 1916: Death of Marcel Playoust reported in St. Aloysius College Monthly

On 4th September 1916 Marcel Playoust took place in the attack on Barleux with the French colonials. His company went forward in the first wave of assault and penetrated to the third line of enemy trenches. There it was held up and later forced to retire on account of flanking troops. Of 180 men in the company 140 never returned, among them soldat Playoust. Nothing has been heard of him till this day.

HAGEN LETTERS

1915: Letter from Louis Hagen, friend of Marcel Playoust, to his mother

Had startling news when we arrived at Suez yesterday at 2pm. We were told that just after we passed a Fort at the entrance to the Red Sea... the Turks had blown up the lighthouse and taken the fort. We had a lot of luck, had we been detained in Aden we might be at the bottom of the sea. The Montcalm is in Suez with other French warships guarding the Canal and coast. All along the Canal, the Indians are camped and instructed. Very interesting to see. [...] On vient de m'appeler pour voir un aeroplane passer. Très bizarre a voir (I have just been called to see an aeroplane passing. Very bizarre to see.).

14th September 1916: Louis Hagen to his mother in Noumea

We had to attack the strongest hold held by the "huns". It was terrible, the Champagne affair was nothing like this. The Caledonians during the last affair behaved most wonderfully. They were the first to leap into the trenches and rush the German lines [...] No news of Marcel Playoust.

ARMY DOCUMENTS

Letter from the chief accountant for the 5th Regiment of Colonial Infantry in Lyon and addressed to the municipal authorities of the 8th arrondissement in Paris

"J'ai l'honneur de vous prier de vouloir bien, avec toutes les ménagements nécessaires dans les circonstances, prévenir Monsieur Playoust Georges chez Mr Leplat 19 Rue Marbeuf à Paris de la disparition du soldat Playoust Marcel né à Melbourne (Australie) du 5e Régiment d'Infanterie

42 Anon. "Old Boys at the War." St. Aloysius College Monthly, November 1, 1916.
43 Hagen, Gilberte. "Louis Victor Hagen Letters."
44 Ibid.
Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Maire, l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus distingués.

Le Chef de Bureau de Comptabilité
signé Illisible

Pour extrait conforme Paris le 1 Septembre 1917
Le Maire
signé Illisible

Translation:

I have the honour to request you, with all the necessary tact under the circumstances, to notify Mr Playoust Georges, care of Mr Leplat, 19 Rue Marbeuf, Paris of the disappearance of Soldat Playoust Marcel, born in Melbourne (Australia) of the 5th Colonial Regiment of Infantry 2nd company,... missing on 4th September 1916 in the region south of Barleux, Somme.

"yours faithfully"

Signature Illegible

Jacques’ 13th field artillery brigade diary

8 August 1918

The operation was successful, casualties being very slight.... This was the first opportunity the Brigade has yet had of participating in actual mobile warfare, and considering the exceptionally small amount of training it has received, it can only be said it did remarkably well [...] The necessity of a motor cycle with side car, or some more rapid means of carrying out reconnaissance was most evident during the day. The advance of the infantry was very rapid, they arrived at their final objective before the time anticipated, and it was found that the batteries’ advance and coming into action could not maintain their rate of advance. It was a most interesting day, large numbers of prisoners were captured. 45

The brigade diary relates:

Fine warm day, country very dry and dusty. Day spent in overhauling equipment and preparing indents for stores lost and destroyed etc. and as far as possible, resting. As many men as possible sent to River for bathing, which was generally appreciated. H.M. The King passed through this area today. 46

45 Anon. War Diary 13th Field Artillery Brigade 5th Division.
46 Ibid.
WAR MEDALS CITATIONS

Jacques Playoust: Croix de Guerre

Le Colonel de MATHAREL, Commandant la 84e Brigade, cité à l'Ordre de la BRIGADE:
PLAYOUST Jacques, Mle M1541
Soldat a la C. H. R. du 162e R. I.
Signé: de MATHAREL

...d'éloges en allant réparer à différentes reprises, sous un bombardement d'une extrême violence, les fils téléphoniques rompus. S'était déjà fait remarquer antérieurement par son dévouement.

Translation:

... and a composure worthy of praise in going to repair several times over, under a bombardment of extreme violence, the severed telephone wires. Had already been conspicuous for his dedication.

Jacques Playoust: British Medal, The Distinguished Conduct Medal

During the operations on 17,18,19 October at St. Souplet and La Haie Menneresse he examined under heavy shellfire many buildings and found French civilians whom he rescued and had removed to places of safety. In this he was untiring and showed great courage.
Throughout the whole of this Interpreter's service with the Brigade since January 1918, he has been particularly keen in the performance of his duties and has been of great assistance during the operations of the concluding phases of the War when units were required to move frequently and hurriedly.
A. Bissel-Browne.
CRA* Brigadier-General.  

Stéphane Playoust: Croix de Guerre

"Officier d'une bravoure ardente. Le 16 Avril 1917 a maintenu sa section sous un violent tir de barrage, l'encourageant de la parole et de l'exemple. Quelques instants après s'est élancé sur le parapet, entrainant ses hommes d'un mouvement irrésistible et a été frappé mortellement.

Translation:

47 "War Office List of 1 December of British Decorations Awarded to Allied Foreign Powers" (Jacques Playoust personal papers, n.d.).
Officer of ardent bravery. On the 16th April he supported his section under a violent curtain fire, encouraging it by word and by example. Some moments later leapt on to the parapet, and drawing on his men with an irresistible movement was mortally hit.

Le Général Commandant le 5e Corps d’Armée
Général de Boissoudy
APPENDIX 4: DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE FRENCH AUSTRALIAN LEAGUE OF HELP

COMPLETE RESUME OF THE FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN LEAGUE OF HELP

Objectives.
1. To co-operate with the French Red Cross Society of London.
2. If deemed advisable, to co-operate with any other movement having for its objects the assistance of the French soldiers and their dependents, or our Allies.

Miss Brasier de Thuy, Hon. Distributing Agent for the League in Paris and London.

Complete Resumé of League's Work
December, 1914, to September, 1916.

Patrons:
HER EXCELLENCY
LADY HELEN MUNRO PEGGASON
M. Chayet (Consul-General for France)

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR
LADY EDILE STRICKLAND

HIS EXCELLENCY VICE-ADMIRAL
and LADY PATEY

HIS WORSHIP THE LORD MAYOR
and MRS. MAYO ESS and

MRS. G. PLAYOUST

Presidents:
The Hon. W. A. Holman, P.L.A.
Miss J. Playoust

Vice-Presidents:
H. Y. Draddon, Esq.
and Members of the Committee

Joint Hon. Treasurers:
Miss L. J. Gurney
Mr. C. A. Le M. Walker

Joint Hon. Secs.: MRS. A. SOURIRAN
Mrs. A. Jeyet

Document held in the Mitchell Library - State Library of NSW.

28 January 1920: FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN LEAGUE LAST MEETING IN PARIS.
Mr. Neville Mayman, writing in the "Daily Telegraph" of the 31st of December, says:

"The last meeting of the Paris committee of the French-Australian League of Help was held in a little office at 372 Rue St Honoré on Thursday the 16th of October.

By invitation of Mademoiselle Soubeiran, who has been acting as secretary of the Paris Committee in conjunction with Madame Brasier de Thuy (wife of the former manager of the Messageries Maritimes in Australia, and well known in Sydney), I came over from London to witness the final scene of this movement which was begun in Sydney over five years ago.

The Rue St. Honore, as many Australians will remember, is one of the principal thoroughfares of this centre of enlightenment; it runs parallel with the Rue de Rivoli, and is close to the Louvre, the Place de la Concorde, the Jardin des Tuileries, and the Champs Elysees.

It derives considerable historic importance from the fact that Robespierre was born in it, at No. 398, near l'Eglise de l'Assomption. The operations of the league have served to enhance rather than diminish its reputation, for it can truly be said that the committee has, with the money furnished by the people of New South Wales, simply revolutionised all conceptions previously entertained by French philanthropists on this subject.

M. Maurice Barrès, who is known throughout France because of his association with the "Echo de Paris", took the chair at the league's annual meeting. He has been the president of the Paris Committee since its formation. Madame Jules Siegfried, who was appointed President of the National Council of French Women at the beginning of the war, supported M. Barrès in her capacity as vice-president of the league.

Besides Mademoiselle Soubeiran and Madame Brasier de Thuy, there were present Madame Frank Puaux, Madame Le Général Michel and Monsieur Prenat (hon. treas.) M. Joseph Playoust was in attendance, as was Mme. Joseph Playoust, who has been the president of the league in Sydney since its inception. During that afternoon M. Moreau and Mr Shard, both of Sydney, dropped in, and thus rounded out a really representative gathering.

The quality of the Paris Committee has impressed me greatly. M. Barrès, for instance, is easily in the first rank of the intellectuals of the day. As writer, as patriot, he has rendered signal and unforgettable services to his country. Of Madame Jules Siegfried who, by the way, is the mother of the Dr Siegfried who visited Australia recently with the French Mission, it is hard to convey any adequate impression in words. She must be over seventy years of age, yet she shows no sign of diminishing intellectual power. She possesses quite unusual physical and spiritual gifts, and has a charm of address altogether unique. I think she is the most eloquent woman I have ever listened to.

Madame Siegfried acknowledged Australia's generous gift to the widows and orphans of France in a speech of ten minutes' duration, in terms so felicitous and touching as to bring tears to the eyes of every person present. It is easy to understand, after hearing Madame Siegfried, why the women of France chose her as their spokesperson, when it was thought necessary to affirm
their unalterable determination to support the waging of the war to the end, whatever that end might mean.

This final meeting voted 200,000 francs for distribution among; some ten small villages, of between 400 and 800 inhabitants, situated in the devastated region of the Ardennes. These diminutive settlements, placed as they are in the backwaters of France, remote from railway communication, had hitherto been almost overlooked in the distribution of gifts. Their populations have dwindled to half their former size, and the greater part of the people who have returned are absolutely without homes of any kind. They haunt cellars or seek refuge like troglodytes in caves or holes in the rocks.

Various benevolent enterprises operating in the poorest quarters of Paris were allotted 5000 francs each. A sum of 100,000 francs was set apart for urgent calls. Christmas gifts for orphans and other children maintained in different institutions helped by the League from the beginning were provided for.

Finally the sum of 50,000 francs was sent to Marshal Foch, to be distributed by him among officers who have small means and large young families. Whatever sum is left after all the expense of the League have been met is to be divided among the Cantines Maternelles presided over by Madame Jules Siegfried fils.

My special object in writing, however, is to assure the France’s Day Committee which conducted the big appeal in 1917, and the people of New South Wales who gave so cordially that the French-Australian League of Help has proved a most excellent channel for the distribution of their gifts.

I have closely studied the committee’s records and methods, and I am delighted to be able to state that the work has been carried out with a complete disregard of the technical apparatus usually associated with conventional charitable organisations. The giving has been sympathetic, but never impulsive. The committee saw the needs of the situation with penetrating and interpreting vision. It met those needs in a broad, humane, even affectionate manner that added largely to the value of the gift.

It was no part of the committee’s business to hand out cold dole of charity to starving and ragged people. That was not its idea at all. It existed for the definite purpose of ameliorating certain conditions arising out of the war; to banish pain so far as it could, to relieve the widow; to succour the orphan; uplift the weary and such as had fallen by the way, and bring cheer and comfort and hope to the blind and maimed. All this has been achieved, and achieved with a plain directness and a wise economy that are beyond all praise.

The committee has systematised sympathy and ignored all religious and political differences. Having no prejudices it has stood all the time for straight methods and the square deal which we in Australia admire so much. Australia’s offerings have brought air and sunlight into dark places and banished the grim spectre of starvation from the homes of thousands of our French brothers and sisters.