



Of mateship, love and service

NON-FICTION

COLLINGWOOD: A Love Story. By Paul Daley. Victory Books. 274pp. \$34.99.

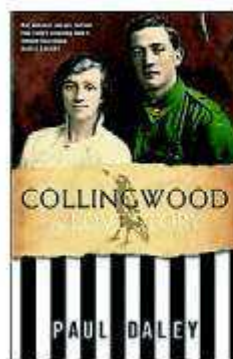
Reviewer: PETER CROSSING

Love him or loathe him, Eddie McGuire has done much for Collingwood Football Club. After becoming president in the late 1990s, McGuire shook the very foundations of a club in the depths of despair, and his foresight, passion and hard work have helped it to once again become a powerhouse force in the AFL. One of McGuire's innovations is to carry an old horseshoe into the change rooms before the annual Anzac Day match against Essendon. As the horseshoe is passed from player to player, McGuire relates the associated story. The horseshoe, manufactured from scrap metal parts from a German artillery shell and a downed German aircraft, was sent back to the club from the Somme in 1917 by serving AIF member and Collingwood footballer Malcolm "Doc" Seddon. McGuire does this to remind the players that they are all "just part of the ongoing saga that is Collingwood . . . so don't get carried away; we are only custodians".

In his book *Collingwood: A Love Story*, Canberra writer Paul Daley brings us the intriguing story surrounding Doc Seddon and the horseshoe. The story is one of mateship, love and service. His two earlier books, *Beersheba* and *Armageddon: Two Men on an Anzac Trail*, trace the World War I battles and skirmishes of the Australian Light Horse divisions in the Middle East.

In *Collingwood*, Daley has combined his research into the historical details with several sections of fictional narrative and dialogue, because there was "little in the way of correspondence and diary entries" from the families involved. "Where possible I have made the dialogue faithful to how the characters were said to have spoken, thought, and viewed each other and the things and people around them," Daley says. The combination of historical fact and fictional account merge seamlessly, with the latter adding a more intimate tone to the story.

Beginning in the working-class suburb of Collingwood in the early days of the 20th century, a place frowned upon by residents of more illustrious parts of Melbourne, Daley relates the growing relationship between Doc Seddon and his childhood friend and sweetheart Louie Newby. The relationship becomes complicated when Percy Rowe (sometimes known as Paddy Rowan) enters



the scene. The two men are important members of the Collingwood football team where Doc, something of an enforcer on the field, carves a path for the weaving runs of the more flamboyant Percy. And it is Percy who wins the heart of Louie.

Daley paints an illuminating picture of the Collingwood of the time – the lives of the local people, their homes and workplaces, the importance of the football club and the role of people such as John Wren and Archbishop Daniel Mannix in the World War I conscription debate. As an aside, Daley also relates the tale of Essendon footballer Cyril Gove. One Saturday in 1915, Gove rode a horse to third place in a race at Moonee Valley, after which he took a cab to the MCG, where he played in the centre in a match against South Melbourne. He then moved on to John Wren's West Melbourne stadium to fight a boxing bout in the evening. How many footballers of the modern era, Collingwood or otherwise, tattooed or not, would contemplate a similar undertaking?

Both Doc and Percy enlist in the AIF. Just before they embark for overseas, Percy marries Louie, pregnant with his child, with Doc as the best man.

The story then moves to the involvement of both men in the mud and horror of the war on the Western Front. Shortly before his death in battle, Percy makes a request of Doc that "if anything happens, look after Louie and little Perc for me, would you?" And Doc did exactly that, for the rest of his life. Daley poses questions about the complex relationship between Doc, Percy and Louie. He also contemplates the enigmatic character of Doc, the remainder of whose life was one of service and commitment – to Louie, whom he eventually married and with whom he established a family; to young Perc, who became his stepson; to Collingwood Football Club, once again as a player and then chairman of selectors; and to



Louie and Percy Rowe, about the time of their wedding in 1915. and above left. Doc Seddon.

his community as a councillor and mayor. Doc also became a successful businessman, whose largesse discreetly assisted local families struggling during the Depression.

In constructing the fictional narrative, an important source of material for Daley has been the anecdotes gleaned from conversations with descendants of the Seddon, Rowe and Newby families. These included discussions with the laconic Allan Monohan, grandson of Doc and Louie. In one passage, Daley provides his impression of Percy's return to farewell his mother and siblings in his home town of St Arnaud before departing for overseas. In another, he imagines the turmoil experienced by Doc before eventually re-establishing contact with Louie.

Daley's research into the history has been comprehensive and detailed, whether in Australia or in his travels to the Somme to visit the places where Percy and Doc served. While in France, he gained further insight when he assisted with the retrieval of the body of an Australian soldier, recently discovered after being buried for almost a century. *Collingwood: A Love Story* is a well-written record of a captivating tale from the Australian past.

• Peter Crossing is a Canberra chemistry teacher who has found Collingwood supporters to be always passionate, often knowledgeable about the game and at times a little scary.