

# THE BATTLE OF THE NAMES

BY HARRY GORDON

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A couple of weeks before the Olympic Village was due to be opened for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, a media group representing press and radio (the city had no television then) was invited to live in the place for a weekend. As a young sports columnist, I was in the party.

The village was in the suburb of Heidelberg, built as a future development by the government's Housing Commission. It was to be occupied as soon as the Games ended, and in fact has ever been since.

We sampled the accommodation, the food and the amenities, and they were all fine. But, wandering around the Village, I was appalled to find that all the streets had been named after battles in which Australian troops had fought.

I calculated that the Japanese had to walk to meals six times a day along a street called Buna, celebrating a place where thousands of Japanese lives had been lost. Similarly, the Germans had to parade along Alamein street, again the scene of great loss of life.

I wrote a column, suggesting that this wasn't a very appropriate thing to be happening during a festival of international goodwill. I proposed that the streets should be changed to celebrate Olympic achievement. Among the potential names I suggested were those of Edwin Flack, Freddie Lane (Australia's first swimming gold medallist), Fanny Durack and the early swimming hero Frank Beaurepaire.

There was quite a fuss. The article was quoted in parliament, people wrote indignant letters to the newspapers, and the Housing Commission was widely accused of insensitivity. Finally it announced that it was changing the names. There would be a Flack Road and a Beaurepaire Street, but these were chauvinistic times: there was still no street for Fanny Durack. It was a triumph for my newspaper, though, and I later received a journalism award for the column.

When the Games were over, the Olympic caravan moved on, and the streets signs honouring the old athletes were all hauled down. Up again went the signs commemorating battles. They remain there today.

Edwin Flack did have his day in 1956, but it was a fairly short one.