

Ian Woodward, *Cricket, Not War: The Australian Services XI and the 'Victory Tests' of 1945*. SMK Enterprises, Brighton East, Victoria, 1994. Bibliog., illus. pp 130.

The late R S Whittington was one of Australia's best known post-war cricket writers, being author or co-author with Keith Miller of more than a dozen books. In 1969 in his *The Quiet Australian*, a biography of former Australian cricket captain Lindsay Hassett, Whittington wrote that 'I have waited twenty-three years in vain for a cricket writer to chronicle the Victory Tests of 1945'. In his own idiosyncratic style Whittington then proceeded to tell the story, highlighting the roles of Hassett (the Australian captain) and Miller. For anyone with a serious interest in the Australian Services Team's odyssey through England, India, Ceylon and Australia, Whittington's account was frustrating because of its many gaps. Furthermore, the 1946 and 1947 Wisden's provided little information on the team's matches in India and Australia. Now, with Ian Woodward's short but informative book, many of those gaps have been filled.

However, this is not merely the story of the Victory Tests and the tour which followed. In fact the beginning point is speculation about those cricketers who may have been involved in the aborted 1940/41 Anglo-Australian Test series. This highlights the number of fine cricketers in both countries whose careers were ended or seriously interrupted by World War II. It also provides an appropriate back drop for the Victory Tests by reminding us how many established Test and first-class cricketers England had available in 1945, whereas most of the Australians were lacking such experience. Despite this, and relishing their role as underdogs, the latter drew the five Test series two all.

The Services team was brought together in April 1945. Some of its members were drawn from the Hassett-led AIF team which played regularly in North Africa from 1941. Others, including Keith Carmody, Ross Stanford, Keith Miller and Stan Sismey, were airmen based in England. They had been involved in one-day matches for the RAAF or 'British Empire' elevens for several years before 1945, providing much needed entertainment at Lord's and elsewhere. Altogether more than 100 Australian servicemen took the field for various teams in North Africa and/or England. The great majority were grade cricketers eager for a game. When confronted by Test-hardened opposition they lifted

the level of their performances remarkably, often outperforming players with far bigger reputations.

Examples? One was Reg Ellis, a slow, left-arm bowler from the Sturt club in South Australia. Ellis had no experience of first-class cricket before 1945. Yet in ten months he took 72 wickets, he and leg-spinner Cec Pepper becoming the backbone of the Services bowling. Despite Ellis's remarkable consistency in England, India and Australia he made one solitary post-war appearance for South Australia. Charles Price never played for New South Wales: in the eight representative matches against England and Indian XIs he topped the bowling averages! Similarly, on the very different wickets of England and India batsmen such as Whittington and Ross Stanford performed far better for the Services than for their home state of South Australia.

This team of 'battlers', on tour for almost ten months until they disbanded in Hobart at the end of January 1946, played their best cricket in England. There they provided genuine entertainment because under Hassett's captaincy they always pursued a result, scoring their runs quickly and relying heavily on high quality spin bowling. While the legendary all-rounder Keith Miller was a natural crowd pleaser, especially with his flamboyant batting, Cec Pepper was not far behind. Hitter of prodigious sixes, and a far more penetrating bowler than Miller, Pepper was a potential match winner in all conditions, yet who remembers him now?

Before 1995 the same question could have been asked about almost all his team mates. Now, fortunately, we know who they were and what they achieved. For the English people the Services team and the Victory Tests symbolised the return to partial normality after almost six years of suffering. In India, where first-class cricket revived more quickly than in England, the competitiveness of the Australians meant their hosts could gauge the abilities of contenders for their forthcoming tour of England. Finally, when they reached Australia exhausted and eager to be reunited with their families, the Services players were required by the Board of Control to tour all states. The series of first-class matches no doubt gave the Australian selectors a yardstick to use when choosing the 1946 team to visit New Zealand. There is a good case for arguing that the Services team was the catalyst for the speedy revival of post-war Test cricket.

Ian Woodward says relatively little about these issues nor, unfortunately, does he provide a detailed statistical summary of the performances of the team. However, his clearly written contribution to the 'Australia Remembers: 1945-95' program is important and will be appreciated, not least because of the many hitherto unpublished photos.

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