

Paris or the Bush doco about 1924 Olympic rowing team The Cods premieres in Murray Bridge

By Mike Sexton

Updated 24 Apr 2016, 10:03am



PHOTO: [A new documentary tells the story of the Murray Bridge rowers who competed at the 1924 Olympics.](#) (Supplied)

The remarkable story of how one third of Australia's 1924 team for the Paris Olympic Games came from a single town in South Australia's Mallee region has made its way onto the silver screen.

The new documentary, *Paris or the Bush*, tells the story of the men's eight

rowing team from Murray Bridge that overcame multiple hurdles to qualify for the Games.

"It is a fairytale," said director Wayne Groom, whose film received its world premiere in Murray Bridge on Saturday night.

"It is the classic Cinderella story of a crew with no money, no boats and no clubhouse versus wealthy, privileged, city teams."

The Murray Bridge Rowing Club, nicknamed The Cods, won the national men's eight championship in 1913 but the team's success was stalled by World War 1.

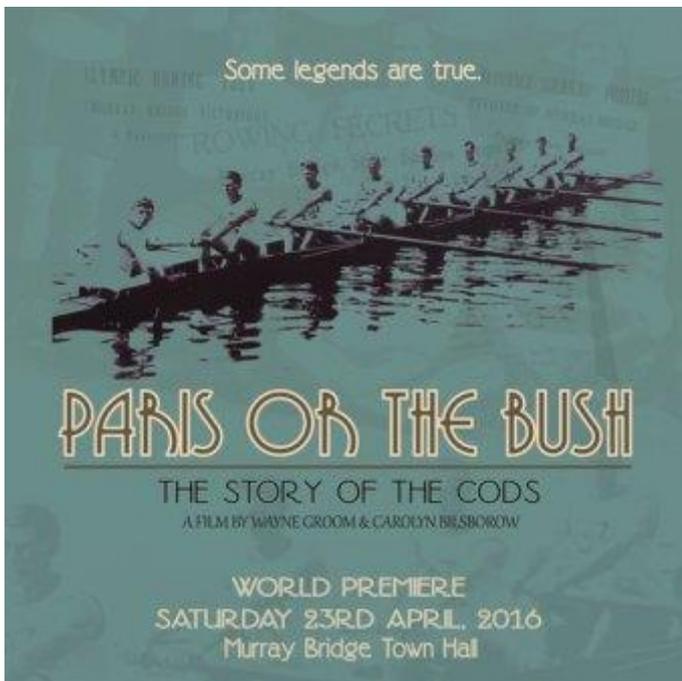


PHOTO: [Fittingly the film will receive its premiere in Murray Bridge where the team hailed from.](#) (Supplied)

A majority of its members served overseas.

One was killed in action, another was wounded at Gallipoli and a third was wounded but returned to rowing, despite persistent pain from shrapnel still lodged in his back.

After the war, the crew overcame both injury and age to win the King's Cup title in 1920, 1922 and 1923.

Their final ambition was to represent

Australia at the Olympic Games in Paris.

Despite their formidable reputation, they faced challenges from interstate and from within South Australia.

One of the crew members, Wally Pfeiffer, had been a conscientious objector during the war and became the target of a campaign to have him disallowed from Olympic selection.

His teammates, including those who had fought in the war, declared they would not go to the Games without him.

Eventually a race was held at Port Adelaide where the Cods faced the best crews from other states to determine who would wear green and gold.

YOUTUBE: [Descendants of the Cods learn about their forebears](#)

The Cods won the tight race lengths after responding to their coxswain's cry that it was "Paris or the bush".

Mr Groom began working on a film script seven years ago but the more he researched, the more he saw the need to document the story.

"The true story slowly began to emerge and it was better than the fictional story. It allowed me the freedom to set the Cods record straight," he said.

Mr Groom and Carolyn Bilsborow spent a year trawling old newspapers, tracking down relatives and searching archives for rare scraps of footage.

They began filming in 2014 and traced the steps of the team from Murray Bridge to Paris.



PHOTO: [The Cods rowing before World War One in 1913.](#) (Supplied)

Fittingly, the premiere of the film is being held in Murray Bridge where the audience was greeted by a guard of honour formed by members of the military and the Murray Bridge Rowing Club.

In the audience was relatives of the original Cods including 97-year-old

Ron Graetz whose father was part of the team in Paris.

He dismissed the critics who labelled the rowers the "raggedy eight".

"They weren't rough," Mr Graetz said. "They had good balance, good timing and they had power through the water."

[history](#), [olympics-summer](#), [documentary](#), [film-movies](#), [arts-and-entertainment](#), [anzac-day](#),

First posted 23 Apr 2016, 1:06pm