

WORDS: Alan Pearey ILLUSTRATION: Stephen Lee/NB Illustration

The Army-Navy day encompasses pride, tradition and the mother of all reunions. And on the field it will be all guns blazing...

**W**AS IT the greatest moment in Army-Navy rugby history? Those in the blue corner might say so. Last year's Babcock Trophy thriller, played out before a record 56,185 crowd, had reached the 79th minute with the British Army 22-19 to the good and poised to extend their winning run in the fixture to nine. Then the Royal Navy won a lineout 30 metres out and shifted the ball back, creating a hole - and

prop Cpl Gareth Evans took it. The Army scrambled but too late. The Plymouth Albion man was over, dragging a posse of red shirts with him. But had the ball been properly grounded? Amid unbearable tension, the decision went to the TMO. Now came a communication hitch. A five-minute delay ensued before a Sky TV floor manager came onto the pitch to confirm that the try was good. Moments later the full-time whistle went and Twickenham



Blue is the colour: the Navy go into the match as reigning champions

erupted. Blue pandemonium. As congratulations flooded in from Navy personnel around the globe - one ex-player ringing in on a satellite phone from the front line in Afghanistan - Navy skipper Dave Pascoe soaked up the enormity of the win. Eighty minutes of physical brutality had culminated in a hairline decision. "You can't really put into words what a feeling that was,"



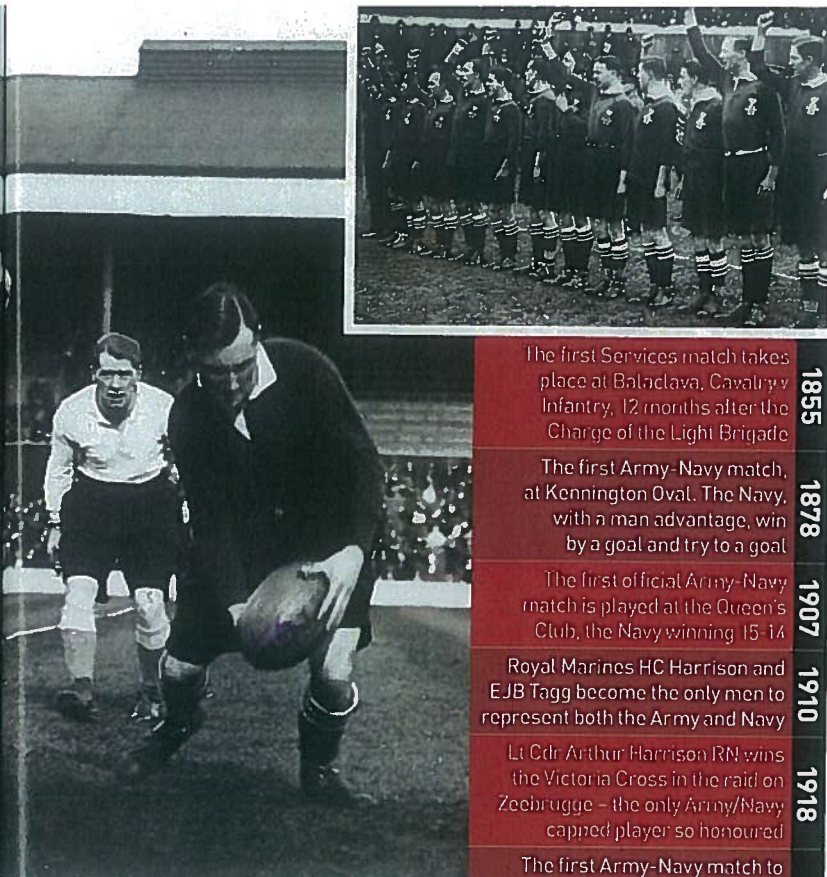
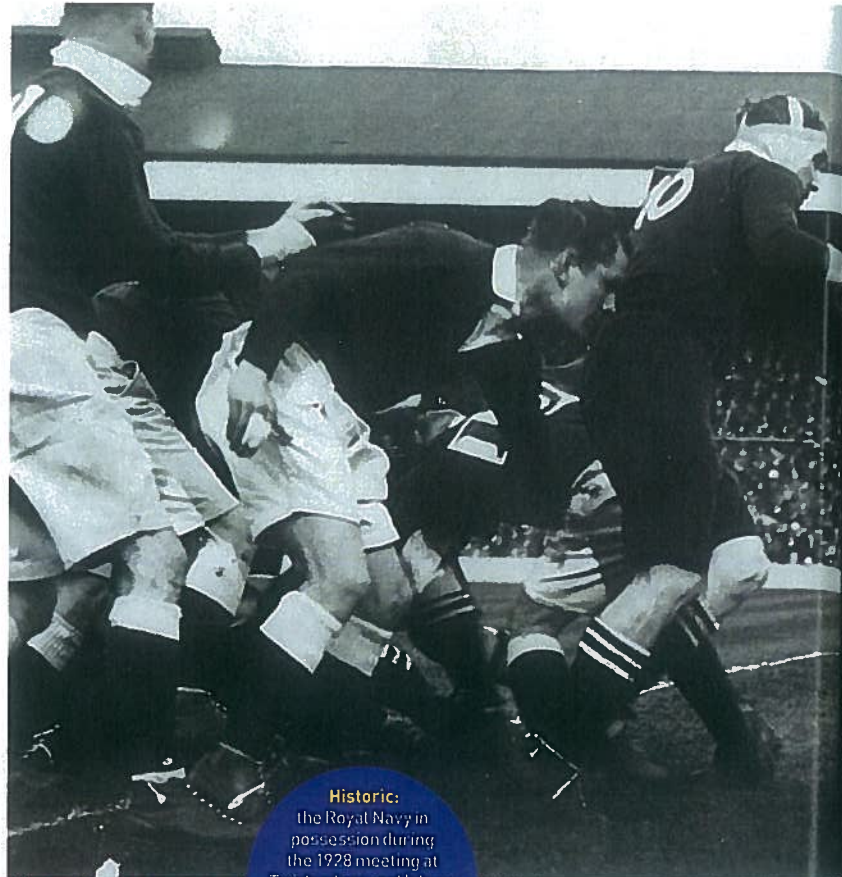
# BABCOCK TROPHY PITCH BATTLE



ects the scrum-half cum  
copter engineer. "Afterwards  
ad the annual dinner at Old  
ndor. People think we must  
e had a great piss-up but  
're so physically and mentally  
ckered that you just sit back  
think, 'We've done it'.  
eople who weren't there feel  
y missed out. They say they'll  
nitely make it this year."  
ey and most of Britain's  
itary. The first Saturday of  
y has become an annual  
rimage for the Armed  
ces, with aggressive  
cketing having  
nsformed the  
ure since the  
-figure crowds  
e early Nineties.  
rious of the big  
s seen at the  
sity match  
nically now  
ggling), the  
anisers set  
ut turning the  
ll Army corps reunions into  
multi-thousand knees-ups  
today. Public sympathy with  
plight of injured servicemen,  
ighlighted by the Help for  
oes match of 2008, has  
ught a concurrent surge in  
lian spectators. The graph  
w shows the upward trend,  
h the two dips reflecting  
rational deployment to  
and Afghanistan.  
e quality and ferocity of the  
ctacle cannot be questioned.  
t month's meeting will  
ude Fiji internationals Apo  
la and Jack Prasad, and  
land Sevens internationals  
g Barden and Josh Drauniniu.

**"If you were a betting man you'd never bet on the Navy"**

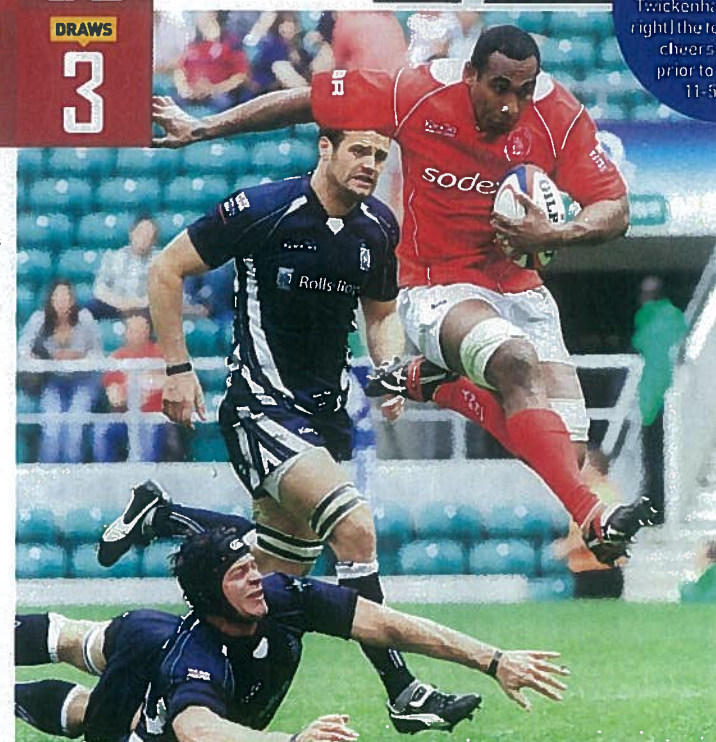
**Navy coach Geraint Ashton Jones**



HEAD 2 HEAD	
PLAYED	ARMY WINS
92	55
NAVY WINS	DRAWN
34	3

**Leap year:** Fiji international Apo Satala will be one of the stars on show

**Historic:** the Royal Navy in possession during the 1928 meeting at Twickenham and Jabose (right) the team give three cheers to the king prior to the Army's 11-5 victory



Best known, perhaps, is LCpl Chris 'Budgie' Budgen, who made his Inter-Services

championship debut 14 years ago at Pontypridd in the company of Test forwards Tim Rodber, Rob Wainwright and (current forwards coach) Mattie Stewart. Exeter prop Budgen, 38, who has served with the Royal Welsh Regiment in Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland, says: "I feel more battered and bruised after an Army-Navy game than I do after a Premiership game. It's a pure, long physical battle that leaves you drained."

"There's also all the hype and the emotion. When you put on that red jersey and look at the badge... you think of overseas and what's going on at work. The likes of (former coach) Andy Hickling and (No 8) Ben Hughes are good at that - reminding us of who we are and where we come from and what we're playing for. It's not a glamorous life."

Budgen was there all through the Noughties, when new sponsorship revenue and the Army's drive for higher standards began to turn the Inter-Services into an all-too-predictable procession. 'Dress smart, eat smart, play smart' was the gist of the message, though reassuringly on the day I visited the current squad in

Aldershot, Shrove Tuesday, the quickest sprint I saw was the lunch-time rush for the pancakes. The recruitment of a tranche of Fijian internationals, the impetus behind two Middlesex Sevens titles, also did wonders for the Army's winning profile.

"During that period the Army became a professional team, or close to it. Now the Navy has changed and the RAF are trying to change," says Budgen. "The body shapes have changed and the warm-up games are no longer against Mickey Mouse sides; now we play Premiership or First Division clubs. The universities haven't moved. We're a notch above them now."

A notch above Oxford and Cambridge maybe but will the Army blow the Navy out the water on 7 May? Army coach Andy Sanger, a former GB rugby league international, is circumspect. "We have to be slight underdogs," he says. "First, because they're the current champions and second, because they've had a three-and-a-half-month training camp, whereas we get together for a couple of days every two weeks."

The Army as underdogs? Try telling that to Geraint Ashton Jones, his Navy counterpart 30 miles down the road in Portsmouth. One amusing

1855 The first Services match takes place at Balaclava, Cavalry v Infantry, 12 months after the Charge of the Light Brigade

1878 The first Army-Navy match, at Kennington Oval. The Navy, with a man advantage, win by a goal and try to a goal

1907 The first official Army-Navy match is played at the Queen's Club, the Navy winning 15-14

1910 Royal Marines HC Harrison and EJB Tagg become the only men to represent both the Army and Navy

1918 Lt Cdr Arthur Harrison RN wins the Victoria Cross in the raid on Zeebrugge - the only Army/Navy capped player so honoured

1920 The first Army-Navy match to be played at Twickenham, in the presence of King George V and the Prince of Wales. The Inter-Services championship is born with the addition of the newly formed RAF team. CSM CW Jones (Welch) becomes the first non-officer to represent the Army against the Navy

1955 Lt Nim Hall (Royal Signals) captains England - the last Army man to do so

1961 Scotland's Tremayne Rodd plays for the Navy at scrum-half. He later becomes the first international player to be banned from the game for accepting remuneration

1963 Maj Robin Roe MC, a 1955 British & Irish Lion, becomes the only padre to captain the Army

1974 The Navy's record win in the fixture, 25-3

1980 The fixture's only scoreless draw

1996 Capt Rob Wainwright RAMC of the Army captains Scotland

2001 The recently formed Army sevens team wins the Middlesex Sevens, a feat they repeat in 2004

2004 CSgt Bob Armstrong RM wins his 31st Navy cap - a record. Cpl Ben Hughes (Royal Engineers) is the Army record holder on 30

2009 The Army's record win in the fixture, 50-7

2010 A record crowd of 56,185. Almost 100,000 pints of beer are consumed and the Army shop in the West car park sells nearly 2,000 replica shirts

aspect of researching this feature was the way the head coaches, wily men both, played down their chances, citing player unavailability as one obstacle to success. Certainly the regular deployment of soldiers and sailors across the globe mean the two services never really field a 'first XV'.

"If you were a betting man you'd never bet on the Navy," insists Ashton Jones, a Welshman and former first-class referee. "We are a third of the size of the Army (which has 95,000 personnel), so they have an inbuilt advantage and always will."

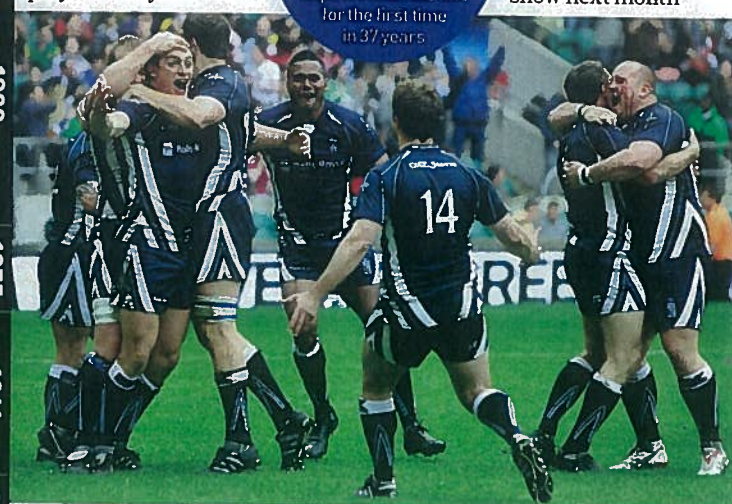
"We're in a perpetual state of rebuilding. We have 11 new (squad) players this year. We

unit. Currently of my likely Inter-Service 22 or 24 players, I have eight."

Players carry big debts. Of the social kind. For example, a couple of the key Navy players are petty officer weapons engineers. When they're not on ship, nobody is drafted in to cover their 12-hour daily shifts - colleagues must simply share the burden. "In the match programme you'll see a list of ships and for each player there are four or five people covering his workload. So when players say they couldn't have done it without so-and-so, they really mean it."

Nobody should be under any illusions that the men on show next month

**Sailing masters:** The emotion is clear as the Navy celebrate ending the Army's winning run last year. Now the men in blue hope to retain the title for the first time in 37 years.



**"You can't really put into words what a feeling last year was"**

**Navy skipper Dave Pascoe**

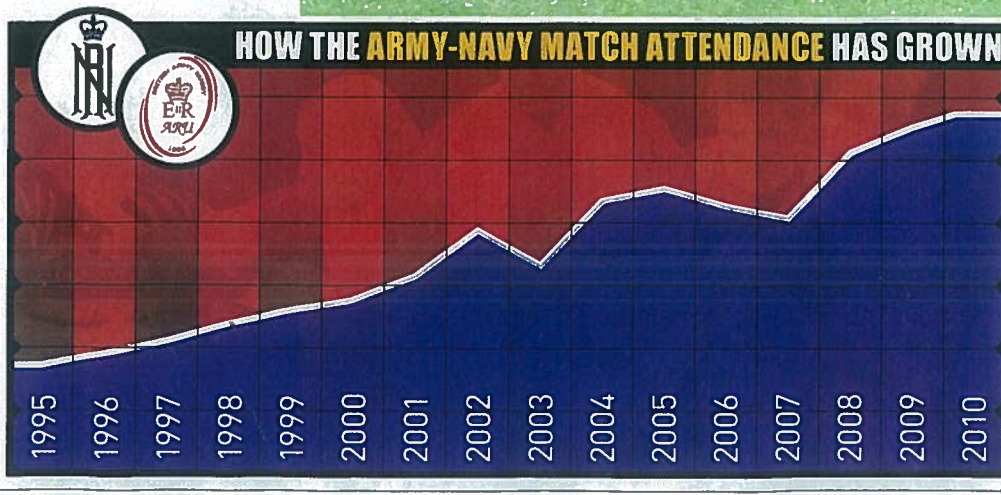
lose mid-ranking junior officers because they have to go off to fulfil their career. Flanker Mike Egglestone was one of our best players against the Army last year but he's Special Forces and we won't see him for four years.

"Yes, the Navy Board have been fantastic in supporting the concept of a three-month training camp for the senior XV (now in its second year). But the camp only works if players can be spared by their parent units."

"For the more junior personnel this isn't too difficult, but for many the reality is that they spend a mix of their time in camp and back working at the

are servicemen first, rugby players second. When an ignorant student spectator at Cambridge insinuated that Army rugby players do little in the way of real fighting, he felt the full force of Sanger's retort.

"At least 80% of our players have been on ops in the past 18 months," he states, "and we play rugby within the confines of our job. One of our players was killed in Afghanistan on New Year's Day. Private Joseva Vatubua (24) was a back-row and would have challenged for a place in our squad. The service was held at Canterbury Cathedral." >



## Army v Navy

> Another person to be put in his place was Matt Mullan. When the Worcester prop took a huge hit from Hughes during a recent friendly, he told his opponent: "When you've played for your country you can take a tackle like that."

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Army have won 40 of the 85 Inter-Services titles played since the championship's inception in 1920. The Navy have won 19 and the RAF 14. The other 12 titles have been shared

"When you've fought for your country you can tackle like that," came the corporal's instant reply. To which there is no answer.

While the Navy's preparations have included training in a

Warm-up results provide a superficial form guide, for such games are used to experiment, but the history books don't lie. Only at the very start of the Inter-Services (1920-22) have the Navy won three successive titles and not since 1974 have they retained it. Last year's victory, reward for the strides made by the Navy in fitness and conditioning, broke the longest-winning run in history, and even the Army, so chastened that day, acknowledge that the fixture cannot be as special if one team becomes excessively dominant.

"They looked fitter and stronger and they did their homework on us," chips in Budgen. "They came back at us. You could see it in their eyes before the game. They were hungry. This game will be all guns blazing."

The last word should go to the current champions. "It's billed as more than just a rugby game and it is," says Ashton Jones. "It's the best party atmosphere bar none at Twickenham."

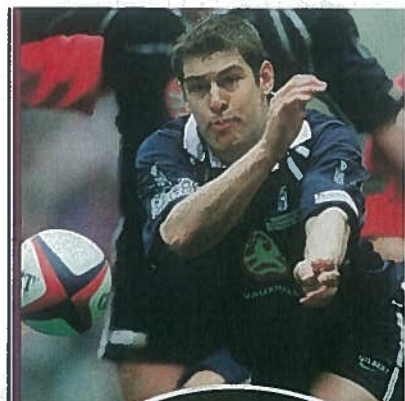
Win or lose, no one forgets that fundamentally the Army-Navy game is just a great day out.

● For ticket info, see ad opposite.

**"At least 80% of our players have been on ops in the past 18 months"**

**Army coach Andy Sanger**

**Off duty:** Chris Budgen playing in Iraq and (bottom) against Worcester last year



**Royal approval:** King George V meets the Army XV in the Inter-Services' first year, 1920, and (top) Dave Pascoe in 2001

Damage Control Simulator – a ship in dry dock which floods with water and rocks about in the dark while sailors try to plug up the holes – the Army this month will soak up the sun in Portugal, limbering up against two provincial sides. Last year Sanger's men went to South Africa and were stranded in Cape Town by the volcanic ash cloud, preventing them playing the RAF fixture for the only time outside of the world wars.

Yet they wouldn't mind being excessively dominant next month. Has Sanger found it hard to wait a whole year for his next shot at the Navy?

"It consumes my life!" he says, and I'm not sure if he's joking. "Credit to the Navy last year, they probably deserved that victory. They managed the game better than us and kept themselves in touch with Dave Pascoe chipping over the penalties. But if we perform well, we're a better team than the Navy, I'm convinced of that."

### WHO'S THE WORLD'S BEST?

THERE'S something else at stake for the players this year – places in the inaugural International Defence Rugby Cup (IDRC) being held Down Under from 1-22 October.

For the first time, armed services from around the globe will compete for a world crown, with the British Army, Royal Navy and RAF sides competing separately against combined forces teams from the likes of New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, France, USA and China.

Four groups of three will battle it out for a semi-final spot, with the competition starting on Australia's east coast and reaching a conclusion



across the Tasman in Auckland in the week of the World Cup final. RFU chief executive John Stoele, a former anti-aircraft missile officer and Army rugby captain, says: "A final of NZ Armed Forces v British Army in Auckland on 22 October, the day before the World Cup final, is one match I'd want to be at."

GETTY IMAGES, GRAEME MAIN, ROGER THOMPSON & WORLD RUGBY MUSEUM



# THE BABCOCK TROPHY

# ARMY v NAVY

## TWICKENHAM

More than just a Game!

Kick off 3.00pm

Saturday 7 May 2011

Bookings: 0844 847 2492  
www.ticketmaster.co.uk  
Adults £20/£18, Juniors £10

www.armynavymatch.org.uk

Live entertainment including The Band of the Royal Marines 2.20pm

Sponsored by

**Combined Services U23 v Oxbridge U23 - 12 noon**  
Matches at Kneller Hall - kick off 10.30am  
Army Women v Royal Navy Women  
Army Masters v Royal Navy Ancient Mariners