



THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT RUGBY HISTORY



Historical origins and changes in title

- 1694: Colonel Gibson's Regiment of Foot
- 1756: 2nd Bn 3rd (or East Kent) Regiment of Foot (The Buffs)
- 1742: 28th Regiment of Foot
- 1782: 28th (or North Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot
- 1758: 61st Regiment of Foot
- 1782: 61st (or South Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot
- 1881: 1st Bn The Gloucestershire Regiment
- 1881: 2nd Bn The Gloucestershire Regiment

In 1910 the 2nd Battalion reached the Army Final and Cpl James hurled himself over the line to score the only try of the match; he was the first soldier to score a try at Twickenham and he won the match for the Glosters. H Berry was another tower of strength in the side and gained four International caps for England but, being an other rank, he was debarred from playing for the Army. He is however, surprisingly enough, the only Gloster ever to gain International Honours while serving in the Army.

The 1st Battalion reached the semi-final in 1912 when the Leicesters got their revenge by winning 13 points to three. In 1913 and 1914 the Glosters again reached the final but again had to be satisfied with being runners-up. Nevertheless they had imprinted their name on Army rugby.

After the 1914-18 war the 2nd Battalion were sent out to India where they remained until 1929. During the tour of duty they won the Calcutta Cup in 1927.

On returning to England they were posted to Gravesend and had little opportunity to play Service sides so they arranged fixtures with London club XV's. They managed to defeat these sides through fitness rather than by ability and these games helped to improve the standard of play.

The battalion was fortunate in that about sixty per cent of the recruits enlisted into the Regiment were Gloucestershire men from Bristol, Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. A large proportion had played rugby at schools and small clubs and some were even schoolboy Internationals.

The standard was such that in the first two years after returning from India only one officer was able to win a place in the Regimental side and for the next three years there were only two officers playing. Most of the men in the Regiment are of medium-sized physique, and so it was decided to form a team which would play an open game throwing the ball about - backed up by fast-moving forwards.

The battalion made good progress playing this type of rugby and in 1932 they won the Eastern Command Rugby Cup and reached the semi-final of the Army Cup, in which they were beaten in a replay by the Welsh Guards.

Finally in 1938 they reached the final. Fifteen coaches and numerous private cars were packed with supporters, and on arrival at the ground there were many ex-members of the Regiment who had travelled by bus, train and cars to add



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their vocal support. Amongst these followers was Gen A W Pagan who had played in the winning team of 1910.

The Welsh Guards were a strong all-round side and a thrilling game, described on page 194, was won by a fine penalty kick taken by Arengo-Jones. The battalion reached the final again in 1939 but could not beat the Welsh Regiment.

During the war the 1st Battalion, after serving in Burma, returned to Calcutta, where playing conditions are of interest. The season was short, from July to September during the monsoon. Games were mainly of twenty-five minutes each way, and the kick-off timed for between five and six o'clock in the evenings. Conditions were of two kinds - either very dry and dusty with a fairly hard ground which favoured open play, or after a monsoon downpour very wet and muddy. One local hazard was 'Calcutta Pink Eye' which afflicted Service teams especially; when the mud dried a fine dust was formed, particles of which inevitably got into the players eyes. The composition of the soil caused an infection which developed into a most painful and unsightly form of conjunctivitis. Teams were known to be decimated by this. In the 28th this infection was combatted fairly successfully; all members of the team bathed their eyes with a saline solution immediately on return to barracks after the game. It was a case of first stop - the MI room and the eye bath under the watchful eye of the medical sergeant rather than the wet canteen for a beer.

By 1946 the 28th were in Doolali, India. A few matches were played locally and a tour of Bombay resulted in two defeats and one victory.

The Regiment did not win the All India Cup but they won the Calcutta Cup three times and were five times runners-up. They also have the distinction of being the only Regiment whose 1st and 2nd Battalions both won the Calcutta Cup.

In recent years the Regiment has not been able to reach the high standards of previous years but it is encouraging to see that there has been a marked improvement in the early 1980s.

Extract from: McLaren Lt Col J: *The History of Army Rugby* (Aldershot, The Army RFU, 1986)