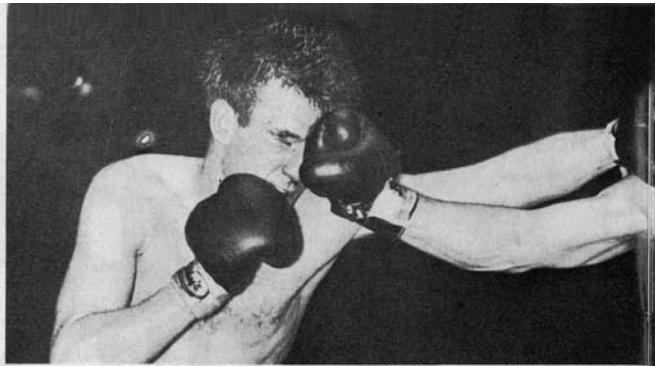




Above: Gold medalist Jim Fox — pentathlete.  
Right: Dave Charnley (right) in his Army days.  
Far right: Slalom canoeing — an Army sport.  
Below: Ex-Pte V A Head — Welsh international.



# SIXTY YEARS OF ARMY SPORT



Above: National Serviceman Bobby Charlton.  
Right: One of the 'big six' sports — rugby.  
Far right: Pte John Edrich in his RAOC days.  
Below: A Kentish Cup clash with the French.  
Centre: Fencing is a traditional Army sport.





BRITISH ARMY sportsmen have World War One to thank for the facilities and organisation which nowadays allow them to pursue the sports of their choice under the guiding hand of the Army Sport Control Board.

This month the board celebrates its sixtieth anniversary, having been born from the bloody battlefields of France. It was there that senior officers first saw the morale-building effect on battered battalions of being able to play football, box and hold athletics matches during their rest periods from the front.

In pre-1914 days there was little organised sport in the Army owing to lack of grounds and facilities. Most regiments had football teams but for the majority of men there was little opportunity to play properly organised games.

General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, when General Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Aldershot before World War One, saw the value of games to the soldier and it was he who ordered the use of picks and shovels to construct sports fields as part of military training.

It is thanks to him and the regiments stationed in Aldershot from 1908 to 1914 that the present-day Army can stage many of its major sporting finals and championships on the fields they pioneered.

But the formal establishment of the Army Sport Control Board did not come until 1918 after peace had been declared between the warring nations of the world. General Sir Charles Harington set up the board and became its first president.

Colonel B C 'Jock' Hartley — a famous rugby player for the Army, Blackheath and England — became the first secretary and



treasurer. He later became the board's director, a post he held until 1946 when he was succeeded by another rugby international, Brigadier A R Aslett.

The original board was set up with a small amount of capital from the Central Canteen Fund (the forerunner of Naafi) and throughout its sixty years of existence money for officially recognised Army sports has come almost entirely from non-public sources.

In the 1920s and '30s many thousands of pounds were spent buying ground for playing fields in garrisons at home and abroad. During World War Two a large number of leading British sportsmen served in the Army and many matches were played at Wembley (soccer), Twickenham (rugby) and Lords (cricket) to raise money for Service charities.

During the post-war era of conscription many more top sportsmen did their two-year stint in uniform and a number still lend active support to Army teams today. Notable among these are the soccer star Charlton brothers, Bobby and Jack, both of whom have swapped their boots for the boardrooms of British league teams. Coventry City's Joe Mercer has kept up his contact with Army soccer too, having offered — among other things in recent years — training facilities to the Army side at Coventry.

Over the years the Army Sport Control Board has expanded until it now holds sway over 31 sports. These range from the 'Big Six' (soccer, rugby, boxing, cricket, athletics and swimming) to more modern sports such as gliding, judo, freefall parachuting and volleyball.

The main job of the board today, operating from its offices in Aldershot, is to

encourage as many Army personnel as possible to take part in sport of some kind. This it does by organising Army cup competitions for both teams and individuals which units are encouraged to enter and by running representative Army teams. These set a standard for units to aim at and a goal for individuals to achieve.

Success by Army sportsmen is reflected in their selection for national and international events up to and including the Olympic Games where Army pentathlete Sergeant (now Captain) Jim Fox gained a gold medal.

Army athletes, judo players and marksmen regularly do well in major competitions. And Britain's first-ever gold medal in the world parachuting championships recently went to ex-Women's Royal Army Corps sergeant, Jackie Smith, who mastered her sport with The Parachute Regiment's Red Devils freefall team.

The board ensures that there is a committee for the administration of every sport it controls and provides secretarial support for the major Army sports associations and the Rhine Army sport board. It also produces the handbook 'Games and Sports in the Army' which contains not only the rules of sports associations but also the laws and regulations governing all major games.

The board meets twice a year under the chairmanship of the Vice Adjutant-General to decide policy and approve the distribution of funds, half of which have been met from public sources since 1956.

With an active past of sixty years behind it, the board looks forward to an equally active future with sport playing a larger part in the everyday life of the nation and especially that of the modern soldier with his watchword of 'fit to fight.'

