



Henry dons his old uniform again.

**T**HIRTY YEARS ago SOLDIER carried a report on 19-year-old twins in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, who were then at the top of the tree in Services' boxing. Today one of those twins is still at the top of the tree — as probably the best loved personality to emerge from the fight game.

South London born Henry Cooper now lives in a fashionable part of North London and enjoys the life of the celebrity he undoubtedly is. After notching up one of the greatest British boxing records of all time he became a successful businessman and show-biz personality — something he could hardly have dared to dream of when he joined up for National Service back in 1952.

That year Henry went to the Helsinki Olympics and became ABA champion. Shortly afterwards he and his brother George went into the RAOC and found themselves at Deepcut near Camberley together with a host of other good boxers, including another famous name, Joe Erskine.

"I was going to go into the Scots Guards because it was one championship they had never won. I agreed, but then I was told that

Watched by his twin brother George the youthful Henry weighs in. ▼



I would have to do regimental duties. At Deepcut we were basically there just for boxing.

"We went to Blackdown to do basic training, then to Deepcut just down the road to learn to drive. We must have had 60 or 70 bouts in the two years we were in the Army and we also used to go and box in London shows a couple of times a week.

"It was great for us because we spent two years in which we trained like pros but were still amateur. One thing — it kept us out of the Korean war. We didn't want to go there."

**"In boxing you can either be the best playboy or the best boxer. You can't be both."**

Henry's company sergeant-major at Deepcut was also a keen boxer. "I had knocked him out six months before and then, blow me down, I got there and he was the company sergeant-major!"

But there were no hard feelings and Henry won the ABA, Imperial Services and Army light-heavyweight titles in 1952 and 1953. His brother, George, meanwhile was runner-up to Joe Erskine as Army heavyweight champion.

"Our battalion team could have represented Great Britain," Henry recalls. "We had all top class fighters, including four or five ABA champions. Other battalions didn't stand a chance. We would usually win 11-0 and if we only won 9-2 there was always an inquest because two of us had lost."

Looking back on his Army days Henry feels it helped to give him a bit of discipline. Although boxing was the main activity he was still responsible for keeping himself and his uniform clean and there were regular barrack room inspections.

"A few weeks ago I went to a reunion at

Blackdown and could not recognise where I was stationed because the barracks we were in then were 100 years old and had been condemned for years. Now it's all green grass and modern blocks. It's like being in Buckingham Palace compared with what we were in.

"I sat between two major-generals and I thought 'when I was last here I was a lance-corporal'. How times change!"

Henry turned professional soon after he was demobbed and fought for 17 years. The public always remember when he dumped the young Cassius Clay on the seat of his pants with the feared 'Eneary's 'Ammer' but Henry himself has two prouder memories.

"I was the longest reigning British heavyweight champion of all time — over ten years, beating Bombardier Billy Wells. And I was the only fighter at any weight to win three Lonsdale belts outright. Of course I also look back on the Ali fight but to me it was a losing fight and I like to remember my winning ones."

Brother George has his own plastering contracting business and lives in Kent. The twins swore never to fight each other but in

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1953 — and Henry is Army champion. ▼





The twins head an Army boxing squad out on a training run in the Aldershot area. Second from right is Joe Erskine.

fact the question never arose. While they were in the Army they fought in different weight divisions and British Boxing Board of Control regulations would not allow them to meet as professionals.

"That was a bit unfortunate because I was heavyweight champion all those years. I think he had the ability to win it in his own right if I hadn't been champion. He beat Dick Richardson and Brian London and knocked out Johnny Prescott."

Henry's move into business, wisely guided by his manager, Jim Wicks, began a few years before his retirement. Now he has various directorships and makes many personal, television and radio appearances as well as extolling after-shave and other pro-

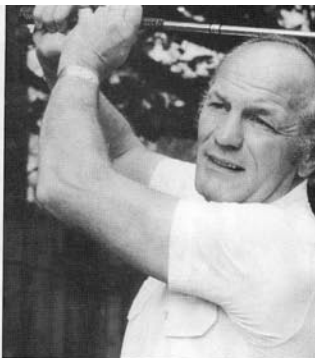
ducts in commercials.

"I never get bored. Two days are never the same with me. That's what makes life interesting. I have tried to analyse how I did it. If you have made a name and you have a certain sort of way and can mix with the public and talk to them you can get on.

"I enjoy meeting the public. A lot of celebrities hate it, but I have always looked at it that they are the people who pay your wages. If you don't have time for them you're cutting your own throat. I have seen people ignoring kids asking for autographs and that's very shortsighted."

The legend of rags to riches, and back to rags again, which surrounds boxers, is not really true Henry maintains. For every Randolph Turpin there are five who have done well out of boxing and some are millionaires.

"It's just the odd one who falls on hard



The only time Henry's left hook appears these days is on the golf course. "I play whenever I get the chance," he says.

times and you can never legislate for frailties in people's make up. Some go bird mad and they want to be Jack the Lad and a playboy. In boxing you can either be the best playboy or the best boxer. You can't be both."

Henry Cooper has enormous glass cabinets crammed full of trophies and mementoes. The more valuable ones, such as the Lonsdale belts (one of which is solid gold), have to be kept in a bank.

But some of the trophies which give him the greatest pleasure are those which he won as Army champion. Even though he admits: "I once saw a bill for them from Naafi and they were about 18 bob a dozen. And that's what we were fighting our guts out for." ■

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