

# The Cinderella Team of 1917

By John Hibner and Bob Royce

Surely the most interesting football team in the year of 1917 and World War I, was the United States Army Ambulance Service Corp team stationed at Camp Crane, near Allentown, Pennsylvania. They were a "cinderella" team of that time in their own right. The team's name was too long to suit many newspaper editors, who reduced it to "USAACS", leaving most sports fans in the dark as to its meaning or identity. It started with two strikes against it, lacking decent facilities and a coach, but ended the 1917 season as one of the strong service teams in the nation.

When the recruits moved into Camp Crane in September the place was in shambles. The barracks were very old and construction had been started to remodel the existing facilities. The new troops were sent to a tent city called Guth Station, without heat or plumbing. The men's basic training consisted mostly of drills and hikes designed to improve their physical conditioning, and football was one of the favorite sports among the men. The camp commandant wanted to field a team to compete with other service teams, since this was recommended by the top brass in Washington as a "morale" builder, but his personnel included no one with coaching experience.

A call was made for candidates for the football squad on September 26, 1917, just three days before the first game with Penn State, which was to be played on the Muhlenberg College field at Allentown. This was to be the home field for the USAACS. Coach Price of Muhlenberg agreed to coach the team, which he did for the first three games. He resigned after the 7th Infantry Officers game at Harrisburg because he found it interfered with his contract at the college. Coach Price barely had time to cut the squad down to 45 players, pick a starting eleven and give them rudiments of his football philosophy before their first opponent, Penn State, three days later.

Predictably, the Nittany Lions beat the rookies 10-0. Fordham, which was looking for a warmup game, pasted the soldiers 19-7. It was after the USAACS third game that their season turned completely around, when one of the team's own players, Dudley Clark, took over the coaching role. Clark had received his commission on the eve of the game with 7th Regiment Officers.

Clark had been an assistant coach under Hugo Bezdik at Penn State, but had never served as a head coach at the college level. His collegiate playing days were spent at the University of Oregon from 1907-1909 where he was an All-Western halfback. He possessed a "versatile mind and analytical power" which marks a great director of a football team. When he took over the coaching reins, he had been playing the tackle position.

He revamped the team and had them practice three hours a day. After practice Clark would order them to run a mile around the track before they quit. He wanted his team to be in shape, and this would bring results. The next game was to be against the Conshocken Athletic Club at Norristown. The soldiers had a tough battle on their hands, but pushed over two early touchdowns. The Conshockens scored on a cleverly executed trick play in the last quarter, but when the game ended the soldiers had held on for a 13-7 victory.

The USAACS' next opponent was the League Island Navy Yard Marine Corps team led by player-coach Eddie Mahan. The Marine team had only played one game, a 27-0 victory over the 319th infantry Regt stationed at Camp Dix. The Marine

team was considered one of the best service teams in the East because it was so heavily loaded with former collegiate players. Despite the so-called strength of the Marine team, the USAACS scored 27 points and let the reserves play most of the second half. The Marines never threatened. Many of the sports-writers commented that if Mahan had played things would have been different. Coach Clark agreed to a second meeting on Nov 10, with the game to be played at Franklin Field, and was to replace the regular Army-Navy game of that year.

On Nov 3 the USAACS played the Ewing Athletic Club of Philadelphia. The club-men were no match for the soldiers and Coach Clark removed his first team after the opening quarter, and coasted to an easy 45-0 win.

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| Army Ambulance Service<br>1917 |
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| Penn State       | 0-10  |
| Fordham          | 7-19  |
| 7th Infantry     | 45-0  |
| Conshocken A. C. | 12-7  |
| League Island    | 27-0  |
| Ewing A. C.      | 41-0  |
| League Island    | 16-0  |
| Springfield YMCA | 62-0  |
| Muhlenberg Coll. | 20-0  |
| Camp Meade       | 20-14 |
| Georgetown U.    | 0-27  |

8-3-0

The second game with the Marines was a hard-fought contest against Mahan, the famous Harvard All-American, and his strong Marine eleven. Charles "Mike" Murphy, USAACS quarterback, kicked three field goals and Ben Cabbage scored a touchdown on a pass with Murphy kicking the goal after the TD. Carl "Curley" Cramer rushed through the Marine line time after time, and the only thing that kept him from scoring was that Murphy elected to kick field goals, as USAACS won 16-0.

The Springfield YMCA team came to Allentown and another close game was expected. But it was the line smashes of Cramer, the speed of Paul "Pud" Brewer and George "Tuffie" Conn that proved to be

just too much for the Y men. The final score was 62-0.

Then the USAACS defeated Muhlenberg College 20-0, before traveling to Reading to play the Camp Meade Officers. The city of Reading declared a holiday so that everyone could attend the game. After three periods of play USAACS had a 20-0 lead, so coach Clark put in the reserves, but the Officers came back with two quick scores. They had cut the margin to six points with about three minutes to play. The game ended with Camp Meade driving downfield and inside the USAACS 25 yard line.

USAACS had now won eight straight games and there were rumors about a playoff for the Eastern Serviceman's championship, with the winner to go to Pasadena's East-West Service game on Jan 1, 1918. The proposed game would take place on Dec 15, 1917 in Philadelphia at Franklin Field between the USAACS and the Second Navy District team from Newport, Rhode Island. The Newport Sailors had a record of 5-1-1. They were coached by Dr William T. Bull, and some of the better known players were Charles Barrett (Cornell), Charles Black (Yale), and Bernard Gerrish (Dartmouth). Coach Clark had no comment about this proposal, and was concentrating on the last game of the season with Georgetown U, to be played in Washington D.C.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1917 the USAACS traveled to Washington accompanied by 1,000 soldiers. It had snowed the night before and the sidelines at Griffith Stadium were piled high, with the field wet and muddy, especially where the baseball diamond made up part of the gridiron. The USAACS team had built up a reputation in the last eight games for its speed and power attacks on the line. They took the kickoff and drove 70 yards, only to be stopped short in the shadow of their opponent's goal post, and from this point on Georgetown completely dominated the contest.

Johnny Gilroy, through his brilliant open-field running, carried the brunt of

the Hoyas' attack, which stalled on the soldiers' 15 yard line. Jackie Mahoney then dropped back and booted the ball straight through the uprights for a 3-0 lead. Again it was Gilroy, helped by Johnny McQuade, leading a Georgetown drive inside the 40 yard line, where USAACS held and again Mahoney kicked a field goal to make it 6-0 at half. The USAACS received the second half kickoff, and immediately tried a surprise quick kick that back-fired and was blocked. "Skipper" Dudek recovered the ball and sprinted 20 yards for Georgetown's first touchdown. Gilroy added the extra point for 13-0.

The soldiers took over again, but Cramer fumbled on an off-tackle play, and Ahern of the Hoyas recovered the ball and ran to the four yard line. On the next play Gilroy broke into the end-zone, placing the Hoyas out in front 20-0. USAACS fumbled the following kickoff, and the Hoyas struck for another quick touchdown.

The Georgetown College Journal of Dec, 1917 said of this game: "At no time this season, in any of the big battles in which Georgetown has played, have they shown such brilliant defensive play. The USAACS were advertised as speed kings, but they must have left some of their agility in Pennsylvania. The visitors plays were smashed long before they even got under way, and to Coach Albert Exendine football fans must tip their hats, for he handed out a real surprise in beating the soldiers. Before the game was to be played, the USAACS were generally recognized as the strongest service team in the East."

The resounding defeat had shattered the dreams of the soldiers, as they saw their trip to Pasadena lost in a sea of mud and snow. But no one would have gone anyway, because the War Department soon announced its travel restrictions, which is what really put an end to any hopes of a trip west.