

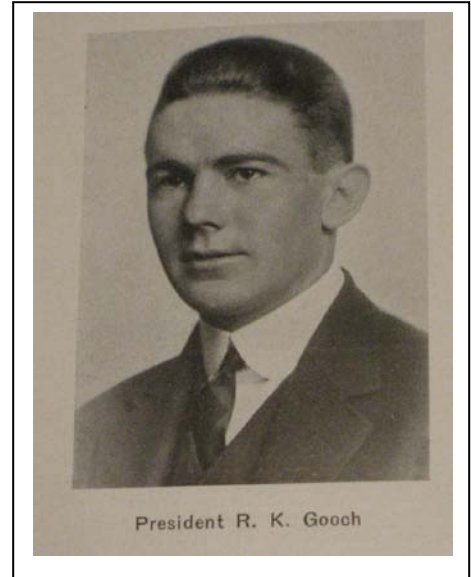
## Robert Kent Gooch

### *Gentleman, Scholar, Athlete*

Robert Kent Gooch – affectionately known as “Bobbie” – played quarterback on the University of Virginia’s football team in 1914 and 1915 and led the 1914 squad that went 8-1 and almost won the Southern Intercollegiate Association Championship.<sup>1</sup> In addition to calling the plays, he caught and ran back kick-offs and was an outstanding half-back; he was also a member of the track team and set records in both sports.

The Alumni News reported in 1914 that U.Va.’s defeat of Georgia (28-0) in the game known as the “Rally Round the Rotunda” was rated the “greatest home game” of the season. Played during a drizzle, quarterback Bobbie Gooch was said to have “led his men with rare ability” much like a general at war!

(At that point, games were held in the brand-new Lambeth Field dedicated in 1913.)<sup>2</sup>



As a student, Gooch was a member of the Z Society. He also belonged to T.I.L.K.A., the “13” club (predecessor of the 13 Society), P.K. (the precursor of P.K. German), and the “V” club (for the most active supporters of the University’s athletics).<sup>3</sup> From 1913-1914, Gooch served as the President of the Academic Class (the predecessor to the College of the Arts & Sciences) and may have been the University’s first Honor Chairman. (The Honor Committee was first established in late 1912 or early 1913 after a student proposed the creation of a permanent Honor Committee to consist of the student presidents of the University’s various schools.)<sup>4</sup>

He earned his B.A. in 1914 and his M.A. in 1915. Gooch was named a Rhodes Scholar, but World War I interrupted his studies. During the war, he served as Captain in Battery “B”, 60<sup>th</sup> Artillery, Coast Artillery Corps (C.A.C.), American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.). He and John V. Ray ’13 – a fellow Rhodes Scholar, football star and

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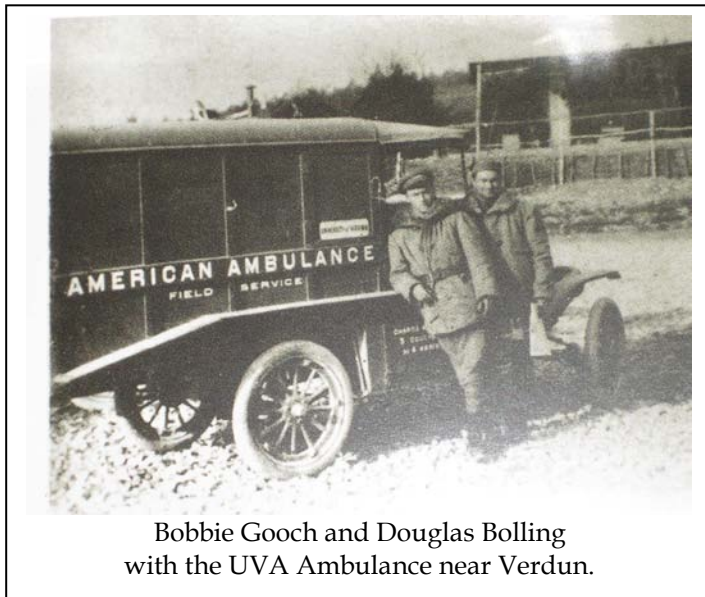
<sup>1</sup> Corks & Curls (1914); Susan T. Hitchcock claims that the teams he led in 1914 & 1915 went undefeated (*The University of Virginia: A Pictorial History, 2003*).

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Cavaliers\\_football](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Cavaliers_football)

<sup>3</sup> P.K. German is the concert committee of the University Programs Council (UPC), responsible for bringing a range of musical artists to the University community.

<sup>4</sup> Student data from the 1925 Corks & Curls. Honor Committee information from: [http://www.uvamagazine.org/features/article/the\\_evolution\\_of\\_honor/](http://www.uvamagazine.org/features/article/the_evolution_of_honor/)

U.Va. graduate, were the first two University alumni to volunteer to serve in WWI.<sup>5</sup> They joined the American Ambulance Hospital at Neuilly in the spring of 1915. They were part of contingent of over 80 other University students or recent graduates who served as ambulance drivers.<sup>6</sup> Gooch and his compatriots served for a time in Ippecourt (near Verdun) which was in a very dangerous location between the French and German front lines with mortar shells and gunfire a constant presence.<sup>7</sup> After the war, Gooch went on to Oxford and earned several degrees there in political science.



Bobbie Gooch and Douglas Bolling  
with the UVA Ambulance near Verdun.

Gooch returned to the University and became an associate professor in political science in 1924. In 1939 he founded the Government (now Politics) Honors Program, which is based on the Oxford tutorial system. Gooch became a full professor and taught at the University until he retired. At that point, at age 70, he accepted the position of Lecturer at Sweet Briar College. He and his family lived in Pavilion IV from 1948 until 1964.<sup>8</sup>

Gooch served the University in a variety of administrative posts while teaching—including a brief stint as acting Dean of the College—and he remained active in wider organizations, including serving as president of the Virginia Social Science Association from 1938-39. In 1949, the Raven Society hosted a panel discussion exploring “ways and means of achieving a more effective indoctrination of first-year men” into the Honor System; professor Gooch was a member of the panel since he had been president of the College and therefore chairman of the Honor Committee during his fourth year.<sup>9</sup> In 1955, he was awarded the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award and five years later he was given the Thomas Jefferson Award.

<sup>5</sup> *Corks & Curls*, 1917, pp. 220-221. Both are also mentioned in the 1916 edition, p. 326. Note: Both men volunteered to serve two years before the United States formally entered WWI!

<sup>6</sup> Gooch is shown in the 1917 *Corks & Curls* as one of the drivers of the new U.Va. Ambulance (a Model T Ford that had been purchased with funds donated by Charlottesville residents in the autumn of 1916), p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> From a letter dated September 26, 1916 written by an unidentified alumni-soldier which states in part, “Gooch was there on ‘picket duty’... the road to this post is a terribly dangerous one... and cannot be passed over in the daytime... shells are always falling... but we have to pass to get the wounded.” (1917 *Corks & Curls*, p. 230)

<sup>8</sup> This information was given to the author via e-mail on May 15, 2009 by Professor Larry Sabato who repeated many of the same academic steps as Gooch (e.g. Rhodes Scholar, teaching at U.Va., living in Pavilion IV); he also won the Gooch Scholarship and the Algernon Sydney Sullivan award as a student. Sabato became the third Robert Kent Gooch Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs in September 1992.

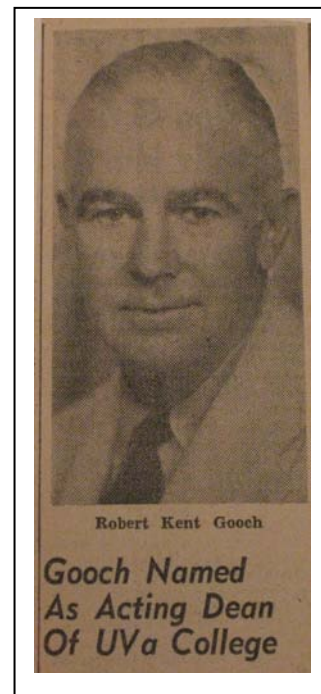
<sup>9</sup> [http://www.uvamagazine.org/features/article/the\\_evolution\\_of\\_honor/](http://www.uvamagazine.org/features/article/the_evolution_of_honor/)

He became “infamous” in 1951 when a University committee he led examined the role of collegiate athletics and the movement towards media-driven bowl games and professional athletes. They issued what became known as the “Gooch Report” and it quickly divided the school. The committee recommended that President Darden discontinue the football program and all athletic scholarships. According to Virginia football media guides, the Gooch Report declared that the school had succumbed to “big-time athletics.” The report split the faculty, enraged alumni and perfectly set the stage for Darden's decision to decline the Cotton Bowl invitation (the first time U.Va.'s football team had ever been invited to a post-season bowl game).<sup>10</sup>

Gooch served as University's Grand Marshall from 1932 until 1964, leading the Commencement & Founder's Day processions and other ceremonial events with the University mace.

Many students were unhappy that he was forced to retire at age 70 (per University practice) in 1964. The following year, the Student Council passed a resolution (supported “wholeheartedly” by the Cavalier Daily) that requested the renaming of the basketball arena – University Hall – after Gooch, calling him “a living symbol of the University.” The CD went on to say, “during his many years here, he was recognized as the embodiment of all the ideals and traditions of Mr. Jefferson's academical village.” He was invited to give the commencement address in 1965.

On the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, an endowed chair was named after him in 1973. Robert Kent Gooch died May 22, 1982.<sup>11</sup> In Virginius Dabney's classic, Mr. Jefferson's University, Gooch is described as “one of the few persons at the University who, by general agreement, is praised by students, faculty, and alumni as a master teacher, eminent scholar, and beloved gentleman of Virginia.”



**Written by Hernando Herrera '89  
April 13, 2011**

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theacc.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/101607aac.html>

<sup>11</sup> On the occasion of his passing, President Frank Hereford stated, “he was a brilliant student and a great athlete, a Rhodes Scholar, dean of the faculty and a precise example of the qualities and style of which the University is justly proud.”