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The Army Navy Country Club

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ALTHOUGH the membership roster of the Army Navy Country Club, just outside the nation's capital, is studded with some of the most illustrious names in the armed services, the older members have a saying that seems to typify the spirit of this unique institution. At the round oaken tables in the men's grill, you'll hear the old hands tell the newly initiated member or the visitor, "There are no generals, no admirals here—only members."

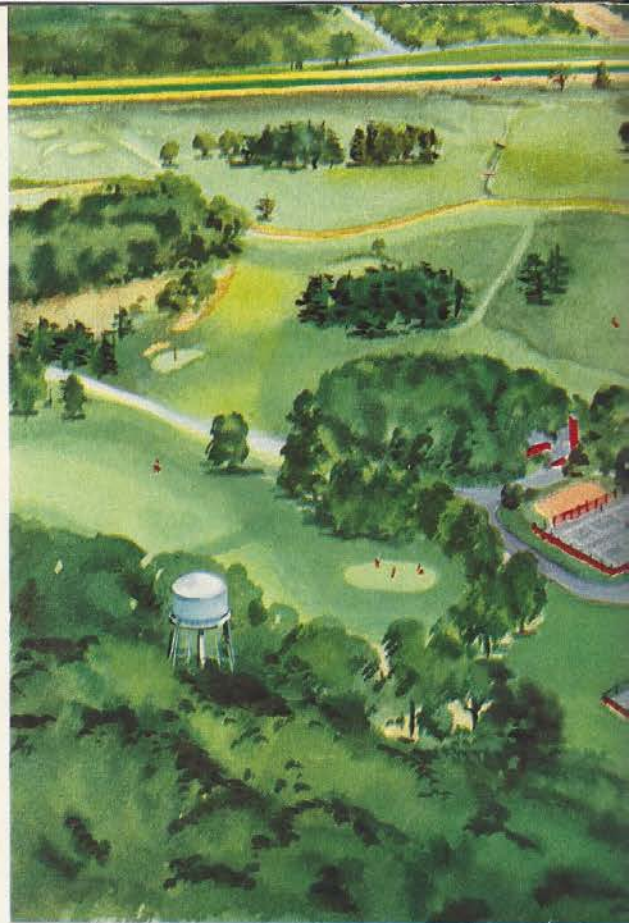
This is a family club. Here the generals and admirals park their stars as they don deliberately disreputable old clothes to beat their way around one of the hilliest courses in the District of Columbia area.

There are no military trophies, no battle flags or Japanese samurai swords strewn about the premises. Except for a few inconspicuously hung pictures of past presidents in uniform, there is nothing at all to suggest the fighting arms of the nation.

This Army Navy Country Club, by the way, is not to be confused with the regular type of officers' clubs on military reservations. It is a strictly private institution on private property, maintained by the members without a dime of government subsidy. It is perhaps the largest country club in the world. When the club manager, Colonel Richard E. (Dick) Daley, told a recent convention of country club managers that the Army Navy club had a total membership of more than 10,000, there was shocked silence.

"They were too flabbergasted to talk," Colonel Daley says.

The club owes this phenomenal membership to

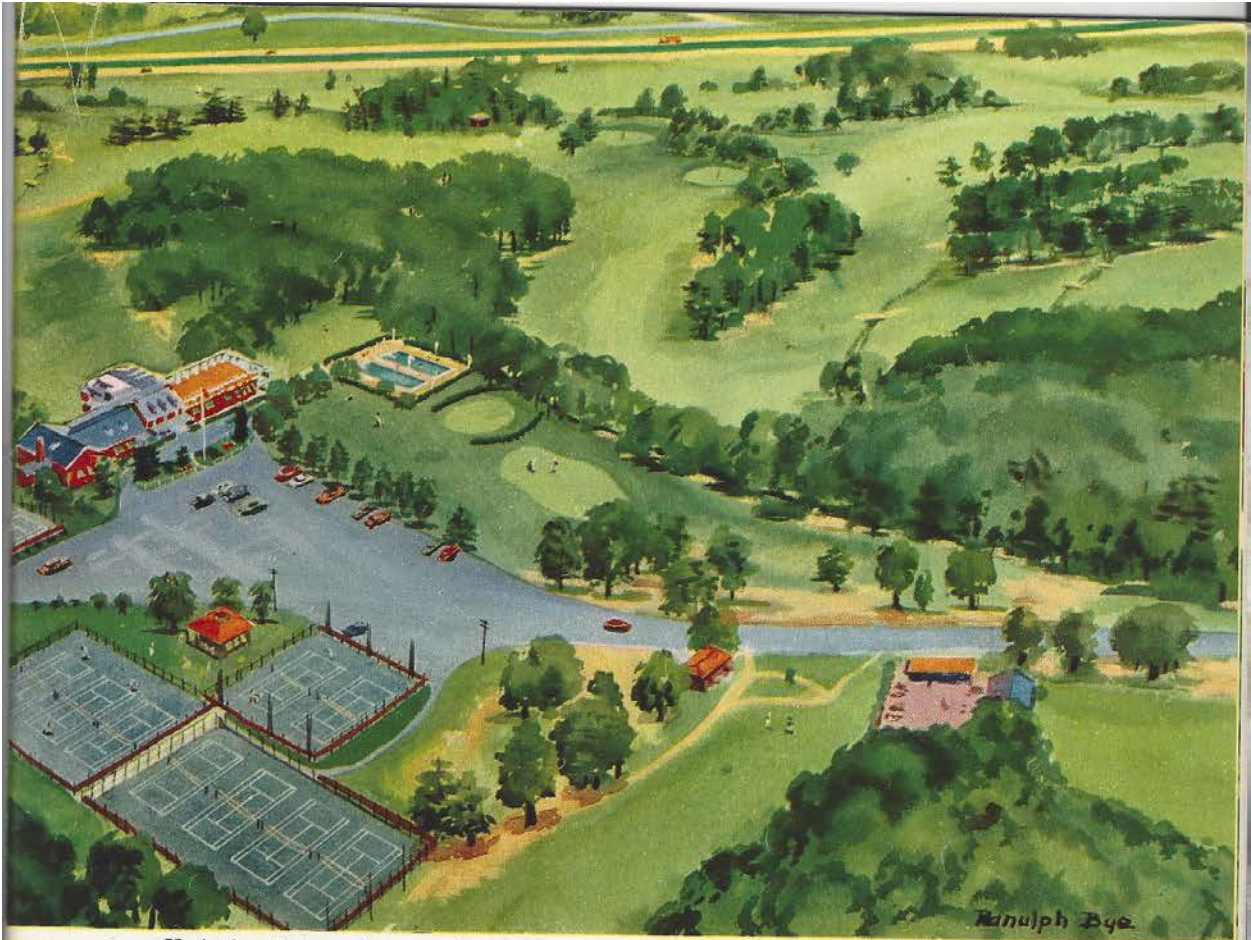


its liberal system of encouraging new Academy graduates to join up. Any West Point, Annapolis or Coast Guard Academy man, if he applies within six months after graduation, may become an absent member on payment of a token initiation fee and dues of \$7.50 a year. Because officers are birds of passage, like preachers, the club has amassed some 8,000 dues-paying absent members.



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Here's the golf course where generals and admirals put on old clothes and take on the junior officers.

The resident members are limited in number to 1,500. There also are more than 300 dues-paying junior members—sons and daughters of members—between the ages of 16 and 23, and more than 1,000 non-dues-paying smaller fry who receive junior member privileges.

The club got its start back in 1924 when a small

group of officers decided to do something about the sad social and athletic plight of their Washington colleagues. Military pay was low and the average officer could not afford the initiation fees at most of the capital's golf clubs.

A bronze plaque testifies that the late Colonel Richard D. Newman's "energy and devotion made



this club a reality." It was he who found the magnificently located 235 acres in Arlington, Virginia, where the club now stands. The location is only a few minutes by automobile, via the aptly named Army Navy Drive, from the mammoth Pentagon building, now headquarters for the National Defense Department.

Colonel Newman's energy in behalf of the infant club was boundless. In the early days, when the golf course greens languished for lack of fertilizer, it was the colonel who arranged for that need to be supplied from the Fort Myer stables. That, incidentally, was the only "gift" the Government ever made to the self-sustaining organization.

The Knights of Columbus had a clubhouse—a handsome, two-story, red-brick building—on part of the Arlington site, and this was the nucleus of the new club. Since, it has been enlarged by addition of two perfectly matching wings. The roof of one wing is an outdoor dancing terrace. Because of its cool breezes and its breathtaking view of the floodlighted Capitol, the towering Washington Monument and the classic dome of the Jefferson Memorial, the terrace is one of the club's most popular attractions. It is not uncommon for 700 guests to turn out on Saturday nights.

The comfortable clubhouse facilities include an excellent dining room which serves a five-course sizzling sirloin steak dinner for only \$2.50.

The golf layout boasts twenty-seven holes—an eighteen-hole and a nine-hole course. On weekends, the eighteen-hole course is for men only up through early afternoon.

Almost any Saturday afternoon, one might see the Air Force's top strategist Lieutenant General Lauris Norstad, decked out in a Hawaiian sport shirt, touring the links with Assistant Air Secretary Gene Zuckert, or youthful-looking Air Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg, now president of the club, dressed in shorts. Before the war, salty Admiral Ernest F. King and doughty Lieutenant General Bob Eichelberger were frequent golfers.

Some famous tournaments have been staged there, the most highly publicized of which was 1949's National Celebrities Golf Tournament. This was the show, presided over by Arthur Godfrey, which drew some 16,000 spectators in two days to watch Sam Snead, Cary Middlecoff and other professionals vie with Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and the Army's enthusiastic golfer-boss, General Omar Bradley, who plays the Army course in the high seventies.

Upwards of 350 members use the eleven tennis courts regularly, and matches often are played under floodlights until one o'clock in the morning. In the District Veterans' Championship tournament played at the club in 1948, none other than Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, paired with Austin Rice, turned up as doubles champion.

The most widely used facility of the club is swimming. A few years ago, the pool proved hopelessly inadequate for the demand, so a twin pool was built right beside it. This season, there were more than 36,000 admissions to the pools.

There also is an enclosed children's playground with its own wading pool, sandboxes and other play facilities. Mothers can check their offspring with the two full-time attendants and then go off serenely to golf or tennis. One recent Sunday, the two attendants handled 300 children during the day.

Army Navy Country Club today is a solvent institution, but it wasn't always like that.

"We were so poor in the beginning, and our golf course was in such bad shape," Major Carrol W. Dunning, a veteran member, recalls, "that it used to be a sacred obligation for every member who played the course to pick up every rock he came across and hurl it off the fairway.

"The golf committee also invested in fifteen dime-store paring knives and issued them to the players who used the course most. When we saw a weed on the greens, it was our job to stoop over and extract it."

The course is highly improved now, but the hilly terrain and the numerous drainage ditches still cause mental anguish to the golfers at the club.

The club originally financed itself by selling 151 life memberships at \$1,000 apiece. Some of the original patrons included Bernard Baruch, Irénée du Pont, S. R. Guggenheim, John G. Pew, Thomas Fortune Ryan, W. K. Vanderbilt and John Philip Sousa.

Today life memberships no longer are sold, and regular memberships are limited. Honorary and temporary memberships may be issued to the President of the United States, the Vice-President, Cabinet officers, Supreme Court justices, senators, representatives and other government officials, as well as to a limited number of foreign military attaches.

The presidency usually rotates among high-ranking members of the services, and among them have been Admiral Nimitz, Admiral William H. Standley, former Ambassador to Moscow, and General Bradley.

The family tradition sits strongly on the club. Its rooms and furniture are homey and comfortable. Slot machines are banned and no hard liquor is sold at the club—only wine and beer. Members desiring a nineteenth hole highball must bring their own bottles.

Wives and children find the club a pleasant, congenial place, and the Sunday brunches and Sunday evening buffet dinners, for which the club is famous, bring out hundreds of officers with their families. As General Ruffner, the board chairman, says, "There's nothing fancy about us. By and large, we're a one-car, one-club lot, strictly a family organization." ■