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World's Largest Country Club

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Col. Richard Daly, manager of the Army Navy Country Club of Arlington (with a Fairfax branch) is a tolerant man. Because he runs the world's largest country-club, membership-wise, at least, Col. Daly often is asked:

“What if every Army Navy member, wives and kids showed up on the same day?”

Although he may face due west, looking toward the mountains that may provide refuge in case of such a catastrophe, Col. Daly replies easily:

“Well, if nobody bought guests, we'd have a cozy little gathering of maybe 48,000 or 50,000 people. Of course, I doubt if Uncle Sam would still be in business.”

Even with Army Navy members scattered over the globe – conning ships, flying jets, commanding troops and manning desks – the activity at the service playground, just about three wood shots from the Pentagon, always astounds country club managers at their conventions.



Golf pro Allan Burton adjusts grip of Mrs. Need Looney in lesson at Army Navy Country Club. Looking on are Mrs. Jean Nettles, chairman of the Ladies 18-Hole Golf Committee, and Brig. Gen P.V.H. Kimble. Burton rarely plays away from his own bailiwick, has been pro since 1933.

Army Navy is in its 34th year, with the newly acquired 18-hole golf course, formerly the Fairfax Country Club, plus the 27-hole Arlington layout. There are four adult swimming pools, a wading pool, a playground for small fry, 14 tennis courts and enough chinaware, silver and help to accommodate 1,200 guests at a champagne reception. This was the house count at a turnout honoring the King and Queen of Holland.

In 1958, here is the way resident members found relaxation:

Upward of 75,000 beat the heat in the swimming pools.

Well over 15,000 registered for tennis, some playing all winter on all-weather courts.

More than 52,000 rounds of golf were played on the 45 rolling holes. “Rolling” is putting it charitably.



The huge club, now in its thirty-fourth year, recently build a new pro shop and caddy house.

Despite its military ring (it used to be the Army, Navy and Marine Corps Country Club), the club is and always has been civilian in nature. However, civilians find membership virtually impossible to achieve, and even reserve officers who made application nine years ago are just beginning to be accepted – slowly.

It is a far cry from 1924, when Maj. Gen Charles P. Summerall of the Army, Rear Admiral W.S. Benson of the Navy and Maj. Gen John A. Lejeune of the Marine Corps gathered with others to plan a country club for officers of the armed forces. Where the clubhouse now stands was the old Knights of Columbus Country Club, no more than a house in bad state of disrepair.

From its humble beginnings, Army Navy has grown until now it owns 250 acres at Arlington, 235 acres at Fairfax and 477 undeveloped acres at Chantilly. Last year a bidder offered \$6 million for the Arlington property alone. “We turned it down flat,” Col. Daly says.

The Arlington property appears on land records of 1609, when it was part of a 6000-acre tract that was granted by Gov. William Berkeley to a Robert Howsing as compensation for transporting 120 persons, for what purpose is not known. Later, it was occupied by Fort Richardson, one of a chain of forts surrounding Washington during the Civil War.

One of the first major problems was to find a golf architect to lay out the course. He appeared in the person of Maj. Richard Newman, an aviator conveniently transferred to Washington from Fort Riley, Kans. Maj. Newman, who died as a colonel, designed the course from an “aeroplane,” and some people who play the rugged links think a plane is the most sensible way to negotiate the tortuous hills and valleys. The only plaque in the clubhouse was given to Col. Newman in token of appreciation.

On August 5, 1925 ground was broken for the golf course. The land was fairly overrun with scrub pines. Near what is now the 6th tee were a moonshine still and a snake colony. Gen. Summerall, then Army Chief of Staff; Rear Admiral Edward W. Eberle, Chief of Naval Operations, and Gen. Lejeune, commandant of the Marine Corps, gagged the ceremonies by appearing behind a plow drawn by an Army mule, a Navy goat and a Leatherneck bulldog.



In 1925, Gen. John Lejeune and Admiral Edward Eberle broke ground for the new club behind a pair of mules, a goat and a bulldog. Picture was copied from original. Note styles of clothes.

Some odds and ends came in handy. Bricks from torn-down government building were salvaged. An old Navy frigate yielded up masts which made pillars for the front porch. Fort Myer, provide mules and fertilizer.

An early problem was money. Originally, Army Navy was financed by selling 151 life memberships at \$1,000 each to such people as Bernard Baruch, Irene du Pont, S.R. Ruggenheim, John G. Pew, Thomas Fortune Ryan, W.K. Vanderbilt and John Philip Sousa.

Army Navy (the day is coming when “Air Force” will be added) probably has the lowest membership fees of any first-class private country club. Upon graduation from the Military, Naval, Coast Guard, or Air Force Academies, a young officer may join by paying a \$30 initiation fee (it used to be less) and annual dues of \$18 if a resident member, \$13 if an absentee.

Golf is the major pastime, and in charge of the two courses is Allan Burton, the dean of the athletic staff. Burton, who has been a golf pro since 1933, probably gives as many lessons as any private teaching pro in the business, and some of his pupils have been pretty well known. They include Sherman Adams; Admiral Chester Nimitz; Frank Knox, World War II Secretary of the Navy; Gen. Omar Bradley, Admiral Earnest King; Lucius Clay and Gen. Lauris Norstad.



Col. Richard Daly is manager of Army Navy. Tracts owned by club total 962 acres, 477 at Chantilly.

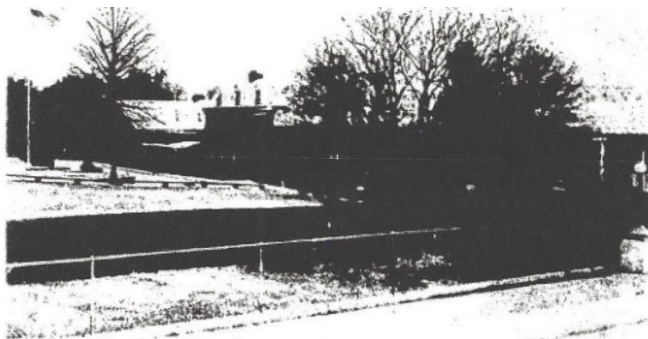
Burton, a dedicated teaching pro who rarely plays outside Army Navy and not often there, lulls pupils into tackling the hilly terrain with his own slow, deceptive swing, and if members can retain what they learn on the practice tee they are all right. But often the duffer is combing the highest rough this side of the Royal and Ancient for lost balls.

So famed is Army Navy for its ruggedness and so far flung its membership that some years ago, when President Eisenhower visited Korea and was accompanied by Gen. Bradley, then Chief of Staff, a humorous but not uncommon note was sounded. Gen. Bradley, when he addressed the troops, submitted to a question period at the end of each talk.

“One final question, General,” a stubble-chinned officer called out in the Korean No Man’s Land. “What have they done about the 17th green at Army Navy?”

Army Navy Member Bradley was familiar with Coronary Hill, which started as a dog leg and left the golfer rubber-legged after he’d scaled the peak to the putting surface.

“I’m happy to report that it is being leveled,” Gen. Bradley replied. The questioner nodded with silent satisfaction.



The club as it looks today. Actually, the center section is part of the original building (note the dormers in the photos). There are several swimming pools and numerous tennis courts on the grounds.