

# GIs Liberate and Restore Famed Resort Course



Neil Martin

By NEIL MARTIN

Neil Martin became the golf pro of the 16th Armored division after this hard-fighting outfit had completed its combat job in Europe. Martin was pro at Orange Hills CC, New Haven, Conn., Fort Smith (Ark.) CC, and at Cleveland and Toledo before entering the army. He attended green-keeping short courses at Massachusetts State college.

**T**HE 16TH ARMORED division was mentioned often as a championship combat organization, but comparatively few know that after the war in Europe was won men of the Sixteenth provided a golf course that kept many a soldier at least partially reconciled to staying away from home. And that's an important part of army postwar work. Everybody wants to get home—and right now!

After VE Day the Sixteenth was withdrawn from Pilsen and billeted closer to the German border. For several weeks we did nothing but await orders. That's the time when soldiers feel like blowing their tops.

During this period Special Service took over several hotels in the famous Czechoslovakian mineral bath resort, Marienbad. Here was established a rest and recreation center where men of the division could spend a week or so away from army life and live—at least a little bit—as rich civilians from all over the world used to live when they came here to recover from the ills of high living. That wasn't the reason we came.

The U. S. army got civilian help to do the work around the beautiful accommodations. The place became a promised land for the weary and bored GIs.

## Discover Abandoned Course

At Marienbad there had been a very popular golf course on which many of the world's notables had played. Special Service, knowing of my golf experience, gave me the job of putting the course into playing condition. I'd had no idea there was a course around here and was astonished to see signs of a beautifully laid out and constructed course of championship length and character.

The course was entirely grown over. When the Germans took over the Sudetenland golf became a casualty. Golf is too good for the Nazis to understand. And anything that's good they don't want

and would not allow anybody else to have. Grass on the fairways of the course was almost knee deep and the greens were ankle deep in grass. The course had not been played for several years.

I asked the Major in charge when he wanted the course opened, expecting him to tell me "in several weeks." His reply was "it should have been opened yesterday." Not a lick of work had been done on it. That is your army, Mr. Jones.

So that's the challenging problem that faced us.

## No Labor Shortage

We had permission to requisition any labor, material and machinery we needed—and could get—from the Germans. The labor problem, which would have been a serious one for us in the States, was solved by the supply of German prisoners of war in numbers limited only by our capacity to transport, guard and feed them.

However POW efficiency was low. And as an entirely new crew was sent us every day it meant constant work breaking in new men.

We had a pleasant surprise in taking

Seven horsedrawn hay cutters were used to cut the knee deep fairway grass.





POW labor used hand scythes to get the overgrown greens turf down to workable height.

stock of the machinery and tools left on the course by former operators. We found a 5-gang fairway outfit of English-made Worthingtons. It was old and worn but capable of cutting after a fashion. We also discovered two Ransome power greens mowers and several old hand greens mowers. We also found hole cutters and some hand tools of ancient vintage.

We found a diesel tractor on a German airfield and used it for pulling the fairway units. We had to tow the tractor to start it and when it operated it put a thick smoke screen around itself. But it served the purpose.

G. I. mechanics cleaned all the machinery and got it into working order. That was a job that tested the ability and resourcefulness of our men. But the equipment finally got so it worked well enough as long as we prayed hard.

### Heavy Cutting Locates Course

With the equipment and labor sections of the job organized we set out to cut the long grass to see where and what the course was. A trip to the burgomeisters of three small villages netted us 7 horse-drawn hay cutters and 7 teams. Of course the Germans had to be paid for their services and team and equipment rent.

To see 7 teams of horses going in echelon down a fairway would shock a greenkeeper but that's the only way we had of making the first cut. As it worked out no damage was done.

In a few days the first cutting was finished and the hay raked and carted away by the farmers and their families. Several times our hearts skipped beats when we saw loads of hay drawn across greens by teams of oxen. But it didn't hurt the greens. Grass and greens can take a terrific beating and survive.

The course is in the hills outside Marienbad at an elevation of 3200 feet.

Rain is plentiful and weather is cool. Although wet condition hindered us at times it provided plenty of moisture for the greens which had been drastically cut to playing height. We had no time for nursing the greens through in-between stages.

Immediately after the cutting by cutter-bars we cut the grass to fairway length with the fairway mowers. After two cuttings the fairways greened up and soon had a beautiful stand of grass on them. There is a lot of bent among the native grasses. Evidently the grass growing full height had seeded, sown and thickened the turf. At the end of 3 to 4 weeks we had thick even turf that didn't show a solitary trace of horses hoofs.

### Reconditioning the Greens

In restoring the greens we requisitioned enough hand scythes from the farmers to supply the POWs who made the first cut. This hay was carefully removed, then the greens were rolled with a heavy roller. That pressed out some of the roughness.

After that we quickly went to work cutting the inch-high scythed grass to greens length with the power greens-mowers. It wasn't necessary to re-roll with the heavy roller as operation of the greens mowers rolled the almost constantly moist ground to satisfactory putting level.

At first it appeared that the greens would not be able to survive the severe cutting. But soon they began to get green and at the end of a month showed little indication of having been out of play for several years.

There was no fertilizer available so although the grass needed feeding we had to skip that. We did have good top-dressing loam so by using it we evened the green and filled in spots which had been left bare when the POWs weeded.

View of the Marienbad course from clubhouse showing restoration work well advanced.



We located 50 pounds of creeping bent seed for which we paid 2 pounds of tea and a package of cigarettes. We sowed this at the rate of 3 pounds a green, after the topdressing. The bent produced new shoots late in June.

### Traps Are Rehabilitated

Most of the greens were well trapped. Here our problem was to rid the traps of weeds and refill with sand. Cutting the weeds down and refilling with sand didn't work and finally we decided to practically remake each trap.

We put 5 or 6 men to a trap. POWs work slow. We had the weedy sod lifted and as much sand as could be was shaken from it. This gave us a bed of about 1½ inches of sand. The Germans had hauled hundreds of yards of pure white sand into Merianbad before they left. This we had loaded on GI trucks and hauled to the course where it gave us an ample supply of sand to face our greens with beautiful and sparkling traps.

Our POW help which ranged from 10 to 20 men a day was augmented by Gaston, a Frenchman who drove the tractor; Hans, a German who cut the greens; and Marion, a Pole released from a concentration camp. Marion was our interpreter.

And believe me, you need an interpreter when you're trying to get a gang like we had working on a golf course.

But notwithstanding the language differences and other difficulties the work proceeded smoothly and at the end of two weeks the course was being played. At the end of the first month you'd not realize that the course had been out of play for so long.

About the first of August, Lloyd Mangrum and Lt. Matt Kowal shot sub-par rounds over the par 72 course. The par was no setup for anyone so the Mangrum and Kowal rounds were good indications of the success of the rehabilitation job.

This job was of special interest not alone because of its value in providing attractive and keenly needed recreation facilities to the marooned GIs, but because it was a good demonstration of what can be done in restoring courses that have been abandoned during wartime in the U. S. Those courses can be restored to provide golfing facilities for many thousands of soldiers who'll want to play when they get back home. Our observation at Marienbad was that golf certainly is going to be highly popular with returning GIs.

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## USGA Championships to Mean Tougher Courses?

★ HARRY ROBERT, golf writer of Philadelphia Record, has stirred up lively controversy with a column saying that conditions favoring low scoring have been overdone to the extent that the public no longer becomes greatly interested.

Robert cites PGA tournament mgr. Fred Corcoran's remark about the possibility of rating tournament courses as an indication that tournament pros have been insisting on playing conditions being too easy to heat up the golfing public about low scores. Robert says that wartime absence of USGA controls over club faces, the PGA abolition of the 14 club limit, selected balls for the tournament pros, casual regard for the rules of golf, and softer greens has been reducing public regard for scoring achievements.

He refers, in his criticism, to the probability of Canterbury, where the 1946 Open is to be held, requiring a winning score that will make the money-circuit performances appear to be affairs played over push-over courses. Little and Sarazen tied at 287 in the 1940 Open at Canterbury, with Little winning the play-off at 70 against Sarazen's 73.

The way Oakmont this year defied efforts of today's top stars to make phenomenal scores may give basis to Robert's

opinion that the tournament circuit courses are not set up to traditional national championship standard.

In this connection it's interesting to note that the Daily Mail tournament, first major competition played over St. Andrews after the war, was won with Cyril Ward's 298. The course was stretched to 6,852. Weather conditions were unfavorable. Jack White, winner of the 1904 British Open, who played in the postwar tournament at the age of 73, said: "The old championship course played four strokes a round longer than in any championship since the rubber ball came into the game."

Comment of several newspaper golf writers on the Robert column is that renewal of the U. S. National Open with the USGA and Canterbury standing firm on real championship conditions will strongly reaffirm the Open's status as the game's top tournament regardless of other events offering more prize money.

U. S. Open lowest winning score was Ralph Guldahl's 281 at Oakland Hills CC, Detroit, in 1937. British Open record of 283 was made in 1932 by Sarazen at Princes, Sandwich; in 1934 by Cotton at Sandwich, and in 1935 by Perry at Muirfield.