

# MID OCEAN, The Course That Wouldn't Die

By R. A. JONES

IN 1939 the British empire declared war on Germany. Bermuda was in it from the first as a part of the empire. From that time on all the island's manpower was devoted to the prosecution of the war. The tourist trade upon which the island depends stopped at once. Within a few days all the visitors left, the hotels were closed and there was no one to play golf but the residents and GIs. When USA entered the war the islands of Bermuda became an important defensive outpost of USA. Big Naval and Air Bases were built and all available native labor plus many thousands of workmen from U.S.A. went to work creating an island fortress out of what was one of America's playgrounds.

Every square foot of shipping space was required for absolute essentials. Since the island produces a mere portion of the food required for its population the American Navy had to become house-keeper and to a large extent protector since the British Navy was busy elsewhere. Horses, until recently, the only means of transportation on the island, couldn't be fed on the products of the island, some were turned out and died; others were shot.

The war work had to go on. Submarine

hunting was of primary importance and air and naval bases were needed and for the former several square miles were added to the island to create what is now known as Kindley Field. Within 2 miles of Kindley Field is the famous Mid Ocean Club. What happened to that great golf course?

With 4 men and absolutely no supplies and equipment of any sort from 1939 to present date they managed somehow to keep the golf course going simply by keeping the greens cut and mowing the fairways as often as the supply of gasoline and labor would permit.

None of the greens received any water since 1939 for the army required the water. Not an ounce of fertilizer was used in the past 7 years. Equipment could not be replaced and they had to get along as best they could. Putting greens were mowed with ordinary lawn mowers.

In prewar days the greens turf was Bermuda grass and rye and red top was seeded in the fall as is customary in Florida, but neither the seed nor the labor was available. *Poa annua* invaded the greens as the Bermuda grass became dormant and produced a fairly good turf just as it will for part of the year in the U.S.A.

At the point where this view of Mid-Ocean was taken the course borders the shore and the club's private beach.



When the poa annua died down the Bermuda grass revived and there was a gradual change from the one grass to the other. An application of nitrogen, the first application of fertilizer in 7 years, applied as the Bermuda became active favored the transition and by June 1st the 18 greens were uniform in texture and compared favorably with those in the United States.

The fairway grass is largely tough St. Augustine or a near relative but the lack of nitrogen through the years has resulted in a heavy infestation of clover and plants of that family which are able to solve their own nitrogen problems. The light color of the turf also indicates lack of nitrogen and the application of any of the soluble nitrogens has an immediate effect. Greenkeeping in USA is a most difficult problem, but it isn't in Bermuda for the following reasons:

Rainfall is regular and sufficient to maintain the native grasses without artificial watering.

Fungus diseases such as large and small brown patch and winter kill are practically unknown.

There are few insect pests.

There is very good drainage.

All the sand needed for traps can be taken from sand dunes which border on the fairways.

There is no clay in the soil and turf is deep-rooted and healthy. Only native grasses are used.

Although there is very little soil above the coral and limestone formation, what there is, is fertile and acidity with which American greenkeepers have to contend isn't a problem for there seems to be ample lime in the surface soil.

In U.S.A. we try to grow Kentucky blue grass far north of its natural habitat and velvet bent far south of its natural habitat, and in the middle of the summer when everybody wants to play golf under good conditions both those grasses are in a semi-dormant state. The greenkeepers' heavy problems occur in July, August and the first half of September simply because many grasses are being grown in the wrong climate; but it isn't so in Bermuda.

If greens in any of the Atlantic states had neither fertilizer nor fungicides for 7 years they would cease to exist, in fact they would not endure for one year. The temperature and humidity in Bermuda in the months of July, August and September compare with Washington D.C., although there are cooling breezes on hot days on the island. However the tough natural grasses are at their best in those months.

As elsewhere, there are problems in Bermuda. The work still in progress at the military bases absorbed most of the limited skilled labor. The rehabilitation

of hotels after 7 years of war conditions has to wait for labor and materials. The luxury liners which plied between New York and Bermuda have not returned from the shipyards where they are being refitted. Space for freight on the few available ships is limited to essentials and it will be many months before the greenkeepers on the island secure adequate equipment. It is truly amazing how they were able to carry on with virtually nothing for so many years.

The workmen use bicycles to and from their work. They could not get along without a bike. The maximum penalty for stealing a bike in Bermuda is 4 years at hard labor and 2 years is "a warning".

The penalty for using "offensive words" is six months in the cooler. But the people on the island are most polite and visitors leave with pleasant recollections.

**WIN THE BEGINNERS**—George McLean, veteran pro, makes the sage observation that in this boom year, despite crowded instruction calendars and other pressing duties, the pros have an important responsibility of forming the foundations of lasting friendships with the hundreds of thousands who are new to the game. Free classes now and then for war veterans who are new to golf, cheerfully given free tips to newcomers on their games, and in general going out of the way to show a welcome and an interest in the new players, George reminds, is smart foresighted business for the pro who wants to establish close and lasting business relations with arrivals who'll be playing golf for many years.



"Gee, it's great to be smacked on the head with a real rubber golf ball again."