

As I Remember Tantallon
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Member Since April 17, 1965

Tax season was finally over, and I had joined Tantallon Country Club, a new club/golf course in Prince Georges County, Maryland. At the time the golf course consisted of just nine holes, but the remaining nine holes and club house would open later that year.

Tantallon was a development started by U S Land Corporation and was named after a castle near North Berwick, Scotland. It was the last genuinely great castle built in Scotland. William Douglas built it in the mid-1300s and was it partially destroyed by Oliver Cromwell in 1651. My wife and I were fortunate to visit the castle remains on one of our trips.

One of the ways to join was to buy a lot. Membership came free with the purchase. Being a new development there were very few homes in the area. In fact, Indian Head Highway was one lane each way. Fort Washington Road was virtually a drive into the woods.

The layout of the golf course was different. What is now hole number nine was the first hole back then. One drove up Baleshore Circle to find two trailers which housed the golf pro shop and golfing equipment for sale or storage.

Hole Number One (Today Number Nine)

The first tee was located on the property which now consist of a private home with pool between what is now the number one green and number nine tee. Your first tee shot was straight down the fairway toward the lake.

Number one hole (number nine today) was different back then. The hole had seven (7) sand traps. The first was to the right side of the fairway and to the left (as the golfer faces the green) of the present sand trap on the top of the hill for today's number one.

The second was on the left side of the fairway to the left of the present cart path and before going out of bounds on the corner. A careful examination of the area will still show the indentations of the sand trap. While the sand trap saved your ball from going out of bounds, one didn't have a chance to go for the green from it.

The main reason why one couldn't go for the green from the trap was a large Willow tree in front of the left corner of the lake. As we all know, a shot into a willow tree has extraordinarily little chance of going through.

The third trap was in front of the lake. Again, a careful examination of the grounds will show the indentation and small rise from the extinct trap. (Note: I once holed out from the trap for an Eagle two and round of 34. Ah, the good old days.)

Traps four, five, six and seven surrounded the green. On the extreme right was number four. It still exists today although much smaller. In the trap was an exceptionally large tree which in many cases left you with no shot to go for the pin.

Trap five existed until 2020 when it was removed. Trap six went around the left front corner of the green and was eliminated several years ago. The last trap existed until 2020 when it was redesigned to its present shape.

To the right of the fairway from the tee to the lake was a row of trees. Some are still standing today but most have been removed. While making the hole more difficult, it did provide a nice separation from hole number two (today's number one.)

The green was pretty much the same as today but some years later the members planted Azaleas on the hill in the back of the green. Made for a nice spring view. One of the future owners decided it was too much work to maintain and removed them.

Hole Number Two (Today Number One)

Hole number two (today's one) is pretty much the same as today except for trees. As mentioned before, the area between holes number one and two, (today number one and nine) was lined with trees. The rest of the hole is the same as it is today.

Hole Number Three (Today Number Two)

As in the case with the prior hole, this hole hasn't changed too much. The trees to the left of the fairway were much lower and long hitters would try to hit a high draw off the tee over the trees onto the green. Not all succeeded but some did. Today that is pretty much impossible with the height of the trees. The cart path ran in front of the green and sand traps making some short shots interesting as they bounced off the cart path. Subsequent owners move the path to its present position behind the green and sand traps.

Hole Number Four (Today Number Three)

The big change on this hole was the position of the tees. Most of the time the tees were moved back making the hole much more difficult. In addition, the

cart path crossed in front of the tees and ran down the left side of the fairway and to the left of the green resulting in more shots going out of bounds after hitting the cart path. A sand trap was to the right of the green and the indentation can still be seen today. The trap on the left did not circle to the front of the green. This was added when the right-side trap was eliminated.

Hole Number Five (Today Number Four)

As with the prior hole the tees were constantly pushed back making the hole longer than it is today. The rest of the hole is the same as it is today. Of course, the lake was clear.

Hole Number Six (Today Number Five)

This has always been a difficult hole. The blue tees were moved back to almost the homeowner's back yard. The tee area can still be seen today. The first lake was two lakes. It was possible to walk across at approximately where the lady's tees are today. If your tee shot went in the water after flying over the land between the lakes you were able to place your 2nd shot on the little walkway island and shortened the distance to the next lake. If lucky, it was possible to skip a ball across the water stopping on the walkway island and saving a penalty shot. Balls that hit the walkway generally bounced into the second lake. Over time erosion occurred and the walkway disappeared.

This hole was always a problem with rainwater. The original design left the fairways in a concave position allowing water to accumulate. Several attempts to level the fairway including dumping the silt from lakes as they were dredged were attempted with only minimal results. Today rainwater still accumulates during a heavy rain. The members, at their cost and labor, planted Azaleas on the hill behind the green making for a "small Augusta" during the spring. Subsequent owners decided it was too much work to mow around them and pulled them up.

Hole Number Seven (Today Number Six)

Believe it or not, for a short time the blue tees were across the road next to today's number one green. As homes were built and occupied the tee was moved to its present position. The big change is the addition of two sand traps to the left of the green. The lake surrounding the back and left side of the green derived its water from today's seventh lake. It ran from the lake down the right side of the fairway, first above the ground and then under. Problems with the underground pipes moving resulted in a former groundkeeper lowering "the dam" to the right of today's cart path and drying up the lake. Today it has been added to the homeowner's lawn. The lowering of the dam can still be seen today.

Hole Number Eight (Today Number Seven)

This hole was much longer and more difficult when originally designed. The blue tees were back to almost today's hole number five's fairway. Even a good tee shot (demanded a draw for right handers) left over two hundred yards to a green guarded by a lake. Subsequent owners moved the tee to its present position in hopes of speeding up play. As mentioned in the previous hole description, water at one time ran down the right side of the fairway before it was moved underground to make the hole more playable. Broken pipes ended that. As with most of the lakes, this lake was clear and devoid of silt and weeds. It was possible to see your ball land on the green. I believe the sand traps to the left of the green were added later.

Hole Number Nine (Today Number Eight)

Again, the blue tees were back to almost the road and to the left side of the fairway. The indentation for the tees can still be seen today. To the right of the cart path as you reach to top of the hill was a sand trap. The remains can still be seen today. The major difference was a large tree in the center of the left green side trap. This tree protected the left side of the green making a draw a necessity when the flag was on the left side. The tree also played double duty in that it protected shots for going out of bounds but also caused many shots that normally would have hit the green, bounce off the tree and out of bounds. The tree was removed by subsequent owners.

Back Nine

As I indicated earlier, 1965 brought the opening of the back nine and clubhouse. At this time, the holes on the front side were renumbered to their present numbers.

The back nine are remarkably like today but to play it in those early days, one took their life in their own hands. Being newly constructed the fairways were still full of small pebbles which flew in all directions when struck while attempting to hit your ball. Snakes and mosquitos were everywhere, and no houses existed at the opening.

The biggest change is the removal of trees which were everywhere. Holes ten through fourteen have not changed much except for the shrinking of the greens especially 11 and 13. Hole number 15 was always a monster. At first the fairways in front of the green were kept short then allowed to grow out. There wasn't a sand trap on the right side of the green resulting in many balls going into the little creek that ran down the side of the fairway. Trees that lined both sides of the fairways required a straight shot. Thankfully, the green was much wider and longer. Slowly it is been allowed to shrink. The hill to the left of the green has seen many changes. From heavy rough and shrubs to scalping. It is still being studied.

Hole number sixteen provides an outstanding view from the teeing area. On a clear day the Washington Monument and National Harbor can be seen. The hole has remained essentially the same but did have a sand trap added on the left side of the green. The trees to the left of the fairway were much shorter and long hitters would hit their second shot from the fourteenth fairway up and over the trees to get "home" in two. Today that is pretty much impossible.

Hole seventeen was generally played back closer to number thirteen fairway requiring a longer tee shot. A sand trap existed on the left side of the fairway just before reaching the green. It was removed by subsequent owners. The green was also larger.

Finally, hole number eighteen at first had no sand traps. One was added to the right front of the green. In addition, there was only one set of tees. The left side tees of today did not exist in the original design. The lake was beautiful, and the clubhouse veranda was generally filled with golfers ready to hiss and cheer as you putted.

Clubhouse

The clubhouse opened in mid-1965. It copied the Scottish theme set forward by U S Land. Many of the neighborhood streets had Scottish names such as Inverness Lane, Firth of Tae Drive, Surry Circle Drive and of course St. Andrews Drive. Stepping into the bar area you immediately noticed the Pewter Beer Tankards hanging behind the bartender. Almost every member had their own personally broken-in Tankard hanging on the wall with their name below it. Copying the Scottish motif, the predominate color was green.

The formal dining room contained a wood burning fireplace and piano. The doors surrounding the dining room were removal opening the area to the bar and dance floor.

In the extreme back left of the building was the member's grille room overlooking the eighteenth green and swimming pool. Separating it from the dance floor was a floor to ceiling folding door allowing the entire area to be open for special events. Virtually every golfer stopped in the grille room after golf for food and refreshments, many venturing out to the veranda to sit, drink and harass the golfers as they finished the 18th hole. Guy Charron, a Washington Capitals hockey player once refused to putt out for embarrassment of missing the putt. This was a person who played hockey in front of thousands for a living.

The entire bottom floor was occupied by the men's locker room which not only consisted of lockers, sauna, and showers but a card/pool room and shoeshine attendant. After golf it was not unusual to see golfers playing gin while eating lunch.

Upstairs were the offices and board room.

As the club was sold and resold each new owner seemed to have different ideas on how the insides should look and immediately moved forward with their ideas. One of the main changes was to redo the men's locker room eliminating the card/pool area, reducing the size of the locker room, and installing a coed exercise facility. Most of the other changes were just new paint and minor changes.

The clubhouse quickly became the local community center. Reservations for Friday and Saturday night were treasured. Dinner was served by waiters in tuxedos and items such as a Caesar salad were prepared fresh at your table. Soft music was played at the piano while you dined. Table hopping to visit your neighbor was common.

Members/Dignitaries

Tantallon quickly became the place to be. Members consisted of politicians, sport figures and prominent businessmen and women. Politicians such as Senator Mike Gravel from Alaska called Tantallon their second home. Senator Gravel built and lived in the house between the 16th green and 17th tee containing a swimming pool and tennis courts. Senator John Melcher from Montana lived on the third fairway and Congressman William Ford of Michigan lived on Gleneagles Drive. Gordan Liddy could often be seen dining at the club with his family. Four-star General Robert Cushman, the 25th Commandant of the Marine Corp lived at Tantallon and was a member of the Board of Advisors.

Sports dignitaries such as the Washington Capitals first General Manager and Hall of Famer Milt Schmidt lived on the third fairway. Hall of Famer Rod Langway lived on St. Andrews Drive, then built a house to the left of the 17th tee. Brian Engblom of the Washington Capitals lived on Willow Wind Circle.

The members of the Washington Capitals were given honorary membership and it was not unusual to see players playing golf during the summer with members.

The club also had rights to about 30-35 Redskin tickets and during the football season the club hired a bus and provided breakfast before the game and dinner after for those members who had purchased the tickets from the club.

The Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association had their annual charity golf tournament at the club. Such baseball greats as Hall of Famers Joe DiMaggio, Warren Spahn, Johnny Mize, and others too numerous to mention played golf at Tantallon.

Board of Advisors

While Tantallon was always privately owned, U S Land established a member Board of Advisors which met monthly. The Board consisted of 12 members with one serving as the Chairman. Each year three members were elected to the Board by the membership to serve a three-year term. On election night the membership would congregate at the club for dinner and deposit the votes in the box to be counted that night. After the votes were tabulated and announced the new Board would retire to the Board Room to elect a chairman to serve for the following year.

Since the club was privately owned the Board could only advise but many times the Board's advice was implemented by the owner. The Board also established committees such as Men's Golf, Ladies Golf, Tennis, Swim and Social. These members served without compensation and often, based on their own experience, provided management with ideas and suggestions which were accepted. The Social committee provided the club with a suggested list of events to be held that year including such events as Valentine Day dinner/dance, Christmas Party, New Year's Eve dinner/dance and Halloween dinner/dance. Many times, the committee would spend the day of the event decorating the club with items purchased by the members. Also, sub-committees were formed to call members to encourage attendance. This benefited the owners at no cost.

For some reason future owners decided they could do a better job and eliminated the Board. With the elimination of the Board the Tennis Courts became unplayable, the swim team disappeared, and the social events stopped. In effect, the Club stopped being a Club.

Member-Guest Golf Tournament

The highlight of the year was always the Men's Member-Guest Golf Tournament. For obvious reasons, the tournament was limited to seventy-two member/guest teams. Sign up for the event occurred on golf's opening day and was generally sold out before lunch.

The event started on Thursday with a practice round. Friday morning was registration, distribution of the welcome gifts and the first nine holes of the tournament. Between nines lunch was served and then the last nine holes were played. Following golf was a men's only stag night where the menu generally consisted of Maryland crabs. Wagers were made and stories told.

Saturday started with a breakfast for all participants, eighteen holes of golf separated by lunch, then a quick return to home and preparation for the dinner/dance that night. The dinner/dance was a formal event with tuxedos and long gowns.

During the night door prizes would be raffled off to lucky members and or guests. These door prizes were provided by local merchants who responded positively to request by members who volunteered to call and collect the gifts. Many times, forty to fifty gifts were obtained providing over one third of the participants with a prize.

On Sunday, the final eighteen holes were played then everyone retired to the ball room for refreshments and awards.

While the tournament was limited to the male members, it wouldn't have been a success without the help of the wives who helped with registration, scoring and spotting.

Name Changes

Over the years the name of the club has changed four times. From the original Tantallon Country Club to Port-America Country Club (1991) to Potomac Country Club (1995) to Tantallon Country Club (1996) to the present National Golf Course. All in search of profit from living off someone else's name or identity. Tantallon is not in Potomac nor is it or will it ever be connected with Port-America (now extinct) or National Harbor. In my opinion, it should become part of the neighborhood again. Saint Andrews Drive should end at Tantallon Country Club.

Future

What is the future for Tantallon? Will it ever be the community center it once was? Will it ever have the participation it once had? Probably not!! The demise of Tantallon started when the owners eliminated the Board of Advisors, eliminating all the free labor, brain power and countless hours of volunteer work to make the club a better place. Outside special events became a regular thing making the use of the club and facilities out of reach for the members. Closing the driving range or dining room facilities for an outside event/wedding happened frequently. Closing the golf course to outside events bittered the membership and damaged the golf course. The name of the game became rounds played even if those rounds were resulting in no or little revenue. The desire to buy and flip the club became the norm.

Summary

Time has made it difficult to remember and any errors are mine and mine alone. Tantallon was and is still a great place to live and raise our children. We never worried where our children were, we knew they were either playing golf, swimming, or playing tennis at Tantallon Country Club. For over 55 years I have been a member. I have loved the club and its members and would do it over again.

My final wish before I play that great golf course in the sky is to play a round of golf once again at my beloved golf course named - TANTALLON COUNTRY CLUB.

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