



Ace Williams

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The Class of 1943 had a good freshman team, winning all of our matches except one – a heartbreaker to Princeton at Yale. Bill Kuntz was 6 down and 6 to go and lost only on the last hole. The format then was six individual and three best ball matches. My partner was Bud Semple, who later became president of the U.S.G.A. (and was the father of Carole Semple, undoubtedly the most outstanding woman amateur golfer of our time). Other players on the team were George Ramsey, Joe Lee, Stan Donnelly and Bud Menninger. I was complimented by being elected Captain. I believe that Joe Lee and I are the only surviving members of that team.

An outstanding event of that year (1940) was a spring trip to Augusta, Georgia, organized by Coach Ben Thomson. Any would-be golfers, from any class, were welcome, as it was pay as you go (except for the Coach) – no Yale Golf Association for support. We played at Augusta C.C. and had one thrilling round at Augusta National. We had a match with the Aiken G.C. and were entertained by some enthusiastic alumni. Ed Meister, the Varsity Captain, lost a challenge match to Helen Seigel of Philadelphia. Also, our car load stopped on the way home for a round on Pinehurst No. 2. The delay took us into a North Carolina snow storm and a layover at Raleigh.

As a result of the trip to Augusta, and our freshman season, the team members became friends for life and have always pretty much kept in touch with each other.

The varsity golf team played in a League (I believe it was Eastern Intercollegiate League – E.I.L.) which was divided into northern and southern sections. In sophomore year we had a good record and tied with Dartmouth and Harvard for first place in the northern section. In the play-off (on a Sunday, which required special permission from the President), we lost badly to both teams. In retrospect, Dartmouth especially had strong players like Manuel de la Torre (who owned one of the most beautiful golf swings imaginable) and Dick Remsen who later enjoyed a storied career as an amateur golfer.

That year (1941) three of us made it on our own to the NCAA National Championship at Columbus, Ohio – I believe it was Ed Gravely, Taz Bott and myself. Without four players we weren't eligible for the team championship, but we all qualified well. I managed two of my best rounds to be tied or one stroke behind Cary Middlecoff at around 141 (I regret that I can't find the clipping). I won one or two matches and then lost to a very strong player from California who was later killed in the war. I have a very fond memory of being warmly greeted at the first tee by both Joe Dey and Chick Evans – they did not know me but I think they were pleased to see Yale back in the picture.

Junior year (1942) was our best under Captain Ed Gravely. The regular players were Ed, myself, Bill and Bob Kuntz, Walter (Jim) Beckjord, and several who competed weekly for the 6th spot – Sam Phillips, Tazwell Bott, Blackburn, Bob Quinlan and maybe others I can't remember. We beat Princeton at Princeton, were undefeated, and won the northern section of the League (as my parents lived in Princeton at the time, they invited the whole team including coach Ben Thomson and Manager Dick Willstatter to our home and we celebrated with a roast beef dinner served on Yale plates).

The winner of the southern section was Penn State, whom we then met for a match at Woodway C.C. in Darien, CT. to decide the title. I forget the score but Yale won something like 5–1/2 – 3–1/2. I learned later that the player I defeated at No. 2 had lost a match for the first time in three years.

That spring was the most hectic of my young life – balancing my commitment to the golf team, flight time and ground school in a U.S. Gov't. CPT program to prepare myself for naval aviation training, working for the Yale Daily News, and above all trying to keep my head above water academically. Somehow I got by.

At the end of the season I was elected Captain – an honor I have always deeply cherished. I did not get to enjoy my captaincy on the golf course because I left for war time service at the end of June.

In June, however, we fielded a team at the NCAA Championship in South Bend, Indiana. I was selected to play on the "East" team in a special match against the "West" team the day before qualifying. I qualified but promptly lost in match play. As a team we made a respectable but unremarkable showing. However, I believe it was the following year (1943) when the remnants of our 1942 team plus some important additions became the last (up until now) Yale golfers to win the NCAA National Team Championship.

When I went into service in June of 1942 I assumed that golf would be out for the duration. However, when I got to Pensacola I soon learned that there was a pretty good golf course right on the base (the story was that the golfing Admiral in charge had succeeded in getting money appropriated for 18 "fire lanes"). And so, when my training took me to an outlying field, the bust returning to base kindly dropped me off at the course. I made friends with Ralph Bogart who was in the same training stage as I was, and together we toured the course almost daily from late p.m. to dark, thumbed our way back to ship's service for a good and very inexpensive dinner (we were of course too late for the regular cadet fare), and generally had a great time that spring of 1943 while serving our country. After the war Ralph was an outstanding player in the Mid-Atlantic region and with his partner, Robert Brownell, won the Anderson Best Ball at Winged Foot at least three times.

After the war, we all settled into careers and family life and to the extent we could competitive amateur golf. Walter Beckjord became a keen student of the game and wrote extensively about it (whether or not he was published I do not know). I know that he was good enough to qualify for the U.S. Open. Bob Kuntz scored a spectacular win over Frank Stranahan to reach the semi-finals of the U.S. Amateur. Bill Kuntz won the Metropolitan Amateur (among others); he also qualified for the U.S. Open at Rochester and distinguished himself with a hole in one in the first or second round. Bill and Bob teamed to win the Anderson Best Ball Tournament at Winged Foot and had many other successes there. I had some success in local and district championships, reached the finals of the Connecticut State Amateur, and qualified for the national Amateur three times but never reached match play. My most memorable moment came in a play-off to qualify for the Anderson Best Ball – a hole in one on Winged Foot West No. 10 – surrounded by spectators and Claude Harmon on the green to take my ball out of the cup.

I can't tell you about others because I don't know about them or can't remember. But I can say that Yale golf, for all of us on the team, was the springboard of a lifetime of enjoyment in competitive amateur golf as well as just golf.

Arthur C. Williams, Yale '43.