

Chapter IV

THE FUN YEARS (1931-1940)

Club life in the Thirties continued without conspicuous change from the Twenties. Military duty at Fort McKinley, Fort Miles (Corregidor) or in Manila was probably the best assignment in the Army, Sangley Point and Olongapo City (Subic Bay) were excellent Navy assignments, and the friendly and hospitable atmosphere of the Philippines combined with the facilities of the Army and Navy Club to make being stationed in the Philippines even better for U. S. military personnel. Admiral Holland M. Sweetser, who knew the club intimately from the fall of 1929 to 1931 and from December 1932 to May 1933, has provided a very complete first-person account of the most important elements of club life in the early Thirties:¹⁹

Rooms:

Each of the rooms on the second floor had a wash basin and running water. There were showers down the hall. We always slept under mosquito nets. On weekends and at other times cots with nets were set up in the halls on the second floor and, in the dry season, on the balcony over the main entrance. The outside cots were known as "drunk's row." The cots were numbered and a charge of 2 pesos (\$1) per night was made for the outside cots. The inside cots cost a little more. All the cots were usually sold out by early Saturday afternoon. It was not uncommon for someone returning late from the Santa Ana dance hall or other amusements to find his cot being used by someone who had missed his last boat. The management usually handled these situations amicably.

Physical Arrangements:

The bulletin board, desk, and office were immediately to the left of the main entrance. The bar was to the left of the corridor in the left wing. Across the corridor from the bar there was a "stag" dining room and at the end of the corridor there was a shoeshine stand and barber shop. Among the round tables in the bar and on its veranda there were several with very large tops made from a single piece of mahogany. These (some at least) had small silver plaques with the name of the donor inset near the edge. There were always free peanuts, free crackers and cheese spread in the bar and a free lunch from about four to six in the afternoon. Each day of the week had a certain free lunch, such as beans and franks, fried chicken, meat balls and spaghetti. The hot free lunches were served from a cart wheeled to all occupied tables. I don't think there were free lunches on Saturdays and Sundays. Certain members were known for visiting the bar only on the fried chicken day. Ladies were permitted in the left wing of the Club (bar, stag dining room, etc.) only on New Year's Eve.

In the right wing of the Club there was a writing room and lounge to the right of the corridor and a large lounge to the left... known as the "passion parlor". The dining room at the rear of the Club and its chef who had been there for many, many years had a reputation for outstanding food and service.

Favorite drinks in the bar were San Miguel draught beer which was always served in chilled-untill-frosted glass beer mugs, and the bar Scotch which the Club imported in bulk and aged for years before using. Reconstituted powdered milk with butterfat added and put up by San Miguel in

half-pint boxes was also popular since the local fresh milk was suspect.

Transportation:

Taxis and carromatas were always waiting at a stand near the Club entrance and fares for these as well as any others in Manila could be paid for by "chits" which were redeemed by the Club and added to the member's bill.

A small launch named the *Dap-Dap* left the Club every morning for Cavite at about seven o'clock. The trip took about fifty minutes. The same launch made the return trip, leaving the Navy Yard at about four o'clock.

There was a telephone between the club and the boat landing. In the late evening boat departures were announced in the Club. Signalmen were detailed to a signal station at the Club (I think it was on the Club roof) for the transmission of messages to and from the ships by flag and blinker.

Activities:

There were two tennis courts between the clubhouse and the boat landing.

There was a Navy Polo team in Manila in the early 30's called the Pirate Polo Association. An attempt was made to recruit each new arrival on the station. The initiation fee was \$100(?) which was a lot for a Lt. (jg) in those days. The main drawing card was that whether one could ride or not, he could sit on the Club veranda in his polo suit, mallet and all.

For the Army-Navy game, a large board of the field was set up at the Club. The game was received play by play via radio telegraph. After receipt of each play the ball was moved on the

board and the details of the play announced. There was no lack of cheering sections.

Services:

There was one-day service on laundering of linen suits and white uniforms and on dry cleaning. Also, there was good valet service with a presser on duty most of the time.

Charges:

For Navy members, monthly dues were charged only if a member's ship was in the Manila area for 15 days or more during the month. If a member's ship was in, even for the full month, and he had no bill (paid cash for services in the club and signed no chits to be paid by the club), he paid no dues for that month.

The early Thirties were years in which the Club's Baguio Branch carried on a particularly active social program. The columns of the daily press seldom failed to record one or another social activity in which civilians were as prominent as service personnel. Thus, on June 27, 1931, the Baguio Branch was the scene of "one of the largest and most delightful affairs Baguio and the post (Camp John Hay) have seen in months". Hosted by Captain and Mrs. Francis J. Heraty, the guest of honor was Governor General Dwight Davis of Tennis Cup fame. Nine ladies of families in residence, including Mrs. Whitmarsh, Mrs. Hal-sema, Mrs. Haussermann, and Mrs. Duckworth-Ford, assisted the hostess. During the first weeks in July, Arthur and Ann Murray, the children of Lt. Col. Maxwell Murray, gave a lively party at the Club for friends and classmates including the McVean, Russell, Thibault, Bennett, Juricka, Powell and Wesley children. Arthur, a graduating senior at Brent school, was departing for Cornell University.

In Manila, ANC activities followed the familiar pattern, with dinners, dances and receptions. J. P. Heilbronn,

occupancy, his hole was plastered over, and the Admiral's reminiscence ends in a mood similar to Poe's *Raven* — Nevermore!: "Was he outside at the time, or inside and just another casualty of the war? It is to worry! Dispossessed fugitive or victim of starvation, the Bat should be remembered."

The immediate pre-World War II years were idyllic ones for club members. Descriptions tend to be lyrical, as in the case of Captain T. C. Parker, who as Naval attaché to the U. S. High Commissioner, lived at the club during the thirteen months just preceding the Japanese attack, and who has provided the most detailed picture of pre-war club facilities and activities available in print:¹²

Situated on the extreme eastern shore of Manila Bay amid luxuriant palms, flame trees, and rambling bougainvillea, with a beautiful view of the Bay proper and fronting on a fine park to the North (the Luneta), the Club's white, three-storey building was one of the favorite landmarks of a great city. The Club grounds, including driveways, outdoor pool, tennis and squash courts, and a beautiful back lawn where food and refreshments were served in fine weather, covered about three acres of valuable waterfront property on lease from the Philippine Government. The building stock and all equipment were owned by the members. The Club landing was only a stone's throw from the Fleet anchorage. Since Club property had to be crossed before proceeding into the city, many naval officers, lured by the facilities for recreation and fellowship, never got beyond these confines unless some impelling circumstance forced their journey farther afield. Lacking only facilities for golf and baseball, the Club was equipped for every type of recreation and service familiar to Americans. For purposes of recreation there were the facilities previously mentioned plus fine bowling

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pose and located directly above the main entrance. During the dry season the branches of a brilliant flame tree practically came in the window on the north side. On the opposite wall, over the door, hung a very handsome oil portrait of General Arthur MacArthur, the father of General Douglas MacArthur. The Board meetings were welcome affairs, but lengthy. After the business was completed, the president and his board were treated to a fine banquet "on the Club" in the pavilion. One large circular table, decorated to perfection, took care of the group.

The aim of the board was to provide the finest facilities and service to Club members and their families at the lowest possible cost. In addition, the board sought to insure compliance in every respect with the rules and regulations of the institution. The rules were strict, but fair, and their observance upheld the prestige of the Club.

Membership was extended to all officers of the United States services, active and retired, to service nurses, and to a carefully screened group of American business and professional men residing in the Philippines. Restricted membership was allowed certain foreign officials. Honorary memberships were extended to the United States High Commissioner and the President of the Philippines.

The Club operated on a close margin. All business was conducted on a chit basis. As far as servants were concerned, tipping was strictly prohibited; their violation of this rule meant instant discharge.

In 1940-41, if Captain Parker does not exaggerate, service and food had reached heights never before or since achieved, and discipline was rigid. Members shaped up or were hauled on the carpet:

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alleys in the basement. In addition, there was a reading room, card room, billiard room, a large and handsomely equipped officer's bar, cocktail lounges for officers and ladies, a barber shop, and ladies' hair dresser.

On the second and third floors there were seventy furnished rooms for occupancy by members. During the last few months prior to the Japanese invasion, extensive alterations were undertaken in the east wing. Eight of the bedrooms were redone, and air conditioning units were installed. The officer's bar was in the process of being sound-proofed, but this work was never completed — the Japanese saw to that.

Club furnishings and appointments, including hand-painted murals of native scenes by an outstanding Filipino artist, were done in exceedingly good taste. The whole atmosphere was one of exotic charm without loss of the home touch.

Club governance and administration had changed little since the earliest days of the club's existence, and Captain Parker's observations on the politicking of that date surely apply as well to past and present years:

Official direction of the Club was entrusted to a president, a secretary-treasurer, and seven directors, one of them a civilian and the remainder divided equally between the Army and Navy. It was the custom to alternate the presidency by service each year. Considerable politicking was in evidence prior to the annual election of officers; caucuses were convened and much enthusiasm was developed. In that far away place, these elections provided an officer's only chance to exercise the great American right of suffrage.

The directors normally met once a month in the board room, especially designed for the pur-

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Service of outstanding quality was provided by Chinese and Filipino attendants. The "No. 1" boy, and surely the most colorful, was Sonny Wong, an old Chinese. How long he had worked there, nobody seemed to know — neither did he, but "hash marks" on the sleeve of his immaculate, blue-trimmed white uniform went all the way to the elbow. This evidence suggested that he was one of the original "fixtures." Sonny was shrewd, wise, and jovial. He loved tricks and would fairly beam when a member showed him something new in the sleight-of-hand field. He knew the House Rules better than the House Committee. If these rules were violated by an officer or guest, Sonny, in a very respectful way, would ignore the individual's request for service. If he would not serve the offender, no other boy dared to do so. A protest from the offender usually followed, with the club steward being called to the scene. Here was the catch. To go this far, something had to be wrong — and usually it was the officer who was at fault. The matter had to be reported to the House Committee Chairman or Club Secretary, and one of these officials would call the offender to task. Happily, even with a very large membership, cases of this nature were infrequent.

The quality and preparation of food served in the Club was superb. Native dishes frequently appeared on the menu. There were delicacies in the seafood line such as tempting prawns and favorite lapu-lapu. Native fruits were available in generous varieties, the most popular and delectable being the mango, papaya, and mangosteen.

The main dining room was in the east wing and served officers only. Additional dining facilities were provided in the pavilion, which faced on the bay proper. Food was served here to of-

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ficers, ladies, and guests, and nightly an outstanding dance orchestra, with talented performers, entertained until after midnight.

Parker speaks little of the more routine social activity of the club, but he describes in detail two of the club's three traditional big events: Transport day and the Army-Navy football game, and mentions the club's famous New Year's Day egg-nogs:

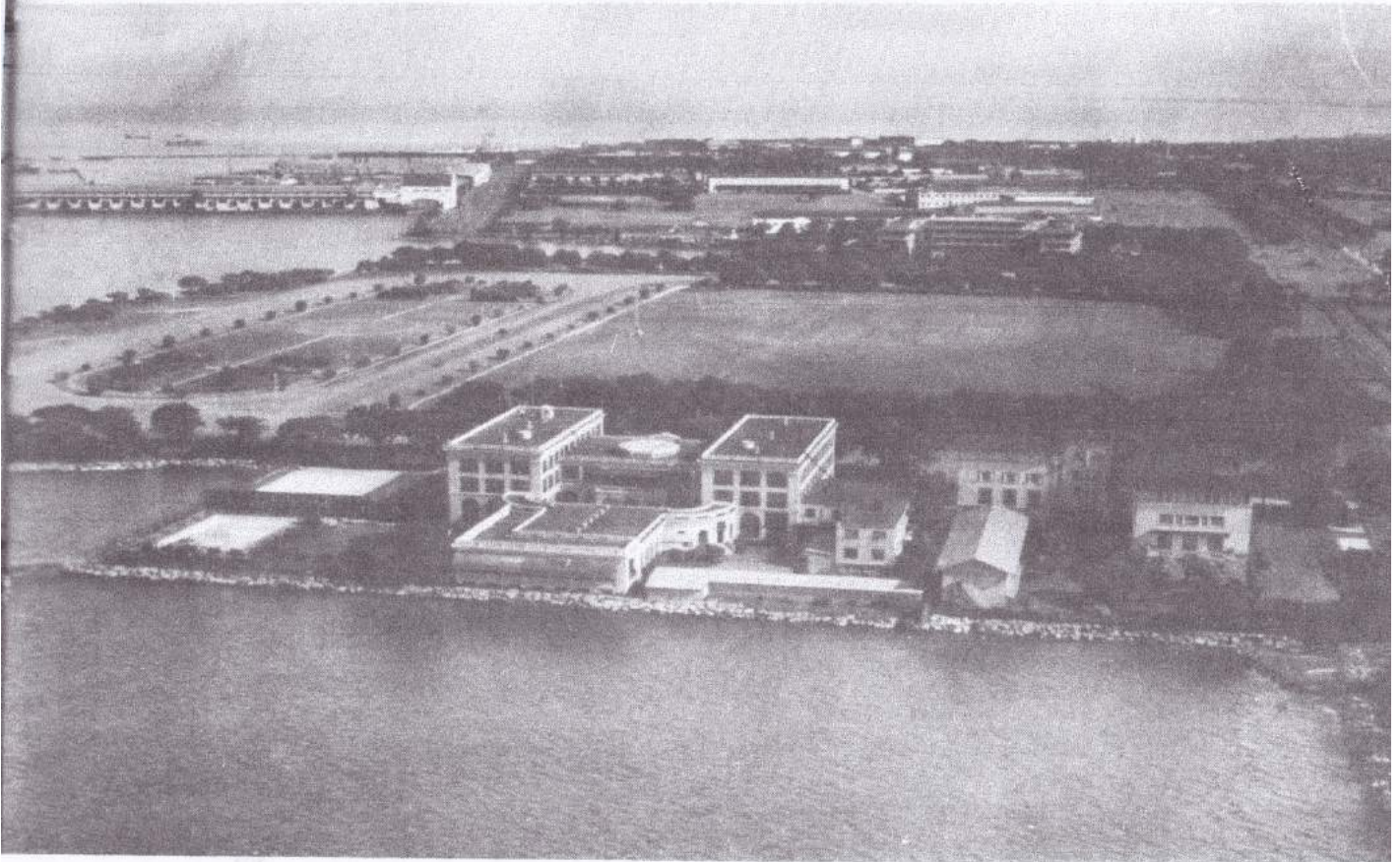
During the last six months of a two-and-a-half year tour or cruise in the Orient, officers and their families generally counted the days until the transport would bring their reliefs, and they in turn would soon be joyfully homeward bound. At such times there were large crowds and corresponding bedlam in the Club. Each unit or activity to which the new arrivals were to be detailed set up its own headquarters and welcoming committees in the Club. The stranger was welcomed with open arms, but in many cases it was a matter of the reunion of old friends. Much gaiety attended such episodes, and, as a rule, the participants made a day of it. Relative quiet reigned for the next two or three days. Then the procedure was repeated, but this time in reverse. The new arrival and others remaining behind came down to see the old hands off. During the lengthy goodbyes on these occasions there were frequent evidences of emotion — the bonds of friendship among Club members were not light ones.

All service personnel are interested in the Army-Navy football games. We normally think of it as starting on a Saturday about 2⁰⁰PM, Eastern Standard Time, but for us in pre-war Manila it got underway about 3 o'clock the following morning. Preparations for this affair were elaborate indeed. Needless to say, the "spectators" did not wait for game time; they came early and spent the night.

No one even attempted to sleep in the Club on these nights. A large game board, marked off like a football field, was erected on the back lawn. The best radio technicians and equipment available were on hand, and directors on a platform marked each play as it was executed. The Club and grounds were packed; service bands were present; there was organized cheering; the Army had their mule, but I cannot remember a Navy goat. All-in-all, Army-Navy game nights were gay and hilarious affairs. The specific line in the Navy football song — "There'll be high elation on the far China station..." is an understatement to a marked degree!

The third major occasion of the year was New Year's Day. Beginning at noon, it was a Club custom to hold open house, with egg-nog served in the lobby for several hours.

Army and Navy Club, 1934
(U.S. Army photo)





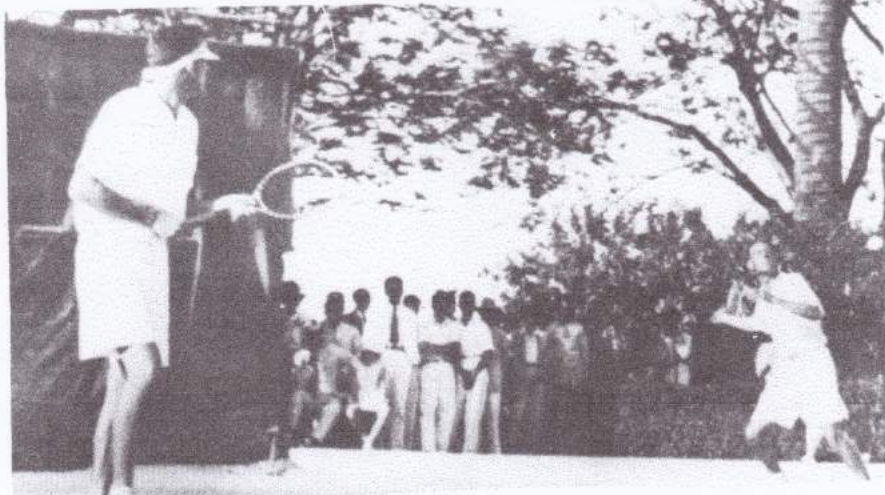
General Hines greets guests at 1932 reception

(U.S. Army photo)

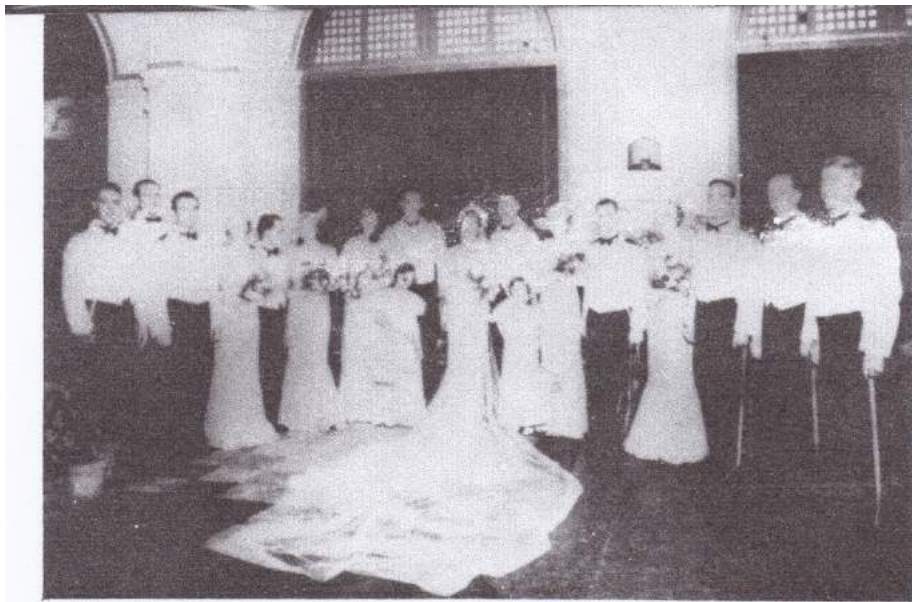


1936 Lawn party. President Meneratti, Lt. Cdr. USN, right center, with glasses
(Rear Admiral J. H. Brady)

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1932 tennis players: Captain Walter W. Rockey, USN, and partner

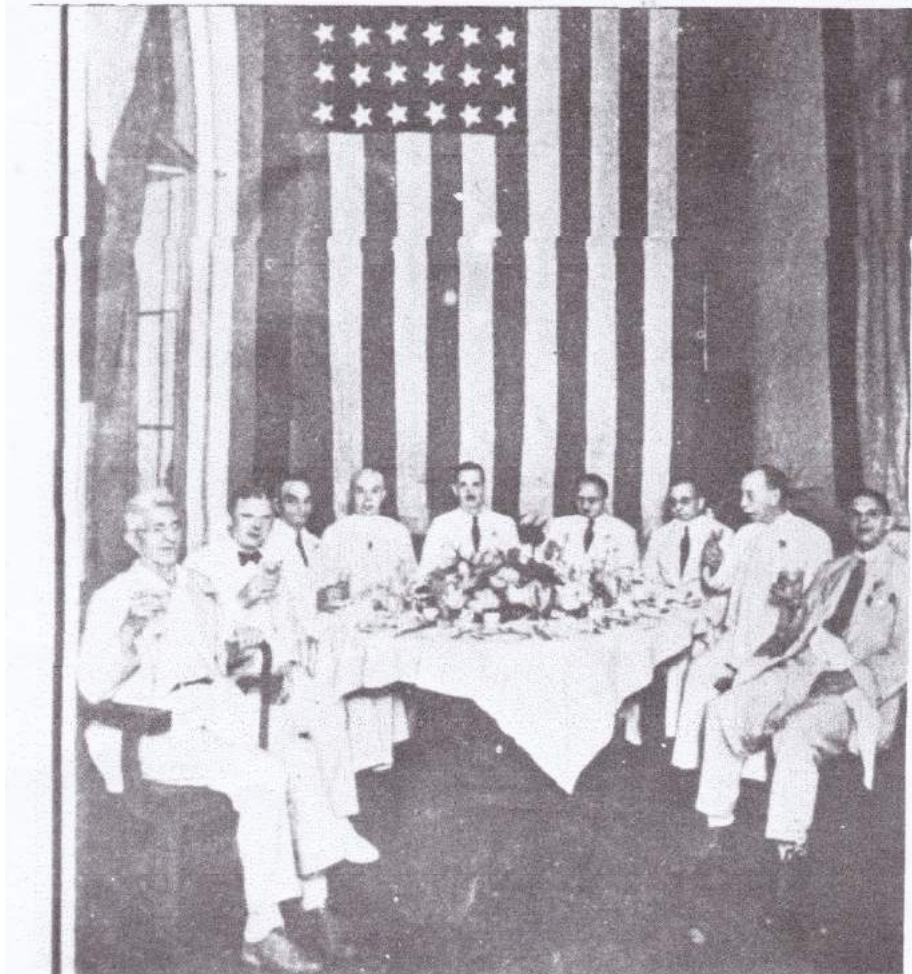


Wm. B. Sieglaff, Lt. (j.g.), U.S.N., Wedding Party, 1935: A covey of future Admirals.

(Arthur L. Wilson, Lt., USN, ret.)

J. P. Heilbronn's 1934 party for veterans of 1898. See footnotes for names.

(Journal, American Chamber of Commerce)





L. G. Wagner (ANC Dispatch)

**TWO
PRE and POST
WAR
MEMBERS**



W. A. Chittick (Manila Times)



The Destroyed Club, 1945

(U.S. Army photo)

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President Sergio Osmeña at 1945 club opening. Left to right around table: Major J. T. Jackson, Mrs. Osmeña, President Osmeña, Mrs. Tuazon, and Jose Corominas.

(U.S. Army photo)