Washington's Burning Tree Club is the only place . . .

WHERE IKE FINDS REFUGE

by ALFRED TOOMBS

THE PEOPLE OF THE United States pay their President a princely wage, furnish him with a stately home and the most luxurious transportation, and invest his office with an aura of great dignity. There is only one thing the people do not provide for the President—a place where he can get away from what Jefferson called this "splendid mis-

ery" and be a natural man among his fellows.

As far as President Eisenhower is concerned, this oversight in an otherwise well-planned regimen has been corrected by the members of the Burning Tree Golf Club in Washington, D.C. For, by dint of great effort over the years, they have created such a congenial, publicity-proof refuge that even a President can enjoy here the luxury of feeling like just another guy in the crowd.

"The first time I saw the President there," one member recalls, "he was sitting on a locker-room bench, quietly drying his toes. Nobody was paying any attention. That means a lot to him—just to be let alone."

In a talk which he made at the fall dinner at Burning Tree last year, the President—who has been a member since 1946—expressed with genuine feeling his sentiments about the club. Here was a place, he said, where he was never pressured, never asked to give someone's brother a job. Then he added his favorite driver to Burning Tree's collection, which includes clubs of Presidents Taft, Wilson, Harding and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

At no other golf club in the country could the President have found a group of men who would understand so completely his need for a little anonymity. In addition to Eisenhower, its active golfing members now include the Vice President, the Chief Justice and two Associate Supreme Court Justices, several Cabinet members, leaders in the House and Senate—of both parties—and the ranking military officers of the nation.

Most of these men come to Burning Tree seeking sanctuary from the relentless pressure of public life. They know that in Washington—not in salon nor in saloon—is there any place to hide from advocates and supplicants. A voter with an unemployed relative may lurk behind any tree, and a cosmic thinker loaded for a long discussion may be attached to the other end of any canapé tray.

So, through a sort of mutual aid and non-aggression treaty, they have created at Burning Tree a haven where neither politics nor personalities are ever discussed seriously. Friday's political enemies are partners in Saturday's golfing foursome. This is the strict law of Burning Tree and no member violates it.

A sort of Shower Curtain of secrecy was drawn around Burning Tree when it opened in 1924 and has hardly been pierced to this day. The membership demands privacy. The Southern Senator who would sometimes bet as much as $2,000 on a single putt did not want to read the news of his winning on the sports page of his home-state papers. The generals who sometimes tour the course clad only in shorts do not expect to meet photographers from *Stars and Stripes*. No pictures are made at the club and no working newsmen are admitted.

Some guests may come away from the club a little breathless at how different Justice Tom Clark looks in a towel than in his judicial robes. Perhaps they will have heard Postmaster General Summerfield kidding Senator Homer Ferguson across the locker room:

"You were really hitting them

today, Senator. I hear you only went nine strokes over par on three holes."

The ribbing, dished out by the nation's nimblest tongues, is rough, and the language, like the bourbon that members keep in their lockers, is usually 100 proof.

One member, an inveterate rummy player, is generally believed to have a vocabulary consisting of only two words—"Gin" and a four-letter expletive suitable for losers.

If Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer had grown up to be rich and important, Burning Tree is the sort of club they might have started—for there is a lot of the small boy in the club's spirit. No women or children are allowed—except at private, after-golfing-hours parties.

Resident membership is limited to 250, so the course is never crowded. Initiation—sometimes waived—costs $1,000 and dues are $300 a year. Meals are generally quite simple and the club does not have a bar.

Golf is the only sport, and the course is one of the finest in the East. In the seclusion of its wooded acres, members wear the sort of costumes—loud, frayed or brief—which might cause their wives to faint dead away.

The clubhouse is of fieldstone, low and strongly gabled. The locker room and dining room cover the entire first floor. The locker room, about 60 by 100 feet, has a vaulted, heavy timbered roof. The 19th hole—a casual arrangement of tables and heavy, tan leather chairs—is in the center of the room; and old-fashioned metal lockers with wooden benches are banked around the walls. Caricatures of members hang on the walls and a colorful array of flags belonging to members who are Cabinet officers, Ambassadors and military chiefs hang importantly from the rafters.

NEXT MONTH IN CORONET

An up-to-date report on recent medical findings that the thyroid gland can be the cause of a wide variety of ills.

Not long ago, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas and Scott Lucas, former Democratic Senate leader, were engaged in a vocal gin rummy game. Lucas kept urging his opponent on with worse and worse advice, which Fulbright ignored, until finally Lucas exclaimed vehemently:

"Damn it, Bill, you never would do what I told you, even when we were up at the Capitol together."

"Maybe that's why I'm still in the Senate," Fulbright retorted.

President Eisenhower, during his first year in office, tried to find time to play at the club on Wednesday and Saturday. The number of guests brought out by members on these days increased and, whether by coincidence or not, the greens fee was doubled to $10.

The President usually arranges his foursome in advance. He likes to include one Democrat and one Republican from Congress. The fourth player may be a Government official, visiting industrialist or perhaps some member of the club.

If he arrives for lunch, the President will take any seat that is open at one of the two long refectory tables in the dining room. Having

finished soup and a sandwich, he will go to the locker which he has had since joining. The next locker is held by Clark Clifford, formerly advisor to ex-President Truman.

Members dressing near the President will speak to him, but do not press a conversation unless he desires it. Where before election they called him Ike or General Ike, they all call him Mr. President now.

Before teeing off, the President and his partners go through the rite of haggling over handicaps and wagers. If one of his opponents sinks a long putt, the President may level a charge of piracy and make a mock demand for an increase in his handicap. If he makes a spectacular shot himself, he expects the same sort of ribbing. The President is a good-natured golfer and has a happy day when he breaks 90.

The Presidential retinue is the strangest that ever moved over a golf course. It includes several athletic young men, dressed in sports clothes and carrying big golf bags. These are Secret Service men who fan out into the woods on all sides of the President's party. In their golf bags are carbines, shotguns and a walkie-talkie radio beamed to a Secret Service limousine at the clubhouse.

When a storm threatened one day, the limousine rushed across the course to pick up the Presidential party. "We didn't want him standing under a tree in a lightning storm," explained one of the agents.

Occasionally, after a round, the President will stop to talk to friends and may even stay for a rubber or two of bridge.

When the President first began to visit the club, curiosity-seekers crashed the gates and a check point was established at the clubhouse to make sure only members got in. One irreverent oldtimer, stopped by a guard and asked his name, replied: "Molotov."

The guard studied the membership list carefully and said: "Sorry, but I can't find your name."

"I was just admitted last night."

"Okay, Mr. Molotov," the guard said, "go ahead in."

It is generally believed that the art of how to win at golf without actually cheating has been brought to a peak of perfection at Burning Tree. Doughty psychological warriors, blooded on the hustings in all parts of America, have brought with them every trick.

The master coup in this field is credited to John L. Sullivan, who showed up late one afternoon for a match with a group of corporation executives. Sullivan, who later became Secretary of the Navy and president of the club, was then an assistant Secretary of the Treasury in the Roosevelt Administration.

World War II was on and Sullivan explained to the other players that he had been called to the White House suddenly. To show how sorry he was for being tardy, he allowed his opponents to name their own handicaps—"take all your conscience will allow, gentlemen"—and the businessmen took advantage of Sullivan's good nature.

When all bets had been made, Sullivan casually mentioned that he had gone to the White House to watch the President sign an order putting a $25,000 limitation on executive salaries for the duration. The news threw the executives into such a rage that they hardly got

around the course. Sullivan won every bet that afternoon.

Burning Tree was started by four golfers who grew tired of the delays encountered on other Washington courses. Wealthy men in a small group of golfing fanatics put up $10,000 each to build a new course. Among them was Joseph E. Davies —later to make the Ambassadorial mission to Moscow—member of a select little group known as the Senatorial Foursome which met each Sunday morning for golf. Most players were Senators—among them Warren G. Harding of Ohio. Another was a young Assistant Secretary of the Navy named Franklin Roosevelt.

When Burning Tree opened in 1924, the Senatorial Foursome moved its game there. Over the years, the political leaders of the nation joined. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg was known to the club as Nervous Nellie; Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson added a touch by bringing his military aides along to caddy.

Forty or fifty golfers may show up almost any week to play in a carefully handicapped Sunday morning competition. The club keeps accurate records of all scores and a handicapper makes up foursomes so they will be equal in strokes. Competitors put $5 in a pool, which is divided between the low score golfer and the low foursome.

The best golfers in the club, men like Congressman Jack Westland of Washington, former national amateur champion, or Senator Prescott Bush of Connecticut, holder of several regional titles, may find themselves in the same foursome with redoubtable duffers such as Senator Capehart of Indiana, who holds a course record of sorts at 148, or Vice President Nixon, who has knocked 40 strokes off his score but is still happy to break 100.

But neither golfing ability nor position will move the membership committee to admit a man to Burning Tree. Since the Republican Administration has taken over, only a dozen or so new members have been admitted. What Burning Tree looks for is a man who "fits" with the group. If he doesn't, neither position nor money nor connections will get him in.

Historians say that in other centuries there stood on the club's acres a tree which appeared to glow like fire at certain times. Then the Indian tribes would gather for a feast and a game of ball. All would pay tribute to the great chief, smoke a pipe of peace and hold an amiable pow-wow. They called it the Place of the Burning Tree.

With certain modifications, members today like to think they are just carrying on an old American custom at the Place of the Burning Tree.

Economically Speaking

INSTALLMENT-PLAN BUYING is a credit device by which the months are made to seem shorter. —*Burning Question*