

MY
SHOT

Shooting Down Time

A retired general proves that age is no excuse and golf really is a game for life | BY BILL ELY

A lot of people get excited when a top pro such as Arnold Palmer or Gary Player shoots his age. I used to get excited about shooting my age, but not so much anymore. I guess that's because I've done it more than 2,000 times—2,005 to be exact.

At least that's how many times I've done it since 1987, when I started keeping a record in a book. I was 75 then and shooting my age or better every day, so I figured I might as well keep track of it. The lowest I ever shot below my age was 16 strokes. That was eight years ago, when I was 90. I shot a 74 on my home course, Quail Ridge Country Club in Boynton Beach, Fla.

Pulling off the feat was exhilarating at first, but then I began to expect to do it every time I played. Now, whenever I play, people around the clubhouse want to know if the General—that's what everyone calls me because I was a lieutenant general when I retired from the Army in 1966—shot his age again. Luckily, the answer is usually yes.

It's a pretty good accomplishment since I never swung a club until I went to West Point in 1929. In my third year I was required to play an intramural sport, so I tried golf. I loved it the first time I had a club in my hand.

I didn't get to play much after leaving West

Point because I was serving on Midway and in the Philippines during World War II. But I was lucky enough to get some assignments in Washington, D.C., afterward, so I started playing a lot at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va. I have the distinction of winning the club championship there at four ranks:

colonel, brigadier general, major general and lieutenant general. My handicap has been as low as a three, but it's up to a 19 now.

I think golf is the best game because it tests you physically and mentally. You have to think clearly and keep your emotions under control. The game changes every day and with every swing, and you're constantly trying to analyze to get better.

I wish I could tell you there's some secret to what I've done, but there really isn't. I've always been a very good putter. And I guess I have good genes. I never had health problems, even when I was playing four times a week. At 98, I don't have a sore joint in my body. My hips and shoulders

are good, although circulation problems have slowed me down recently.

People don't believe it when they hear I've shot my age so many times. With them I share my greatest bit of wisdom: It gets easier every year.



ARMY GOLFER

Ely began tracking every round during which he bettered his age in 1987.

Bill Ely will turn 99 on Dec. 29.