

GOLF GAME IN NEW DELHI LEADS TO TRANSFER

By Joe McGowan

In April of 1968, I received word that Wes Gallagher, president of The Associated Press, would be arriving in New Delhi for a three-day stay and a visit with me, the AP bureau chief for South Asia.

Gallagher's office in New York City informed me he would appreciate it if I would arrange an interview with U.S. Ambassador Chester Bowles, line up a game of golf, and save one night for dinner with him.

Wes was a newsman's newsman and highly respected by all who worked for him. He had earned his stripes as a World War II correspondent in Europe. Ramrod straight, with a flattop haircut, bushy eyebrows and a shoeshine that would pass a drill sergeant's inspection, Gallagher personally stayed on top of world news events.

Gallagher would be arriving in India from Vietnam, where he had an extended interview with U.S. Gen. William C. Westmoreland. The two had been buddies since the WWII campaign in North Africa when they were riding in a Jeep that overturned. Gallagher and others lifted the Jeep off Westmoreland, who had been trapped under the vehicle.

I arranged the interview with ambassador Bowles and added an interview with the British High Commissioner (equal to ambassador). I did that because Bowles had become an apologist for everything India did and I knew the British diplomat would give a more objective view of matters on the sub-continent.

Arranging golf proved to be more difficult. Gallagher was a formidable golfer and I was a real duffer. I tried to line up various diplomats and American businessmen based in New Delhi, but the golf game would be on a weekday and no one was available.

So, when Gallagher arrived, I told him – wondering if this would harm my career with AP – that I would be his golf partner. The next day we drove to the course in the posh Golf Links section of the Indian capital.

As we headed out on the course, we each had an assigned caddy, but about a dozen young Indian boys headed down the fairway on both sides. Wes was a little indignant, telling me we didn't need all those fellows because he NEVER hit a ball into the rough.

I explained to him they weren't down the fairway to find his ball, but to keep the various mongooses who inhabited the course from stealing the ball and taking it to their nest.

The game went fairly well. Gallagher played at par. On a couple holes I got up to 8 or 10 strokes, so picked up my ball and went to the next hole. Didn't want to hold up the general manager.

Finally, I made my move. I told Wes I had been in India three years and was desperate for a transfer. I wanted Latin America. I was fluent in Spanish and had had many temporary assignments there.

Wes scoffed and said, "The real story is here in Asia." But he said if I really wanted out he would work on it when he got back to New York.

And with a smile on his face, he said I could improve my golf game when I got to Latin America, “because nothing ever happens there.”

He kept his word and late that summer I was transferred to Lima, Peru. Two weeks after I arrived there was a military revolution, and I didn’t get much time to play golf. But then that’s the subject of a future column.

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