Pioneer Polo In Paradise

By EDWIN NORTH McCLELLAN

"Polo historians will have to revise their story, for polo was first played in the Paradise of the Pacific on the Island of Oahu in 1880 and not on the Big Scenic Island of Hawaii in 1886," I wrote in the *Advertiser*, June 21, 1939. "A British Army officer brought a polo outfit to the Island of Hawaii and the first game was played on Christmas Day, 1886, on an unused cane field," records the program of the "1936 Inter-Island Polo Championship." This Hawaiian Polo Legendary, however, is twice upset. Read on.

FIRST POLO

"On Wednesday afternoon (November 3, 1880) was played a game of polo, the first we suppose ever played on these Islands," reported the *Saturday Press* of November 6, 1880, which may be found in the Archives of Hawaii. "To those who know anything of the grand game of 'hockey,' polo would be easily intelligible as it may be described as 'hockey on horseback'. . . . On Wednesday every man was mounted on the best steed he could procure; there were five players on each side and four games were played. . . . It would be a capital game for natives, especially those accustomed to bullock-hunting and we hope to see it naturalized here."

James Haig Mackenzie described other polo matches played in 1884 on the Island of Hawaii. "Clement Sneyd-Kynnersley came to Hawaii in 1882," wrote Mr. Mackenzie in *Paradise of the Pacific* magazine, June, 1940. "He was accompanied by his brother Ralph. I had arrived in Hawaii two years before.

"Having played polo in England the Sneyd-Kynnersley brothers decided to introduce the game in Hawaii. Accordingly, they imported English polo saddles from England and mallets and balls from India. These having arrived in Hawaii, the initial practice games took place about the middle of 1884 on an abandoned sugarcane field at Puehuehu, Kohala, Hawaii.

FIRST PLAYERS

"The players in this first practice game were: Sneyd-Kynnersley brothers, Hubert Filder, Ernest and Fred Burchart, John Hind, Robert Hind, Charlie Kempster, W. S. May, Henry Renton, William John Brodie, James Haig Mackenzie, Robert Wallace who was Kynnersley's Plantation Manager, the Rev. Whalley called 'Parson' by us, and Desborough. We were all members of the famous old Kohala Club. I remember Major Jack Haley very well but not as a polo player. He lived in Honolulu.

FIRST MATCH GAME

"The first real match took place on Christmas Day, 1884," continued Mr. Mackenzie. "H.M.S. *Constance* (Captain Frederic P. Doughty) at this time was at Mahukona (port of Kohala). Captain Doughty and some of his officers attended this first polo match. Sides were chosen and the match was played. One of the players not actually playing did the umpiring. We used little Hawaiian ponies born and bred on the Big Island.

"After this first game we played regular games every week, on the same ground, weather and time permitting. . . . These weekly games continued on up to about 1890. Our playing was confined to the Island of Hawaii. We never played anywhere else.

"In the meantime, Louis von Tempsky had visited us several times. He played with us several times and learned the game. On his return to Maui he established the first Maui polo team about

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POLO

1887. The people-of-means on Maui took up polo with great interest. Among these e Frank and Harry Baldwin, David Fleming, von Tempsky, and others. About the same time teams were developed on Oahu and Kauai."

Mr. Mackenzie's polo-facts are corroborated for in the *Advertiser* of January 5, 1885; we read that "the Gentlemen residing in the portion of the District known as *Outside*, have gay times every week playing polo," at Kahala, "a sport requiring good sportsmanship and nerve, both of which most of the participants possess." The *Advertiser* (August 18, 19, September 3, 1884) shows that H.M.S. *Constance* (Doughty) arrived at Honolulu from San Francisco on August 17, 1884, and sailed for Hilo on September 2, 1884.

Keep researching, friends, for maybe there is an earlier Hawaiian polo date un unearthed so far.