

Robert “Bob” Carmack, the caddymaster and Elwood, the caddy

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on January 19, 2010)

One of the greatly appreciated benefits of writing about almost any subject in the *Historically Speaking* column is the response I get from readers who have additional information about a given subject and are willing to share information to add to the story. I delight when that happens.

It means I have another story of Oak Ridge history and likely one that will be new information to add to the collection of *Historically Speaking* stories. The new story may also add previously unknown details to the rich tapestry that is our Oak Ridge history about which others would appreciate learning. I am constantly being reminded of the great depth and variety of our unique history.

But more importantly, when I get these phone calls, I am about to meet someone new and make yet another friend in my seemingly endless search for the unique stories that make up our history. The person I am meeting will not only give me more knowledge about our history, but likely will become an even stronger supporter of my efforts to capture the essence of our history through personal stories of those who actually lived the history in the making.

Such is the case with the history of the Oak Ridge Country Club. The day after the first part of that story was published in *The Oak Ridger*, Robert “Bob” Carmack called me and left a message that he had another picture of Mickey Mantle when he was a guest celebrity golfer that he thought I might want to use to illustrate the history of the Oak Ridge Country Club.

I called Bob and said I would like to have a copy of that photograph, but snow kept me from getting to his house until the weekend. What I found was amazing. Not only did Bob have a great photograph of Mickey Mantle riding in the very first golf cart ever used at the Oak Ridge Country Club, but Bob had a great story about going to Gatlinburg to buy those first used golf carts and hauling three of them on a truck back to the country club in Oak Ridge. I was quick to grasp that was not all that Bob had to share. But first let's finish with the golf carts.

Bob said none of the golf carts would run when he got them to the club and he had to repair all of them before they could be used. They were battery operated and something was wrong with all three of the carts. I was later to learn that Bob has also spent many hours restoring antique cars, so repairing golf carts was a natural thing for him to do. I will tell you more about Bob's antique cars later in the story.

He also said that the caddies were mad at him for bringing in golf carts. That innovation would eventually cut drastically into the caddy business and they realized that right away. Bob was the “Caddymaster” or the person responsible at the time for keeping the needed number of caddies available.

Bob said he got paid 10 cents for every caddy who was used by a golfer. When he went to get the golf carts, he was just doing as he was told. It was not his decision, he just had to implement it. The caddies did not understand that and felt bringing in those new fangled golf carts was all Bob's doing.

One of the caddies who fondly recalls Robert “Bob” Carmack is Phil McCulley. Phil was known as “Elwood” to his golfers and other friends. How did Phil get that moniker? If you know Phil you know that he has a unique sense of humor and enjoys unusual things, strange names and other oddities he encounters.

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He will comment on each of them and often catches others unawares as he remarks about something that the rest of us would never catch or give a second thought. Phil, however, sees these rare and unusual things he encounters as adding spice to his life and interest to his day. He can't help but make comments about them.

When Phil was about 10-12 years old there was a barber who cut Phil and his brother's hair. That barber's name was Elwood. Now Phil thought that was a most unusual name and again, if you know Phil, you can just see him making a very big deal about that “odd name.”

Asking things like, “have you ever heard of such a name as ‘Elwood’ and what does it mean?” Well, his friends turned that trick on him and began to kid him by calling him “Elwood.” That name stuck to Phil. To this day many know him as just “Elwood.” He smiles when he acknowledges this and I am convinced he gets a kick out of it.

Phil (Elwood) told me a few caddy stories that occurred when he worked with Caddymaster Robert “Bob” Carmack. The caddies had their regular golfers who always used the same caddy. One such arrangement Phil that developed was a partnership between Elwood and Dr. Cruze, a regular golfer at the Oak Ridge Country Club.

On one occasion, a particularly poor shot caused the good doctor to throw a club. As Phil described it, he heard a “whiz, whiz, whiz,” as the three iron flew over his head. He just looked at Dr Cruze and said, “I’ll get that one, but if you ever throw another club while I am your caddy you can get it yourself.”

Now remember Elwood was a schoolboy. But Phil said that Dr. Cruze never threw another club. He did say that when Dr. Cruze would sometimes be paged while on the golf course to come to the hospital that he would throw the club he was using at the time down on the ground and say, “Elwood, take ‘em on in, I gotta go.” Phil would collect the clubs and take them to the club house.

Another story Phil told was when he was caddy for Bill Maddox. It seems Bill missed a putt and was about to break the putter over his knee...not the first time he had done that. When Phil saw what Maddox was going to do, he said, “Wait! If you are going to break that putter, why don’t you just give to me?”

Well, Bill stopped with the putter in mid air just over his uplifted knee and handed it to Phil. Phil took it and kept it for a few days until Bill said to him, “Elwood, you still got that putter?” Elwood said, “Yes.” Bill said, “Can I have it back?” Phil (Elwood) returned the putter to him and it continued to be his favorite putter.

Next we will return to the story of Bob Carmack and examine his uncanny ability to win golf tournaments – 52 of them in his career!

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Mickey Mantle in the first golf cart brought to the Oak Ridge Country Club by Bob Carmack shown in this photo at the very rear of the picture helping golfers get in the “new” (used) golf carts.

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Bob Carmack showing off the collector's putter with "Oak Ridge Country Club and Oak Ridge, TN" printed on the face of the club...note that "Oakridge" is one word, twice!