

Fencing at USNA: A Legacy of Excellence

Updated by CDR Emil Petruncio on 14 Nov 2011

The Naval Academy Fencing Club provides lessons for beginners as well as advanced fencers, and supports intercollegiate club level competition in men's and women's epee, foil, and saber fencing. One of only four sports to be included in every modern Olympic Games, fencing is a strenuous sport that uniquely supports the Naval Academy mission by promoting:

- aerobic fitness
- balance and coordination of footwork and bladework
- rapid problem-solving involving timing and distance
- timely execution of offensive and defensive actions
- honorable conduct in heated competition.

The Naval Academy has a long tradition of outstanding fencers and coaches. There are 57 fencers included in the USNA Athletic Hall of Fame, spanning the classes of 1917 to 1994. These fencers were either selected as members of the U.S. Olympic, Pan-American, or NCAA All American teams, or qualified as U.S. National Champion, NCAA or AIAW Individual Champion, Eastern Collegiate or National Regional Champion.

National Champions (AFLA, renamed USFA in 1983):

Epee

1923 – George Calnan ('20)

Foil

1925, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31 – George Calnan ('20)

1959 – Joseph Paletta ('60)

1972 – Joseph Bert Freeman ('70)

1976 – Edward Donofrio ('73)

Saber

1890 – George Heintz, Jr. (head coach at USNA, 1915-1932)

1966, 67 – Alfonso Morales ('60)

Intercollegiate Fencing Association (IFA) 3 Weapon Team Championships:

1924, 1925, 1939, 1943, 1953, 1956, 1957, 1964

(IFA is America's oldest collegiate fencing organization; USNA joined in 1896)

NCAA Team Championships:

1950, 1959*, 1962

(*Only 3 teams have won NCAA team championships by sweeping 1st place in all three weapons: Navy (1959), NYU (1960 & '61), and Columbia (1988))

NCAA Runner up: 1948, 1953, 1960, 1963

Individual NCAA champions:

Foil:

Joseph Paletta 1959

Saber:

James Day 1948

Frank Zimolzak 1952

Alfonso Morales 1959

Epee:

William Bryan 1948

Thomas R. Stuart 1950

Roland Wommack 1958 and '59

Thane Hawkins 1962

Lawrence Crum 1963

The following alumni fencers and coaches represented the U.S. in the Olympics:

1912:	Marc W. Larimer (class of '12)	individual foil and epee
1920:	George Calnan ('20)	individual foil
	Roscoe L Bowman ('21)	individual and team saber
	Edwin G. Fullinwider ('21)	individual and team saber (youngest U.S. Olympic athlete, age 19)
	Claiborne J. Walker ('21)	individual and team saber
	Frederick J. Cunningham ('20)	individual and team saber
	George Heintz Jr. (Navy head coach 1915-1932),	asst coach
1924:	George Calnan ('20)	individual and team foil and epee
	Edwin G. Fullinwider ('21)	team saber
	Thomas P. Jeter ('19)	individual and team foil
1928:	George Calnan ('20)	individual and team foil and epee
		bronze medal for individual epee (Note 1)
1932:	George Calnan ('20)	team foil, individual and team epee
		2 bronze medals in team epee and team foil (Note 2)
	Curtis Shears ('22)	team epee, bronze medal (Note 2)
	Richard Steere ('31)	team foil, bronze medal
1960:	Alfonso Morales ('60)	individual and team saber
	Joseph Paletta ('60)	individual and team foil
	Roland Wommack ('59)	team epee
	Andre Deladrier (Navy head coach 1957-1989)	head coach
1964:	Alfonso Morales ('60)	team saber
1968:	Alfonso Morales ('60)	individual and team saber
1972:	Alfonso Morales ('60)	individual and team saber
	Joseph "Bert" Freeman ('70)	individual and team foil
1976:	Edward Donofrio ('73)	individual and team foil

Note 1: As of 2009, this remains the only U.S. Olympic medal in individual epee

Note 2: As of 2009, this remains the only U.S. Olympic medal in team epee

Navy head coaches:

1896-1914	Antoine Corbesier (appointed Swordmaster in 1865)
1915-1932	George Heintz, Jr.
1933-1947	Clovis Deladrier
1948-1957	Joseph Fiems
1958-1989	Andre Deladrier
1990-1991	Richard Deladrier
1992	Edward Donofrio
1993	Janusz Smolenski

United States Naval Academy Athletic Hall of Fame

Fencing

Headlee, C. D.	1917	Gonzales, J.C.	1955
Calnan, George	1920	Parker, J. T. Jr.	1955
Cunningham, F J.	1920	Hill, R. W.	1956
Fullinwider, F. C.	1920	Kirkpatrick, J. H.	1956
Becker, A. L.	1922	Walverton, J. R.	1956
Guider, J. W.	1922	Paletta, Joseph, Jr.	1959
Hunter, G. P.	1922	Wommack, R. R.	1959
Malstrom, A. I.	1922	Canley, B.	1960
Shears, C. C.	1922	Lewis, William	1960
Callaway, C. H.	1924	Morales, Alberto H.	1960
Stubbs, D.	1925	Hawkins, D. T.	1962
Eskilson, E. T.	1926	Hurst, E. K.	1962
Bennett, R.	1927	Crum, L.	1964
Foley, H. P., Jr.	1938	Frey, R.	1964
Campo, A. C.	1940	Fluhrer, Norman P.	1965
Depoix, V. P.	1940	Heredia, Armando	1966
Stokes, G. P.	1942	Hewitt, Frank	1967
Blalack, R. E.	1944	Davidson, James	1969
Day, J. C.	1948	Freeman, J.	1970
Bryan, W. C.	1949	Solecke, Pete	1972
Powel, S. R., III	1950	Donofrio, Edward	1973
Stuart, Jerome C.	1951	Richards, Robert E.	1978
Stuart, Thomas	1951	Druce, Robin	1980
Utterback, P. W.	1951	Mines, Gwendolyn	1981
Hiller, M.	1953	Pace, Gregory	1981
Leavitt, Horace	1953	Lefon, Carroll	1982
Zimolzak, Frank	1953	Hitchcock, David M.	1988
Allen, Joe	1954	Hanover, Paul E.	1991
		Prieto, Brody	1994

Varsity status was terminated in 1993, but fencing re-emerged in the late 90s with informal practices and travel by a few midshipmen to local competitions. Fencing became an Extracurricular Activity (ECA) in 2002. In the Spring semesters of 2009 and 2010, the team was granted exemption from intramural sports, allowing the fencers to practice in the afternoons. Since the Fall of 2010, the fencers were granted intramural exemptions from October through April. Midshipmen currently compete against other collegiate club level teams, including Army, and continue to garner national recognition.

U.S. Association of Collegiate Fencing Clubs (USACFC) individual champions:

Rae Katz (women's epee) 2004

Joel Katz (men's epee) 2006, 2007, 2008

Other Notable USNA Recognition:

Joseph "Bert" Freeman ('70, foil): NAAA Sword for outstanding male athlete in 1970

Dawn Smith ('86, foil): NAAA sword for outstanding female athlete in 1986.

Rear Admiral Robert Wertheim ('46), a 2005 recipient of the USNA Distinguished Graduate Award, was a foilist on the undefeated 1946 team.

U.S. Fencing Hall of Fame:

George Calnan ('20), Clovis Deladrier, Andrew Deladrier, Alfonso Morales ('60) – 2012 electee

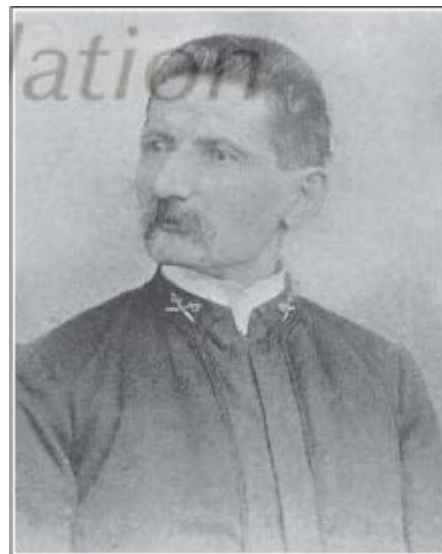
Historical notes:

Antoine Joseph Corbesier immigrated from Belgium and taught fencing in the U.S. beginning in 1862. He was appointed to the position of swordmaster at USNA in October 1865, and coached Navy in intercollegiate competition between 1896 and 1914. He was greatly respected and exceptionally popular with midshipmen. By special act of Congress, he was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant in the Marine Corps on 4 March, 1914. He died on 26 March, 1915. A U.S. destroyer, DE-438, was named in his honor. USS Corbesier was commissioned on 31 March 1944, received two battle stars for service in the Pacific during WWII, and was decommissioned on 2 July 1946.

According to the New York Times archives, George Heintz Sr. was a long-time Assistant Swordmaster at USNA who died on 29 June, 1915. His son, George Heintz Jr., was national saber champion in 1890 and was appointed Assistant Swordmaster at USNA in 1903. George Heintz Jr. went on to serve as Swordmaster and head coach at Navy from 1915 to 1932.



A. J. CORBESIER, U. S. NAVAL
ACADEMY



GEORGE HEINTZ, SR., U. S. NAVAL
ACADEMY

Photos from December 1912 article on U.S. Fencing in "The Outside Magazine".



LT George Calnan taking the Olympic Oath on behalf of the athletes at the 1932 Olympic games in Los Angeles. Calnan perished in the line of duty the following year, in the crash of the airship USS Akron (ZRS-4) on 4 April 1933.

Sources:

www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes

www.databaseolympics.com/sport/sportlist.htm

http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/Outing/Volume_61/outLXI03/outLXI03k.pdf

http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/past/index_uk.asp?OLGT=1&OLGY=1932#

<http://www.swordhistory.com/excerpts/corbesier.html>

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1896/1/9/the-fencing-club-there-has-been/>

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0DE1D7143BE533A2575AC0A9649C94619ED7CF>

<http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/a4/akron.htm>

1915 Lucky Bag

On the following page is a reproduction of the tribute to Antoine Corbesier issued by the Superintendent of the Naval Academy on 26 March, 1915.

U. S. NAVAL ACADEMY,

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND,

26 March, 1915.

NAVAL ACADEMY ORDER NO. 60.

SUBJECT: Death of First Lieutenant Antoine Joseph Corbesier, Marine Corps.

The Superintendent has the painful duty of announcing the death of First Lieutenant Antoine Joseph Corbesier, U. S. Marine Corps, which occurred at the Naval Hospital, Annapolis, at 4:20 A. M. Friday, 26 March.

Lieutenant Corbesier was born in Brussels, Belgium, 22 January, 1837, and was appointed Swordmaster at the U.S. Naval Academy in October, 1865, serving faithfully and efficiently for a period of 49 years.

He was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, 4 March, 1913, by special Act of Congress.

Professor Corbesier was an interesting and conspicuous figure in the history of the Naval Academy for nearly half a century. Possessed of a stern though lovable nature, he won the high esteem and affection of all with whom he came in contact.

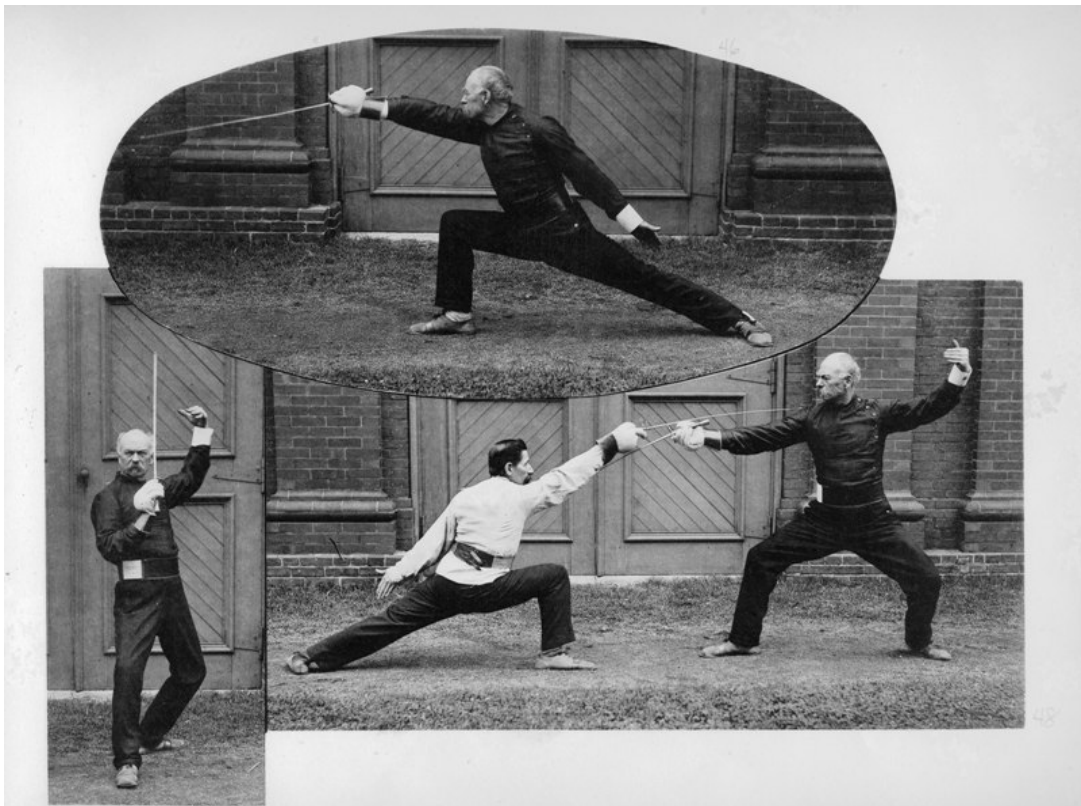
Every graduate of the Naval Academy on the active list of the Navy, to-day, except the Admiral of the Navy, has been under the military instruction of Professor Corbesier and his death will be mourned by thousands of men in all walks of life, who have known him through their attendance at the Naval Academy.

The value of Professor Corbesier's services to the Navy is incalculable. He was the author of the "Sword Exercise" and "Bayonet Exercise" as laid down in the Navy Drill Regulations, and his "Setting Up" drill was long the standard of the Navy.

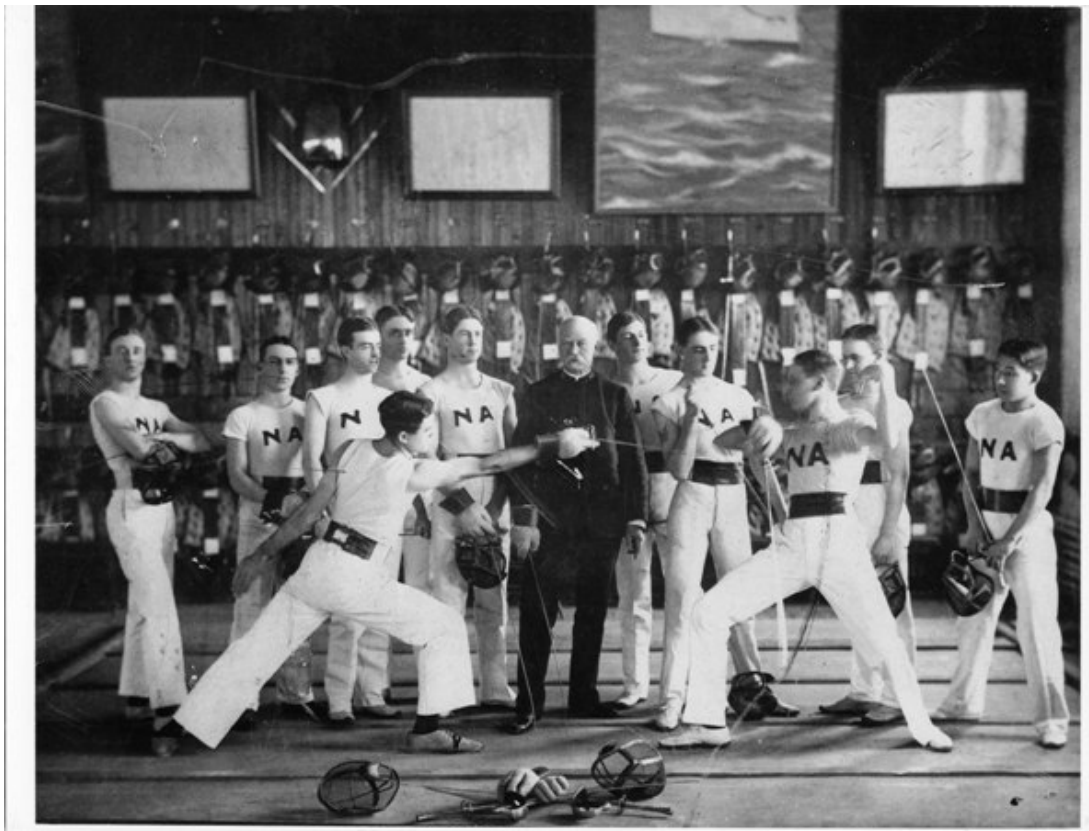
During all the years of his splendid service, Professor Corbesier showed the greatest possible interest in the development and instruction of midshipmen, and he never failed to win their sincere respect and affection. His manner and bearing were always military, his habits and his private character were exemplary and his influence was most powerful for good.

The deepest sympathy is extended to his family in their bereavement.

W. F. FULLAM,
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy,
Superintendent.



Antoine Corbesier and George Heintz, Sr., 1887 from USNA Archives



Antoine Corbesier and midshipmen, 1899 from USNA Archives



USS Corbesier DE-438, undated wartime photo <http://www.navsource.org/archives/06/438.htm>



Antoine J. Corbesier's headstone in the cemetery on Hospital Point



Corbesier instructing a midshipman in 1911