



ANCC FOUNDATION Did You Know?



George S. Patton, Olympian

This "Did You Know" is an "enhancement" of the January 2016 DYK.

George S. Patton, Jr., USMA '09, became a Resident Founder Member of Army, Navy and Marine Corps Country Club¹ in 1928. Most know of him as a brilliant tactician in the use of armor and as the commander of the 3rd Army during its lightning surge across Europe in 1944. Some may know of him as a member of General "Black Jack" Pershing's staff during the Mexico expedition against Poncho Villa in 1916. Few, however, are aware that Patton competed for the United States in the Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden in 1912 on a team that included Jim Thorpe², the greatest athlete of his era, and Averill Brundage, the future president of the International Olympic Committee (1952-1972).



George Smith Patton, Jr. was born into a wealthy family on 11 November 1885, and eventually married into more wealth as his wife, Beatrice Ayer, was the daughter of a Massachusetts textile magnate. After attending school in Pasadena, Patton enrolled at the Virginia Military Institute. From there he went to the United States Military Academy at West Point. He graduated from West Point in 1909 and was commissioned a second lieutenant.

Research of Patton's athletic career has yielded little. At West Point he went out for football, but broke both his arms and never played. He ran on the track team and apparently set a school record in the hurdles in his senior year. He competed in the broadswords at West Point, earning letters in his senior year in track & field, fencing, and sharpshooting (rifle and pistol). He never competed nationally in either track & field or fencing.



In addition to those three sports, Patton was an accomplished horseman. With the family's background he had grown up with horses and became a well-known polo player. Given his ability in running, fencing, shooting, and riding, Patton was a natural to represent the United States in the first Olympic modern pentathlon. Still, almost nothing is known about how he was selected to the team, as he had little national reputation.

¹ Our Club was renamed Army Navy Country Club on December 3, 1930

² In Stockholm Thorp won the gold medal in both the pentathlon and the decathlon.

At Stockholm, Patton finished fifth in the modern pentathlon. It is also commonly stated that he also competed in fencing at the 1912 Olympics. While he was entered in that sport (in individual saber), there is no evidence that he competed in fencing at the 1912 Olympic Games.

The first event of the 1912 modern pentathlon was shooting, and Patton performed poorly, finishing 21st.³ It cost him a chance at a gold medal, as he performed credibly in the last four contests. In swimming, probably the sport at which he had the least experience, he was seventh. He placed fourth in fencing and sixth in cross-country riding. He had moved up to sixth place with only the 4,000-metre run remaining. He did well there, placing third in the run, and moving up to fifth spot. But the deficit he had built for himself in the shooting was too much for him to overcome.



There is no record that George Patton ever again competed in organized sports after the Stockholm Olympics. Thus, he has one of the shortest athletic careers of any well-known American Olympian. His “career,” as it were, consisting mostly of military training while at West Point, and then the 1912 Olympics.

³ Patton claimed that his shots were sufficiently clustered that the lost bullet had not left a trace as it passed through a hole made by earlier shots. The official scorers ruled differently, i.e., that the shot had completely missed the target.