

= Charles Cabaniss =

Charles Cabaniss ( October 14 , 1859 ? January 19 , 1882 ) was a midshipman in the United States Navy and early player of American football . Born and raised in Central Virginia , he was appointed to the United States Naval Academy at the age of 16 . At the academy , Cabaniss retained average @-@ level grades and was a member of the school 's first @-@ ever football team . He graduated in 1880 and was appointed to the USS Swatara . Cabaniss was killed in an accident on the Swatara in 1882 which received coverage throughout much of the Eastern United States .

= = Life = =

= = = At the Naval Academy = = =

Cabaniss was born on October 14 , 1859 in Petersburg , Virginia . He grew up in Central Virginia until he was appointed to the United States Naval Academy at the age of sixteen years and eight months . He began classes at the academy on June 21 , 1876 and was the only member of his class from Virginia . Cabaniss was an average student while at the Naval Academy ; he finished 40th in his class of 69 in his second year , earning near @-@ top marks in drawing and mathematics but very low marks in history and French language . He also spent the mandatory two months and eighteen days at sea . Cabaniss had the fewest demerits of any member of his sophomore class and earned a spot on the academy 's summer cruise on the USS Constellation .

Cabaniss 's academic rankings remained generally the same in his following year at the academy . His scores in drawing , mathematics , and physics were above average , while his merits in French language and history were among the worst . He finished 33rd in the class of 66 . He maintained his spot as the most disciplined in his class , earning fewer than half the demerits than the second @-@ best .

Cabaniss finished his final year at the Naval Academy ranking 25th out of 61 graduates . The course requirements changed that year ; Cabaniss received poor marks in seamanship , tactics , naval tactics , astronomy , and French language , but very high marks in mathematics , electricity , and English composition courses . He maintained his good conduct , earning the second @-@ fewest demerits of any cadet . This earned him an appointment as a Cadet Ensign , a temporary position as an academy officer .

That year , the academy fielded its first competitive football team . Although football had seen some popularity at the school , there had not been an organized effort to establish it . Two different teams were assembled in 1879 ; only first @-@ classmen ( final @-@ year students ) were allowed to join the teams . Cabaniss joined the second team as a rusher , the equivalent of a modern @-@ day offensive lineman . He played alongside future admiral Hugh Rodman and eventual Governor of Guam William John Maxwell . The academy 's team played one game , a scoreless tie with the nearby Baltimore Athletic Club . Navy 's rushers forced the Baltimore A.C. backwards into their own end zone for safeties on three separate occasions , and generally outplayed and overpowered their opponents the entire game .

= = = Swatara and death = = =

On June 10 , 1880 , Cabaniss graduated from the academy and was sent home to await his orders . He was assigned on August 17 of that year to the USS Swatara as a part of the Asiatic Squadron . For sixteen months , the ship was docked in Kobe , Japan , during which time Cabaniss earned himself a positive reputation with other sailors . Crew mates described him as always being happy , with an intimidating , six @-@ foot @-@ tall physique but a personality that did not match . His disciplined nature remained ; he reportedly was one of the best @-@ behaved sailors , who spent all of his time either carrying out his duties or practicing to be a better officer . Cabaniss was never admonished for shore misconduct , a considerable issue for most other new officers and sailors . He

was reportedly a favorite of the superior officers stationed in Kobe , and was appointed to a spot on the admiral 's staff as a reward for his conduct . Cabaniss was preparing for an examination for promotion early in February 1882 .

Cabaniss was killed in an accident on board the Swatara on January 19 , 1882 . An official report of the incident was released on March 25 of that year . According to the report , before @-@ noon exercises on board the ship had just been completed when an order was made to prepare rifles for target practice . At around ten in the morning , Cabaniss was assisting in the instruction of the ship 's second group of sailors when he broke off and entered the ship 's engine room to instruct a sailor on his duties . An experienced sailor , Ensign James P. Parker , was explaining to new sailors how to properly load their guns . He showed them how to load and discharge the weapons using a practice round . He then reloaded his gun with live rounds , but apparently forgot this and fired one of them . The bullet ricocheted off the ship 's deck , struck one of the guns , ricocheted off the deck again , and struck Cabaniss , killing him instantly . The ball first entered through his left arm , impacting it so strongly that it broke every bone in his elbow . It then entered his side , tearing his latissimus dorsi muscle ; went into his chest , severing every major artery ; ricocheted up to near his shoulder , exited his right side , and struck the man he was instructing in the shoulder . Cabaniss was reported to have never made a sound as he fell . The other sailor recovered .

Cabaniss ' body was ordered to be embalmed but was not ; the damage to his body was so severe that the embalming fluid would leak out . His body was buried in Kobe on February 24 with military honors . The entire crew of the Swatara attended , as well as the entire crew of HMS Flying Fish and many noted Japanese citizens . Ensign Parker reportedly suffered from depression following the accident . Cabaniss ' death received significant media coverage in the Eastern United States . The New York Times published an article on its second page , and among other papers that carried the story were the Wilmington Morning Star and the Petersburg Index @-@ Appeal .

= = = Explanatory notes = = =