

U.S. Naval Academy Golf Club Annapolis, Maryland

Architect: William Flynn (1944)/ Andrew Green (2021)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Blue	70	71.2	126	6610
White	70	69.6	121	6200
Red	72	69.0	120	4935

Overview:

The symbiotic relationship of golf and the military is well documented and is evidenced by the fact that there are golf courses at almost every major military facility in the country. Best part is the courses are there to serve the individuals and families of those in uniform no matter their rank. The low key and humble presentation of this classic and challenging old school golf course makes for a memorable golf experience for everyone who steps on the first tee.

The U.S. Naval Academy Golf Club dates back to the 1940's and was created late in the distinguished career of the Golden Age architect William Flynn on a flowing piece of terrain close to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. The original course, having had a couple of holes added in the mid-50's, remained as it was until Andrew Green did a thorough cosmetic renovation in 2021. He pruned back trees to open up the playing areas, relocated and rebuilt bunkering throughout to add some punitive expense to your misses, rebuilt the tees to modern standard, and reconfigured the greens to recapture lost angles and pin placements. But on balance he respectfully maintained the strategic playability of the original Flynn design.

The course is very typical of what was built in the Mid-Atlantic region in the 1940's and 50's. The macho formula of the day was find a high spot for the teeing ground, a low valley to receive the tee shot, and a higher spot to bench the green complex and complicate the approach. The course plays very uphill into the greens which makes a 6200 yard course play over 6500 even without any wind effect.

Besides all the uphill approach shots the most obvious characteristic is the complexity of the green areas. Flynn loved table top green settings and this one has more high tops than a singles bar. As a result meek approach shots are often repelled and you can wear out your 60 degree wedge on recovery shots. One thing you will find that is not original design are the moated short grass surrounds on a number of the holes with long approach shots. Green left a user friendly, close-to-the-ground option for recovery if you are a bit too aggressive into these greens.

Andrew Green expanded the putting surfaces to reclaim their original size and shape that typically wither over time. He left severe internal slopes and undulations creating segmentation to greens already steep back-to-front. This puts a premium on approach shots getting to the proper section given the pin of the day to avoid defensive putting.

The first hole is a template for what you will have to cope with through the day. Drive off a perched tee across the edge of a water element cordoning the right side of the fairway to an expansive landing area beyond. Now

you are looking straight up a massive slope requiring a club and a half more than the distance to a blind putting surface perched behind a false front and deep bunkers. Green created a low collection area in the front left of the green behind the bunker that is a magnet for any ball aimed at a back pin without sufficient resolve. The new greens have plenty of pace in them so navigating undulations like you see on the first requires the right balance of confidence and resolve to play a game close to your index.

Memorable courses present a variety of challenges that keep the player off balance. The short, on level second, at just over 300 yards, tempts you to take a direct line to the flag but there is a sentinel oak tree in the right rough about 50 yards short of the putting surface that should dissuade you from such heroics. Lesser club played on a line well left of center gives leaves a manageable short pitch into your first coffee table of the day. From the rough or over a 60 foot oak your chances of holding this piece of furniture are slim and none.

The first par five of the day is a stunning view from the tee and once again you get the formula of high tee to low landing area to high green setting, but this time the added complication of a fairway that cants sharply left-to-right on the first two shots is thrown into the mix. This last 50 yards of approach and the green are set on a plateau so there is none of that false front, sharp shoulder roll off, but the surface itself has plenty of turbulence so two-putts are not guaranteed.

The rest of the outward nine is open, hilly, and full of optics and challenge with your best scoring opportunities from four through seven. Eight and nine are brutally difficult long four pars so you need spending pars in the bank before you get there.

Eight may be the hardest hole of the day requiring a long carry tee shot not dissimilar to the adjacent first hole, but the approach this time is on level to a high top green arrangement tucked to the right behind a stand of trees and protected by some of the most viscous bunkers you will see all day. Take the "Pit of Death" moniker of the front right bunker seriously.

Once you traverse the long ninth make sure to stop in to the bar/restaurant under the blue awning at the base of the Naval Academy Primary School, their elementary school, on the way to the tenth tee. The cup of chicken salad, tuna sandwich, or dog at the turn you can get are delectable, cheap, and necessary, as the cloistered corridors of the inward nine take on an entirely different tone than what you have experienced so far.

The first three holes on the back nine are probably the most interesting variety you will face all day. As you turn the corner to the 10th tee the same hilly terrain you saw on the front nine is now encapsulated in tree lined corridors of play. The drive on the tenth has to be hit far enough right to avoid the severe camber of the fairway that can abruptly drag a timid effort back towards you into the rough forty yards to the left leaving no visual of the green. From the middle of the fairway the approach is a half a club more to a half blind green setting on top of a hill.

The short 11th switches gears suddenly with a twisting dogear left that is defined by OB right and trees left. I like the long club off the tee here that you are confident will not wander to leave the shortest approach into another blind green complex way up the hill. The bunker you can make out on the left is a good 50 yards short of the putting surface so adjust your club selection accordingly.

What comes next is Andrew Green's new hole, the most visual offering of the day. Best described as a driver/fairway wood reverse Redan par three with serious elevation parameters....now there is a mouthful.

Matching left-to-right ball flight to the angle of the green setting is obvious, negotiating the downhill adjustment and the roll out of a driving club is a different kettle of fish. My conclusion is, that if in doubt, take the longer club and hit it through the green since the pitch back is a routine uphill bump and run to all pin settings.

As was true on the front side, the best scoring opportunities are in the middle holes of the back nine so control your tee ball on the next two and be aggressive on approach if you have a stock club in hand.

Walking from the 14th green to the 15th tee take a moment to engage with the tribute memorial, a reminder of the bravery of seven space explorers who lost their lives in 2003 when the Columbia Space Shuttle disintegrated upon reentry over Texas and Louisiana. The stars in the pavers around this monument commemorate the lives of Rick Husband, William McCool, Michael Anderson, Kalpana Chawla, David Brown, Laurel Clark, and Ilan Ramon who were lost in this tragedy. Solidarity with the brave always has a place in a military facility.

Interesting anecdote about the monument shared by a club member. William McCool, the pilot of the Columbia, was a Navy pilot who, when he attended the Naval Academy was the captain of their cross country team. The placement of this memorial was 16 minutes from the finish line!

The finishing holes will test your discipline as they are all about controlled shot making to avoid blowing up your scorecard. 16 is a short par four with a blind landing area off the tee leaving a dicey approach into another bar stool green sloped back-to-front with nothing but trouble around it.

The signature hole in this run is the pitch n putt 17th, a steeply downhill Par 3 which simulates landing a short iron on the hood of a VW Beetle. The view from the tee is disarming in that this is literally a lawn dart hole, there are no good misses here. If you miss the green playing for four is just smart.

The 18th is the modest twin sister of the 9th just across the entrance drive, but you must drive the ball in play to have any hope of hitting this green and walking off the hole with a gratifying par. If you are out of position off the tee lay up in front of the putting surface for a little elevation pitch to today's pin.

As I said at the beginning, there is nothing flamboyant or tricky about the presentation of this old school course. Having to hit a club or more extra into many of these Par 4's will tax your patience and strategic discipline. I am pretty sure that walking off the 18th green the first thought you will have is that you need another crack at this one. That is the sure sign of a course worth going out of your way to play.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (Blue/White)

#1 Par 4 415/390 yards

Stiff start where you have to drive over the corner of a pond to a landing area that extends out to the left. Second shot is up a steeply ramped fairway to a green that looks like it is fronted with a Jai Alai wall. It is two clubs longer to a severely pitched green. Green has low collection area front left behind the bunker that collects timid shots. Any pin in the back you have to play your approach to the back third to avoid the low.

#2 Par 4 310/310

Hit it about 200 to left center, aim at the corner of the red brick building through the trees, to leave a 90 to 100 yard shot into a raised green tucked to the right. Fairway bunker on the left must be avoided but there is tall sentinel oak tree on the right about 50 yards from the green that can block you out from the right edge of the fairway. The green has lots of slope and a fall off back right.

#3 Par 5 535/535

A three shot hole for most mortals, you drive to center to a landing area well below the tee. The second shot has a serious lean left to right toward the fairway bunker 90 yards short of the green. Want to lay up your second just short that bunker leaving a short iron pitch up to an accessible green that is an extension of a flat plateau fairway area above the bunker. Green is a wavy Lays potato chip and the front left pin presents no margin for error.

#4 Par 3 210/180

Relatively simple challenge in that the green is on level to the tee that plays to the number. Putting surface leans a bit right to left with a high ridge back left and is well guarded by bunkers on both sides. There is a water hazard to the right for a wildly strayed ball. Pick a club for the center of the green no matter where the pin is cut.

#5 Par 4 410/350

Driving area is cordoned on the left by a nasty fairway bunker 20 yards long. Best drive is left center even with the bunker leaving a blind approach is into a shallow multi-tiered green that sits well above you. At least a club more on the second. Two very deep bunkers guard the front right and one on the left. This green has crazy slope middle left to front center that will drag balls down into this collection zone. Two putts here can be very challenging.

#6 Par 4 355/335

Beautiful visual hole off the high elevated tee into an expansive landing area below framed by two fairway bunkers. If you hit the fairway you have an on level shortish iron into an accessible green. The front right is steeply banked so you should approach front center. The back of the green has a moated short grass area behind that is relatively easy to recover from.

#7 Par 3 185/170

Another on level green to the teeing area requires a forced carry across the water and over a false front of the green. It is a saddleback putting surface with deep bunkering on both sides. Like the 4th I like center of the green as the target no matter the pin of the day.

#8 Par 4 460/425

A beast of a four par requires a long carry down the left center of the hole. The hole doglegs to the right around a nest of mature trees close to the green. Green is raised table top and plays a club and a half more on the approach over a pair of deep bunkers on the right coined the "Pit of Death".

#9 Par 4 465/430

Another long and demanding Par 4. You have OB the whole way down the left along the entrance road. Long approach into this two-tiered green that is accessible in front and leans at you.

#10 Par 4 395/385

Hard dogear left around the bunkers requires a strong carry to right center to avoid the camber slope which can drag the ball back down to the low left rough. Shot into this uphill green setting needs distance precision to carry the guarding bunkers and the front edge to get one close.

#11 Par 4 330/320

Short and narrow alcove hole is fraught with danger. OB tight to the right of the fairway and large trees on the left. On the short approach, a blind shot into a narrow plateau green with steep drop offs on both sides. The big fairway bunker about 50 yards short of the green creates depth perception issues so you have to visualize where the putting surface is on the approach.

#12 Par 3 250/225

This new hole is a challenging long Reverse Redan with a 38 yard green sloping away from you wrapping around a bunker on the right. There is one fairway bunker 30 yards short of the green on the left and another in the hill on the left adjacent to the first third of the green. Best shot carries the fairway bunker and caroms right onto the front third. This is a real finesse play with a driver or three wood in hand. Maybe the best miss is long leaving an uphill pitch back to the pin.

#13 Par 5 520/490

Hitting off an elevated tee across a chasm to a blind fairway landing area slightly above you. There is a bunker pinching the left your drive needs to avoid. Lay up is just right of the bunker on the left at 100 yards. Green is tucked well to the left and is protected by layered bunkers front left so your pitch needs to carry to the center of the green.

#14 Par 4 445/410

Downhill blind drive needs to stay in the fairway. Long approach shot into a long narrow green way above you that is open in front but protected by bunkers right and left. Moated short grass area wraps the back of the green.

#15 Par 4 400/390

Hitting off an elevated tee there are a school of bunkers pinching the right. Best drive would right center just off the bunkers. Green sits on a table top above four bunkers front left and one right. If you do not want to take on the wall of bunkers on the left lay up out right and leave yourself a 60 yard cross pitch into the green that tips at you.

#16 Par 4 345/325

This is a short one so be tactical off the tee. Blind drive is left center over the hill top leaving a carry approach from about 100 yards into the smallest green on the course with bunkers front and left. It is full carry over a deep face bunker into this steeply pitched green back to front.

#17 Par 3 150/125

This is the quiet postcard hole of the day-if you can ignore the car traffic heading to the clubhouse behind the green. A short lawn dart pitch from an elevated tee is required to tiny green leaning left to right perched on a knob with trouble all around. Front right bunker is death but the misses short and left end up well below the putting surface and are no bargain either. I have been advised by someone who knows that a miss left you might consider putting it up the steep bank trying to make a 4 rather than risk pitching it through the green for a far worse fate on the other side.

#18 Par 4 430/405

A stiff finishing hole that is the slightly shorter twin sister to number nine. Your tee shot has to mind the fairway bunker on the right about 150 from the green. Green is 40 yards long and protected by a deep bunker short right. Play smart and a finishing par is possible.