

WHAT GOES UP ...? ...NAVY SKYDIVERS!

by Midshipmen Jill Hutchinson, Sallie Haas, and Brian McMenam

In a cooperative pose by members of the U.S. Naval Academy and the Army's Golden Knights, the spirit of working together manifests itself.

This spirit of togetherness arose from the efforts of *Mike Davidson*, Coach of the Academy's Parachute Team, and *Maj. Mike Butler*, Co. Officer of USNA's 15th Co, and Officer Representative of the Team to the Academy's administration. They coordinated an invitation

by the venerable U.S. Army Parachute Team with an Academy movement order, allowing certain aspiring midshipman skydivers to attend the Black & Gold Interservice Competition Meet; held the weekend before Veterans Day last.

The occasion presented a rare opportunity, outside the U.S. National Collegiate Skydiving Championships, for the USNA to interact with cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Air Force Academy, located in Colorado Springs; conducted under the watchful eyes of the world's premier skydiving organization; largely responsible for the U. S. Army's recruitment program.

Two Golden Knights members performed tutorial activities in freefall competition techniques and parachute packing. Some Midshipmen Welfare



Fund contributions, added to personal funds, were donated to rent time for training in the world's largest wind tunnel, located in Raeford, NC.

The Black & Gold meet anticipates the upcoming collegiate championships, to be held at Skydive Spaceland in Houston from Dec. 28 to Jan 2.

USAFA's Wings of Blue and USMA's Black Knights, perennial high finishers in that event, will be challenged this year by a formal USNA group, sponsored for the first time by the Naval Academy administration. Since the initial cam-

Photo: front: SSG Howie Sanborn, USAPT Black Demo Team, Midn. 3/C Micah Penley, 1/C Jill Hutchinson, 3/C Sallie Haas, 2/C Brittany Bolton, SFC Matt Davidson, USAPT Formation Skydiving Team; rear: Maj. Mike Butler, USMC, Midn. 3/C Nick Firestone, 1/C Ben Fox, 1/C Brian McMenam, 3/C Rob Roy, 2/C Mike Head, 1/C Dane Robie, Maj. Mike Davidson, USA (Ret.)

pus recognition of skydiving, in March of this year, Major Butler has been, in the finest Marine Corps tradition, battling uphill for university funding. The Midshipmen Welfare Fund has assumed the burden of some current expenses, with Mids hoping for more assistance from consistent interested sources in the future. To a person, the Team members have pledged to give their maximum performance against the country's best collegiate level competitors; their service pride on the line

Despite unfavorable weather, those persons on the movement order managed an average 6 - 8 jumps apiece from Twin Otter and Fairchild aircraft at 13,000 ft.



Midshipmen in DZ aircraft loading area

The rapid developmental progress of the skydiving 'group' (delineated between 'Team' and 'Club' members) has been compared to their descent velocity in freefall; nominally 120 mph. Some members are designated as competition Team while others are aspiring to Team membership. However, they are all Club members, enjoying the skydiving environment and utilizing it to hone their character skills and performance under stress; frequently referred to as 'psychodynamic duress'. It's an important les-



deHavilland Twin Otter, popular skydiving aircraft son in self-awareness, self-confidence, even self-conquest, to test one's behavior in the extreme three-dimensional aviation environment. The USNA Skydiving Club, **USNASC**, provides a reservoir of active skydivers who support the Team, through admin, training, recruiting, aspirations, and personal skill development; all the while pursuing their individual goals.

Also developing is a cadre of Team and Club supporters, mainly Academy alumni or staff, active duty and retired, fleet personnel and interservice parties; providing important and sorely needed influence and resources required for meaningful growth and improvement . Such altruistic endeavors are highly appreciated by these men and women, instilling a lofty spirit of dedication and fidelity to a purpose of representing the institution with dignity and pride. There is a fine history of support, going back to, in memory, the early '70's, when the Vietnam conflict was still underway. At that time, a Co. officer, USNA class of '68, was instrumental in encouraging administration support of midshipmen skydiving. He is now *Marine Corps LtGen Jack Klimp (ret.)*, still finding time to stop in and check on the well-being of team members, exhorting them to "Beat Army! Beat Air Force!"

The Team traveling to Spaceland to face college skydivers from all across the country (with an estimated 40 colleges and universities represented) will be comprised of 8 individuals: **1/C Ben Fox, Dane Robie, Brian McMenamain, 2/C Mike Head and Nate Tocco, 3/C Sallie Haas, Nick Firestone** and **Micah Penley.**

1/C Allan Ambris missed the event due to an ankle mishap.

LtGen Jack Klimp, USMC (ret.)



Other Club members on the NC trip included **1/C Jill Hutchinson**, Club Admin Ofcr., **2/C Brittany Bolton**, and **3/C Rob Roy**, Public Affairs Ofcr.

(<http://www.navyskydiving.com>)

The experience with the Golden Knights was a major plus for the purpose of seeing how a skydiving competition event is conducted and getting practice working together as a team. After jumping, in the evening hours, or on wind holds, the group was tutored in freefall formation skills by Matt Davidson of the Golden Knights, on floor creepers and in the wind tunnel; polishing the mid's performance.

*Maj. Mike Butler USMC
Team Officer Rep.*



*Mike Davidson, Maj.
USA (ret.), Team Training
Officer*



At the Nationals, the competition Team will be

entered in these events:

- 4-Way Formation Skydiving*
- 2-Way Formation Skydiving*
- Individual Accuracy Landing*
- Team Accuracy*
- Sport Accuracy*
- 2-way Vertical Formation Skydiving*
- 6-Way Speed Star Formation*

Over the Christmas break, the mid's will converge on the skydive center at Rosharon, TX; about an hour south of Houston, (<http://www.skydive>



Sallie's landing approach

[spaceland.com](http://www.spaceland.com)) with an excited intention of conducting their respective skills in the aerial arena; eager to make a respectable impact.

They may be hard-pressed to emulate the Academy football team's recent dominance over Army and Air Force, since, after all, they'll be the 'new kids on the block'. This is their first serious endeavor, diving into national competition. The B&G Meet experience has certainly helped.

So, with prudent optimism, deep in the heart of Texas, it's a start for the **USNAPT**. Stay tuned!



Touchdown; Sallie and Brian McMenamain



Dane Robie



Nate Tocco



Jill Hutchinson



Micah Penley



Mike Head



*Brian
McMenamin*



Nick Firestone



USNAPT's 4-way freefall formation team utilizes floor creepers to visualize the aerial techniques and maneuvers for that event; accepting tutorials from Matt Davidson.



Brittany Bolton



Rob Roy



Ben Fox



Sallie Haas



Allan Ambris



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THE TEAM PROCESS

In preparation for the rigors and skill requirements of skydiving and its competition elements, the Team and Club members have been conducting instruction and training operations at the Skydive Delmarva drop zone on the Eastern Shore, across the Chesapeake Bay from the Academy, about a 1-1/2 hour drive.

The Team's Officer Rep., Maj. **Mike Butler** is a veteran of over 360 skydives, and a Marine since 1983. Among his many accomplishments, he is entitled to wear the Bronze Star with Combat Distinguishing Device, Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal (third award), the Joint Service Achievement Medal and the Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal. His impressive complete bio can be viewed on the navyskydiving.com website.

Mike Davidson, an Instructor and pilot at the DZ, and a Safety & Training Advisor appointee by the United States Parachute Association (USPA), has been handling the Team training pro-



Ben at altitude, prior to exit

gram. Mike is a past Executive Officer of the USAPT's Golden Knights, and coincidentally, the father of Matt Davidson, a current member of the Knights. He is also a past Team Leader of the USPA National Skydiving Team. His complete bio can also be viewed on the navyskydiving.com website.

Assisting in instructional duties is **Mike Schultz**, on staff at Skydive Delmarva. Mike has experience of 12 National Skydiving Championships as a competitor and pilot, as well as a past Team Leader of the U. S. National Skydiving Team at the World Championships. He will be escorting the Team to Texas.



Brian McMenemy, Team C/O, passes a plaque to Mike Davidson, Team Trainer, for presentation to Matt Davidson, SFC of the USAPT in appreciation by the USNAPT for help at the B&G Meet.

THE CLUB PROCESS

With few exceptions, Club members, *Ben*, after exit, wearing freefall video camera, on his back shooting the aircraft



bers don't arrive on scene with previously crafted skydiving skills. They arrive at a minimum level of consideration for the Team by pursuing their own program. A Midshipman must have at least a USPA A license, which consists of no less than 25 freefall skydives, passing a written examination, amassing a number of skydives which demonstrate skill in freefall, canopy landing control, group freefall activity, and an observed keen sense of aerial safety, plus membership in the national organization.

However, Club membership is achieved by completion of the AFF program, a prescribed series of 7 skydives; unless the applicant has documented prior experience. It's no coincidence that the current Club members are very active in providing guidance and leadership in the attainment of membership. The Club oversees DZ movement orders and basic training classes on campus, organiz-

ing groups and dates for DZ travel. A healthy team spirit permeates the Club atmosphere, with additional social duties on the menu of activities. Entering into the unknown is more easily managed with mates aboard.

With 5 of the current members graduating in May, the succession to Club leadership and training posts must be established through nurturing the development of new people.

Other Club members are: 2/C Mike Chertude and Mike Hatch, 3/C Gene Soto and Brandon Dorsett, and 4/C Carl Stofberg. Trainees in transition from looking upward to falling downward, having completed at least one AFF skydive include: 1/C Ryan Rose, 2/C Alex McIntosh, 3/C Nick Danforth and Ben Hoover, 4/C Spencer Wilson, Jennifer Groger, Daniel Sedberry, Patrick Bagnick, Armando Torres, and Austin Lee. Several of these Mids have made

Authors' Interview with Micah Penley

What was the most rewarding part of the Black & Gold Meet?

The Black & Gold Meet was a phenomenal experience! The best part being the camaraderie among skydivers and military personnel alike. I met so many great skydivers who demonstrated humility and were willing to help us develop as skydivers in any way at all.

How do you feel about the opportunity to go to the Nationals?

I'm extremely excited. It's been something I've worked for since I started skydiving last spring. It's a great feeling to know I'll be representing the Academy and testing my skills.

What aspects of the Team did you see develop on this trip?

This trip represented the first time that I really felt the entire group come together. It solidified the Team on a focus, continuing the direction of our momentum of improvement.

What resources were provided to improve your skills?

We were given the finest resources to assist in our development. The foremost was the wonderful coaching we received from the Golden Knights; especially World Champion Matt Davidson. We were also given the opportunity to spend time in a wind tunnel, which is one of the best freefall learning tools out there.

Give us a comment on your first experience in a wind tunnel!

The first two minutes was very frustrating because the tunnel accentuates every flaw in your technique. At the opposite end of the spectrum, it's invaluable because there's not a wasted moment; making every second a meaningful experience.



l. to r.: Micah Penley, Rob Roy, Nick Firestone, Jill Hutchinson

At times, on campus introductory skydiving classes are conducted; with those electing to enter training, or just try a tandem to experience the exhilarating environment, traveling to the DZ.

Activity will resume on a regular basis in the spring. During the colder weather,

advanced AFF levels, and many have also made the tandem jump as an introduction to the skydiving environment.

More than 100 Midshipmen made tandem jumps this past season. The Club, USNASC, hosts and organizes regular movements to the skydiving airport, referred as the DZ, for Drop Zone.

usually only the very dedicated Team members and upper level AFF students are pursuing their vertical quest.

Persons interested in researching the skydiving program are invited to email: info@navyskydiving.com.

(photo credits: Mike Butler, Jill Hutchinson, Sallie Haas, Ben Fox, Mike Schultz)

The B&G Meet contingent (missing: Brittany Bolton, Ben Fox)

