



HERE COMES THE NAVY !!

by Brian McMenamin, USNA '09

www.navyskydiving.com

In the flying atmosphere of military academies, there's a new kid on the block; ... it's anchors aweigh for the Midshipmen of Annapolis. For over forty years, the U.S. Naval Academy has been producing freefall skydivers. Unfortunately, except for a few years during the Vietnam era, the brass has been reluctant to offer administrative support. Thus, virtually all involvement in skydiving by mids has been on a private, individual level.

An era long conundrum, replicated numerous times around the world, underlies an inquisitive sense from the skydiving community. "Why doesn't the Naval Academy have a skydiving team?" The Air Force and West Point subsidize skydiving operations, but there was no such joy for the Midshipmen.

In a welcome milestone, on March 28 past, the U.S. Naval Academy Administration granted aegis for a skydiving program. Maj. Michael Butler, (USMC, 15th Co. Officer), received notification that the Academy would support a limited effort at

establishing a team of midshipmen that could be sponsored at the Collegiate Nationals, including equipment and aircraft expenses for training, and possibly evolve into a group effort at demo skydives for Navy sponsored events. A major step forward has been set down to bring the Academy into contemporary parity with the other academies.

This announcement is the culmination of a long quest by Maj. Butler, with the assistance of Maj. Mike Davidson (USA ret'd.), past Executive Officer, U.S. Army's Golden Knights and a staff member at Skydive Delmarva. Last year, Mike Butler had raised the idea at an Academy staff meeting, followed by an approach to the commandant, Capt. Margaret Klein (USN), with a two-fold proposal incorporating the Collegiates and demo team objectives. Happily, after considerable research, a response was received from the Academy Superintendent, Vice Admiral Jeffrey L. Fowler, approving their request. That event marked the first occasion that the concept of skydiving as an approved Academy activity was recognized.



UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

HONOR... COURAGE... COMMITMENT



THE SEEDS OF GROWTH

Furthering the cause was the recently demonstrated competition spirit of a pair of active Mids, and the past accomplishments of a pair of recent graduates. Traveling to the recent Collegiate Nationals in Eloy, AZ, Midshipmen Ben Fox and Brian McMenamin competed, at their personal expense, finishing 3rd and 4th, respectively in the Novice Sport



Top: Maj. Butler, Midn. McMenamin & Fox before Tecumseh statue; *Above:* top row l to r, Mike Head, Ben Fox, Majors Mike Davidson and Mike Butler (Team Coach & Officer Rep. respectively), Rick Gillis - bottom l to r, Dane Robie, Sallie Haas, Allan Ambris, Brian McMenamin (Team CO); *Left:* 4-way line, Mike Butler, Ben Fox, Brian McMenamin, Mike Davidson; *Left-above:* Mahan Hall tower, campus.

Accuracy event, and tying for 5th in the 2-Way freefall formation event (see 'Earning Credit', PARACHUTIST, March'08).

Prior to that, in spring 2005, a letter was broadcast to the Brigade of Midshipmen by Joe Leidig (R/CAPT USN), Commandant, congratulating Midshipmen Doug Morrow and Gary Windt for their performance at the 2004 National Collegiate Parachuting Championships. Morrow won the gold medal for Novice Sport Accuracy and 3rd in Style, with Windt finishing 4th in accuracy and 5th in style. These were stellar accomplishments for guys with relatively little experience.

Inauspicious in comparison with the plethora of West Point and Air Force Academy cadets who medaled, this was significant from the point-of-view that these other academies have been sponsored at great length, in great numbers, and in great depth by their respective administrations; for almost 40 years.

Naturally, it will take some time to consolidate a group and a process for support, but at the outset it appears there's a dozen or so novices who have indicated a desire to be part of the effort, bolstering the initial leadership of Midns. McMenamain and Fox. Maj. Davidson's training program has been outlined and is currently being implemented to inaugurate the formal framework of development designed to build on the recent competitive performances of these gentlemen. Additional aspirants are subscribing to the program, preparing themselves for the conditions which will ensue publication of this project. Regarding the inclusion of females in the effort, the skydiving competitive environment has demonstrated that performance is no longer an image of external muscularity so much as a nascent athletic finesse, rendered in the third dimension. In the training sphere, there will be healthy rivalry and contention between men and women, underlining the importance of individuality as well as teamwork.

Clearly, the willingness for Mids to assume the economic and time burden to become competitive with the other academies is present. Perhaps at the outset they can be expected to achieve an A-license status to demonstrate dedication, but to arrive at a meaningful skill level they need additional support. The hope of Naval personnel across the seven seas is that they can present a contemporary image in comparison with the other services. To do so, a small cadre of novices is gathering on weekends to travel to the DZ and work on skills.



THE SPIRIT RISES FROM THE PAST

Going back about ten years into history, the Academy allowed a military effort, the Airborne Training Unit (ATU) which involved pursuing military parachute wings (5 static line jumps) after a training session at Ft. Benning, GA. In 1998, the unit was disbanded, with the residue of the unit's funds being appropriated to USPA's AFF program. 21 ATU members performed an AFF at Skydive Delmarva, with several pursuing the entire 7 levels; on to independent status. Prime movers of that effort were Chris Fiacco (at that time Capt. USMC), Dave Forman (USNA 1/C) and Glenn Matamoros, (OS1, USN Seals).

Many past USNA graduates who achieved skydiving license status have gone on to other careers where their experiences have done them well; reflecting the awareness that scholarship remains the principle objective at the Academy. Among those are:

Frank Weisser (Lt., USN), USNA 2000, the current narrator and pilot #7 of the Navy's *Blue Angels*, which will be performing



at Annapolis for the 2008 graduation ceremonies;

Cassidy Reese, (Lt. J.G., USN), USNA 2003, a young lady who can be found working, in Naval Aviation, on her carrier landings in F-18's;

Dan Caldwell, USNA 1976, past Naval Aviator who flies for Delta Airlines, and also flew skydivers for the club while a Midshipman First Class before graduation; plus many others who went on to stellar Navy and



Below: l to r; under one of U.S. Navy's historical big guns at Bancroft Hall, Sallie Haas, Allan Ambris, Rick Gillis, Jill Hutchinson, Dane Robie, McMenamain, Maj. Butler, Ben Fox, Mike Head; Left: group in classroom; Above: Sallie Haas climbing to altitude.





Marine Corps careers, notably in the Seals and Submarines in addition to Fleet Surface Warfare service. Leadership skills are enhanced by development of the self-confidence, awareness, and superior performance required by the dynamics of the skydiving environment. They have acquired intrinsic acquiescence

to the spiritual maxim that 'self-conquest is the greatest victory'! These qualities, attributes all, contribute positively to their already expressed dedication to freedom, country, and family.

BIOGRAPHIES: To do justice to the bios of

Majs. Butler and Davidson would take way too much space here. Complete descriptions can be obtained from the Navy Team website www.navyskydiving.com. Here follows brief descriptions of career accomplishments pertinent to their roles in the military and skydiving.

Michael J. Butler, Maj. USMC, B.S. Georgia St. U. A Marine since 1983, most recently in Iraq he led Weapons Company as the Mobile Assault Company and Battalion Quick Reaction Force (QRF).

His skydiving experience includes 360 jumps, some of which were performed for 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. While serving with Force Recon, he participated in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm as a member of 5th Platoon from August 1990 to March 1991.

Major Butler 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 among his personal decorations.

Mike is currently the 15th Co. Officer, USNA, living in Centreville, MD with his wife Cathy and son, Connor. He can be contacted during office hours at 410-293-7315, or email at mbutler@usna.edu. At the moment of this writing, he's running the Boston Marathon.

Michael S. Davidson, Maj. USA (Ret'd.) M.M.S., St. Francis Col.

Mike is a pilot, flying jumpers and practicing the privileges of tandem and AFF Instructor ratings; S&TA at Skydive Delmarva. He has over 2,800 skydives and has served as the Team Leader of the United States Competition Team. He also possesses the USPA PRO rating and is qualified as a National Accuracy Judge.

His military career spans 26 years in Special Forces, with two years on assignment to the Golden Knights; a year as the Executive Officer. Duties included his mission as a Flight Surgeon and Medical Officer, specifically with the 3rd Special Forces Group at Ft. Bragg, during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

To jumpstart the Navy Team in it's quest for excellence, he's preparing a training syllabus intended to develop their capabilities in precision freefall and canopy accuracy. The overriding principle of the approach is 'safety'.

He's currently living in Laurel, DE with his wife Robin. His email is freefalldoc@aol.com.

WHAT THE FUTURE BRINGS

The gates are now open to receive any well-intended, approved assistance in the search for subsidy. Several persons and agencies have already expressed an intention to be of help. At first, the Administration will be limited by possible funds appropriation; understandably, since the program is so far only showing signs of a healthy birth. The future will depend to a large degree on the success of the current group, including their intelligent conduct of affairs, and the degree of acceptance by the larger Naval military universe. At the outset, Navy Skydiving will proceed with a faith in their competence and a pride which will instill satisfaction on the path to perfection.

In the words of William Ellery Channing (ca. 1840), theologian and transcendental poet, "*There are periods when the principles of experience need to be modified; when hope and trust and instinct claim a share with prudence in the guidance of affairs; when, in truth, to dare is the highest wisdom.*"

Interview — Sallie Haas, USNA Class of 2011, with 92 skydives and ambitions to be part of the new Naval Academy Skydiving Team, inquires of Brian McMenamain.

- *Does skydiving interfere with your studies?*

Ans: We jump mostly on the weekends during our liberty time, so not really. Since coming to USNA, I've learned a lot about time management, which is even more prevalent now with my dedication to this team.

- *How would you briefly describe your competitive spirit?*

Ans: "Winners never quit; quitters never win!"

- *Do you see a meaningful level of Brigade interest, required to keep the initial effort going?*

Ans: Yes, definitely! We've received some 500 emails about interest in either being part of the team or coming out for a tandem skydive. The interest is out there; it's just a matter of funding and organizing groups to come out and jump.

- *What is the most satisfying sensation you derive from your skydiving objectives?*

Ans: Watching other people come out and make their first jump. It's like you are starting all over again, because you know exactly how that felt.

- *Do you see a productive military significance to skydiving?*

Ans: It builds leadership character through self-confidence in behavior under potentially stressful situations; and develops keen awareness in a dynamic atmosphere under potentially hazardous conditions.

- *Is there a similar role for women?*

Ans: Male or female, if you are qualified to be on the team, and you show a dedication to making it out to jump, there's no reason you would not compete.