

O'FLORIDA



The USNAPT 2023 Sebastian Spring Break -- (actually, winter, including St. Patrick's Day)

It's so often true that the value of an entity is underappreciated until it is lost, or has passed. It's also true that being aware of this truth allows recognition of a certain melancholy in concert with an otherwise splendid occasion.

The entity in question is my long and satisfying association with the United States Naval Academy, specifically the midshipmen skydivers, since 2008 designated as the USNAPT. Beginning in 1965, I served as an Instructor/Advisor to many of the nascent aerial novices of USNA who desired to become accomplished skydivers; about 2,300 of them. This included those who, after a jump or two, discovered they really just wanted the experience of self-control in falling through space, alighting comfortably under a flexible descent device. In other words, those who didn't really want to master freefall, but only survive the event. I was a civilian entrepreneur, performing as a USPA certified S/L & AFF Instructor, Jumpmaster, & Tandem Master, and FAA Jump Pilot & Rigger.

Then, in 2008 four individuals combined to obtain initial recognition for this ancillary academy activity that heretofore only required a Company Officer's permission to participate. Some CO's were more permissive than others. The four are referred to as the **USNAPT Charter Group**.

Meet, l to r;

MAJ Mike Butler, USMC, O'Rep.

Midn. 1/C Ben Fox, '09, TEAM X/O

Midn. 1/C Brian McMenamin, '09, Capt.

MAJ Mike Davidson, USA-Ret., Head Coach

*(Photo from 2008; Ben is now an F-18 pilot, and
Brian is a SEAL)*



It was through Mike Butler's persistent appeals to the Commandant that a uniform jump approval policy be applied throughout the brigade, and the USNAPT be recognized as an Academy entity. Up until that time, if a midshipman attended the Collegiate Nationals, he/she had to do so as an individual, with no official recognition by USNA. Thereafter, the USNAPT was recognized, and in 2009, an official contingent of the USNAPT, representing the U. S. Naval Academy, travelled to Spaceland, in Rosharon, TX for the USPA Collegiate National Championships. I was privileged to attend as the TEAM Event Volunteer Coach.

It's been uphill and virtually glorious since then, with various personnel changes, and the arrival in 2013 of CAPT Bill Boniface, USN-Ret. '72, who was a former USNA skydiver as a midshipman, and later as an Officer Representative. He was named the Alumni Representative! There has been a steady growth of TEAM size, experience level, equipment and facilities acquisition; all thanks to him and the support staff he recruited.

The Coup de Grace was applied in 2017, when then Commandant CAPT Robb Chadwick responded to a request from Ken Levens and Simeon Brewster, both '18, which culminated in ECA status for the USNAPT. The TEAM had been invited to make public demonstration jumps at the Wings 'n Wheels airshow in Georgetown, DE, in answer to a proposal by Mike Davidson. However, the request was initially disapproved. The appeal to CAPT (now RDML) Chadwick, after a formal hearing of the pertinent parties was successful.

(See: [SONG OF USNAPT](#) In fact, after CAPT Chadwick, and his deputy, CAPT Charles Grady, USN, made successful tandem jumps onto Hospital Point, the Commandant spent the next 13 months pursuing his personal skydiving credentials, achieving the USPA A and B Licenses.)

Subsequently, the TEAM made a great leap forward with the appearance of CAPT Donnie Kennedy, USN, as the O'Rep. who took the reins on the administrative side, including adding freefall to his military jump wings. His influence opened up the Yard to regular practice jumping, as well as invitations from academy Supt. VADM Sean Buck, who pioneered the USNAPT in brigade parade demos, before public audiences. [\(See video\)](#)

Reverting to some history, after 2009, it became a tradition for the TEAM to travel as a group for training, over spring break. Naturally, the destination was the temperate, sky-friendly climate of South Florida.



I to r: Kneeling; 2/C Eric Lim, Aron Sobers, 4/C Julian Saldana, 3/C Tom Snead, 2/C Nick Froude, 3/C Jordyn Urrea, 2/C Ambria Pipho, 4/C Mariam Abud-Chalita, Kobby Boateng. Middle Row: 3/C Chris Kehr, 4/C Colton Christian, Grace Parker, ED Sturgeon, Maeve Carrigg, 3/C Mary Root, 2/C Nate Basford, 4/C Brody Boggs. Back Row: Chris Schrier, 4/C Conner Mollberg, 3/C Brett Dumais, JP Anhalt, 4/C Henry Borthwick, 2/C Gavin Kim, 4/C Chris Paris, Myles Hall, Ethan Clark, 2/C Cyrus Eghtedari, 3/C Manolis Tsavaris, Caleb Sheyda. Missing: 4/C Reagan Mar, All 1/C.

So, here we are in 2023, March 11 – 18. 2/C **Nate Basford** has made arrangements with Skydive Sebastian to host up to 34 midshipmen of the USNAPT for skydive training exercises, with approval of TEAM leadership. Some plebes have been ferried to Skydive Deland, and to Skydive Florida, in Lake Wales for the purpose of furthering their advancement in training through the initial AFF phase, returning to Sebastian after a few days, upon completion. The entire contingent included LTJG **Matt Bender**, '21, OIC & former TEAM member, and honorary USNAPT member **Chris Schrier**; which brought the total number to 36. This was by far the largest contingent of USNAPT ever to be on travel together.

The aforementioned melancholy enters with the knowledge that the friendship and joy of associating with Midshipmen, alumni, and their families is coming to an end. Watching these young, intelligent, and vital future leaders conducting their affairs provides moments of the passion that surges with the dynamics of their activities. This is underscored when figures of past years arrive and join the vibrant atmosphere of the DZ they're populating at the moment. Two events typified the camaraderie, teamwork, competition, and continuing archival history, comprising the USNAPT social and team atmosphere on this occasion,

- A TEAM canopy accuracy competition,
- An evening at Mulligan's.

The TEAM leadership devised an accuracy competition between upper class members. A handicap system was effected so that all members could be eligible for a money prize offered, without segregating experience



Brian Flaherty communes with Lauren Modica on the target; ... past & present TEAM Captains..

categories: \$250 1st place, \$150 2nd place, \$100 3rd. This was handed out at the end of the competition, which included 3 rounds, with the handicap of a throwaway jump, and the cumulative score by adding the best 2 of 3.

Of the 16 entrants, first place went to 1/C **Brian Flaherty**, 2nd to 3/C **JP Anhalt**, 3rd to 1/C **Jason Weiss**.

The event revealed a pattern of deficiency in canopy accuracy skills, with 41 of 48 jumps coming

up short on the downwind side of the target on final approach. In keeping with the theme of spring training, this indicated a dearth of early perception of the influence of relatively high winds; which will certainly bear on the attitude of more serious attention to canopy accuracy technique. The Chief Judge for the event was 2LT **Lauren Modica**, USMC, '21, currently stationed at flight school in Pensacola. She drove 14 hours round trip to spend a weekend with the organization of which she was a member for 3 years, including as the first female USNAPT Captain. She is already a TEAM legend, having performed several skydiving 'firsts' on the Yard, and demonstrating a personal confidence as a competitor and Coach to the younger members. She also obtained the PRO-R rating, allowing jumps into the NMCM stadium. [\(See video\)](#)

Another significant event was a group repast at a local seafood restaurant, Mulligan's. 42 persons spent a couple of hours expressing glee and social satisfaction while consuming the best that Sebastian had to offer.

The USNAPT group was expanded by the presence of some skydiving prominence, in the person of **Amanda Owens Smalley**, newly appointed USPA Director of Competition.



Amanda

Also present was the Chief Instructor from **Skydive Cross Keys**, the DZ most frequently used by the TEAM when traveling on weekends from Annapolis; **Range Luda**, and his lady, **Stephanie Vaughan**. Range performs Tandem & AFF functions for Sebastian DZ during the winter. He has passed 36,000 jumps and probably deserves recognition as having the most freefall time in skydiving history.



Seated before a menu was the CEO and Chief Instructor of **SkydiveRatings**. **Bram Clement** was present to conduct a USPA Coach Rating course for 4 members of the USNAPT: 2/C **Nick Froude**, 3/C **Brett Dumais**, **JP Anhalt**, & **Caleb Sheyda**.

Range (left) orders at Mulligan's.



Bram smiles before ordering.

[\(See video\)](#)

Another distinguished visitor, who dropped in from Orlando, was alumnus **Ken “Skip” Wheeler**, '62, former 'Frogman'; ... before SEALs, now a practicing lawyer. Ken is a supporter and contributor to the TEAM.



Family support is especially valuable, and welcome. 3/C Manolis Tsavaris poses with Mom & Dad, grandmotjer and brother.



l to r; 2/C Gavin Kim, 3/C Brett Dumais, 4/C Julian Saldana, Ethan Clark, Ken Wheeler, 4/C Grace Parker, Maeve Carrigg, 2/C Nate Basford, 4/C Kobby Boateng, ED Sturgeon.



LTJG Matt Bender admires the scenery offered by a s(t)unning Marine Lieutenant, Lauren Modica. Matt took time from duties at Norfolk to shepherd his former teammates.



2/C Nate Basford & 4/C Julian Saldana relaxing in TEAM room.



2/C Aron Sobers, 1/C Vince Tenebro & Matt Newton at Twin Otter mockup.

Except for a few periods of high winds, which kept the lower licensed & student jumpers grounded, the weather was ideal. As the week progressed, the AFF graduates returned to Sebastian and began their Category Dive coaching phase, aiming for the A license which allows so much more latitude in activity and self-determination. Where possible TEAM coaches were utilized for cost and time efficiency. Seven early jumpers finished the required Canopy Course to be eligible for their B-license.

Each day began with a safety briefing, drilling the members in responses to queried action situations, which inculcated in each a confidence in dealing with normal, and abnormal, situations. Safety was always the watchword, with appreciated respect shown by all.



Matt Bender

The licensed jumpers alternated between canopy accuracy practice, when winds allowed, then formation skydiving, and speed stars. Occasionally, a few fun jumps were interspersed to prevent burnout. As the week progressed, there were more requests for license tests, with several members either advancing in license category, or receiving the first license. [\(see trip summary by TEAM Capt.\)](#)

Altogether it was a profitable skill-enhancing enterprise, from the standpoint of advancing the proficiency, qualifications, and ratings of the TEAM, with a shoutout of appreciation to all those who contribute to the USNAPT existence. Although, it must be noted that 90% of the expense burden of this junket was borne by the individual Midshipmen themselves, which usually indicates a high level of parental involvement. There's not enough audio volume in this article to be worth mentioning what the Mids get paid. [\(See video\)](#)



9-way Star, w/1/C Meg Welch, Matt Newton, Jason Weiss, 2/C Gavin Kim, Eric Lim, Ambria Pipho, Chris Schrier, Matt Bender & Mike Schultz; photo from video by 1/C Vince Tenebro



View of Atlantic as 1/C Vince Tenebro climbs out of Twin Otter to camera step at 14,000 ft. for 9-way exit.

The next planned trip for the USNAPT is a 6-person excursion to USMA at West Point to participate in the Interservice Academy Meet, a competition between USAFA, USMA, and USNA for the ISAM trophy. Six 2/C TEAM members will be making the trip, accompanied by CAPT B and me. Sadly, it will be my last trip with the TEAM, ending a period of pride, personal satisfaction, and pleasant reflection of the amazing progress this group of stellar individuals has constructed over the past 15 years. However, with the onset of a new phase imminent, which will encompass the addition of a full-time professional Coach, the ultimate TEAM identity is sure to be realized. In addition, a recognition of the value of this TEAM to the USNA will emerge, accentuating the high level of leadership preparation which is cultivated by their experiences.

A quote by **RDML Robb Chadwick** is on point, especially in light of the fact that he is the recipient of the U. S. Navy's **Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership**; to wit, *"the Parachute Team provides more relevant lessons for future military service (and life in general) than probably any other activity on the Yard."*

I add my own observation, evolved from so many years interacting with so many excellent examples of the product of the USNAPT: *"Being a member of the skydiving team is conducive to fostering self-reliance, trust and teamwork— profound qualities of leadership which equal or surpass any other reason for attending the Naval Academy,"*

Thank you all for the wonderful life, with special sincere appreciation to Bill Boniface, who is the engine of this organization. Mike