



If you haven't seen you're missing the greatest flying sequences ever presented by the film industry. Tom Cruise is the apparent star of the movie, but the true star of the exciting and dynamic aerial shots is unseen. Frank Weisser, depicted here in his F-18 Super Hornet aircraft, which he occupied for 10 years as a U.S. Navy Blue Angel, provided a stand-in level of flying skill and electrifying nerve which allowed the film to entertain millions of viewers, to the tune of \$1.5 billion income worldwide for Paramount.

[\(see video\)](#)



LCDR Frank Weisser, USN as Blue Angel Lead Solo Pilot in F-18

It may be coincidental, but Frank began his aviation career as a U.S. Naval Academy midshipman skydiver, achieving experienced freefall status. After graduation in 2000, Frank chose Navy Air as his military career path (call sign "Walleye"), eventually serving two tours with the Blue Angels, punctuated by 3 combat assignments in Afghanistan and Iraq, and culminating in retirement with the rank of Commander. He currently resides in Heaven's Landing, GA, representing the real estate community while ferrying clients in various corporate aircraft. He transports his beautiful family of wife and three children in a Beechcraft Baron, which persons of the pilot community recognize as a wonderful aircraft; ... but not quite as exciting as the F-18.



CDR Frank Weisser, USN (Ret.) in Alumni Hall

On 20 October just past, Frank made a truly magnificent presentation of his experience with the movie staff of **"Top Gun: Maverick"**, and the intricacies of performing camera shoots to achieve the desired audience effects. Video clips and narrative had excited onlookers stirring in their seats. He was responding to an invitation from the USNA President's Circle, appearing before 300 exhilarated observers in Alumni Hall. In many ways, it was more exciting than the movie because what was

[\(see video1\)](#)

viewed was all real. [\(see video2\)](#)

Later, visiting the U.S. Naval Academy Parachute Team loft, he further entertained midshipman members and staff of the USNAPT. Following that he viewed a demonstration skydive by the TEAM, kicking off a formal brigade parade at Worden Field. Frank was a 25-year precursor to this year's membership, having been one of the first graduates of the USPA Accelerated Freefall Program (AFF) when the academy's Airborne Training Unit transitioned from the traditional military static line method. [\(see video\)](#)



Frank in TEAM loft with 2/C Caleb Sheyda & 3/C Kobby Boateng.

What makes this article meaningful is the spotlight it shines upon the USNAPT. Frank is a paragon of the constitution and character which is developed through involvement in the TEAM, which represents the USNA brigade, the USN, and the Marine Corps in public demonstrations of skill and in collegiate athletic competition.

Frank's exploits are self-explanatory, but other stellar USNA graduates have also proceeded from such experience; too many to enumerate individually. However, as a result of their involvement in USNA skydiving and subsequent advancement in leadership positions, a few more should be mentioned.



ADM Olson, left, with USNAPT members, l to r: 2/C Miller Lambert, Jordyn Urrea, 1/C Eric Lim, CDR Jason Duff, USN, USNAPT Ofcr. Rep., 1/C Nick Froude, 2/C JP Anhalt, Mary Root, Tom Snead

Admiral Eric Olson, USN (Ret.), '73, who became the U.S. Navy's Bullfrog. That's the highest ranking and longest serving SEAL, reaching 4-star rank as combatant commander CO of USSOCOM. He is also a Silver Star recipient as a result of service during Mogadishu ('Black Hawk Down'). He began his skydiving career while a midshipman in 1972. After a recent academy visit, watching a TEAM formal parade demo, he offered these words

"The professionalism of everyone involved is very impressive. It proves again that USNAPT is much more than just another extra-curricular activity — it is an awesome training experience for planning, coordinating, executing with precision and responding to emergent challenges. Well done by all ..."



LtGen Jack Klimp, USMC (Ret.), '68. Gen. Klimp, among other duties, was the Director of the Joint Operations Center, U.S. Central Command during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Other duties included CO of Marine Corps Recruiting Depot at Parris Island, SC. He facilitated midshipman skydiving while serving as an instructor at USNA, shepherding neophytes to the Pelicanland drop zone on the Eastern Shore. He has been an active supporter of the TEAM since its Charter Group, precursor to the TEAM, was formed in 2008. In response to viewing a video of a recent TEAM formal parade demo, he offered this remark, one of many accolades over the years *"Amazing stuff!! They are great."*



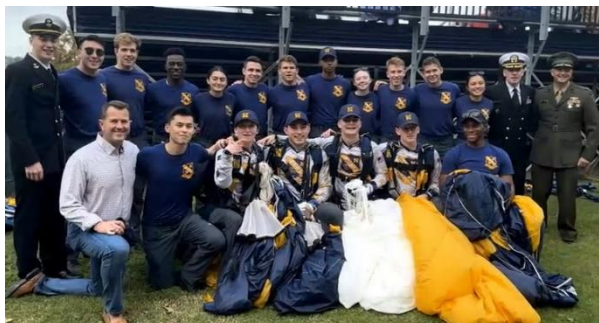
2021 USNAPT at Lake Elsinore USPA Collegiates Competition:

Standing; l to r – **RDML Robb Chadwick**, 3/C Nick Froude, Mike Schultz, 1/C Dave Petrovich, 3/C Gavin Kim, 1/C Mitch Jorgensen, 2/C Brian Flaherty, 3/C Eric Lim, CAPT Donnie Kennedy, 2/C Ryan Grafman, Chris Schrier; Kneeling: MAJ-R, Mike Davidson, USA, 3/C Ambria Pipho, 2/C Kevin Borman, 2/C Meg Welch, 3/C Jackee Gwynn, 3/C Aron Sobers, 2/C Vince Tenebro, 1/C Brittany Holden-Rhodes, CAPT-R Bill Boniface.

RDML Robb Chadwick, USN (Ret.), '91. RDML Chadwick began his skydiving career while serving as USNA Commandant. He eventually reached advanced license status, reflecting his freefall and canopy skills, and also fostered and approved the USNAPT status as an academy ECA, and acquiring the TEAM loft. Robb had a distinguished career period as a destroyer commander, winning the U.S. Navy's James B. Stockdale Leadership Award. A cogent analysis of USNAPT effectiveness in leadership development is found in his words, posted on a plaque in the TEAM loft

"... The Parachute Team provides more relevant lessons for future military service (and life in general) than probably any other activity on the Yard."

Considering the quality of these laudatory comments from such eminent USNA graduates begs the question why the USNA has no subsidy for the USNAPT. The USAFA and USMA subsidize their 'Wings of Blue' and 'Black Knights', respectively, because they recognize the activity from both leadership developmental and brigade representation points of view. Events have revealed the USNAPT to be a magnificent adjunct to the primary mission of the USNA, which is military leadership development. Their performance at competition events is serving the broader acceptance of these young women and men as prime athletes. They actually exceed the general opinion of the varsity or intramural athlete in the fact that their athleticism exceeds the bounds of the definition: "A person trained in activity requiring strength, skill, stamina and speed."



Frank, kneeling left, with TEAM after parade demo 20OCT23

The USNAPT arena is much broader than the field or court, and the disciplinary demands upon their prowess is far in excess of the boundary lines of the typical game; ... not to mention the mental fortitude required to function in the aviation environment, under the duress of uncertain operating conditions, weather vagaries, topographical variations, unfamiliar aircraft, critical equipment maintenance, need for instantaneous assessment and correct reaction in performance, etc. These men and women are already demonstrating the qualities required for

leadership in other than the quiescent atmosphere of a peacetime military. 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.



Bill Boniface
"CAPT B"

It's the obvious recognition of these claims that have motivated so many individuals to respond so generously to CAPT-R Bill Boniface and CAPT-R Kirk Michael, both '72, in their exhortations and energies on behalf of fund-raising to support the TEAM. Bill had created an informal 'steering committee' to pursue this end. He has been serving the USNAPT since 2013 as the Alumni Rep., and Kirk responded a few years ago to assist in the fiscal effort. Together, they have canvassed the community of USNAPT supporters in pursuit of a budget to subsidize assembly of the TEAM, equipping with first-class parachute gear, group travel, aircraft access and populating the loft with up-to-date training facilities, as well as financing training assistance plus demo and competition expenses.



Kirk Michael

Also assisting has been former Marine Gib Armstrong, '91, who has been assiduous in answering the call for whatever help he can provide the TEAM..

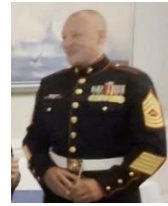
Gib Armstrong



Matt Cecala

The result has been very satisfactory, with the recent addition of a full-time professional Coach, who will come on board in February. Bill has accumulated over \$300,000 for a 3-year tenure for Matt Cecala, including TEAM operating expenses to the present date. Much more is needed for continuing operations, most of which currently emerges from the meager pockets of the midshipmen jumpers themselves. Matt is a 2015 graduate of USNA and a former member of the USNAPT. He went on to become a SEAL, and eventually the OIC of the U.S. Navy's Leap Frogs, their skydiving demonstration team. He possesses Instructor credentials for mentoring and certifying TEAM members in license advancement, ... and the FAA Rigger rating which will allow scrutiny of equipment handling and maintenance. He will separate from active duty to assume the new position at the academy. This development will provide a much

needed enhancement to the training regimen for TEAM members; most certainly provide improvement in performance precision, safety techniques, and training discipline; all attributes of a superior unit. His expertise will be invaluable in perfecting performance and establishing credentials for the ultimate aim of USNAPT performance at NMCM Stadium athletic events, long absent. Matt, as the new Coach, will also be assuming the role soon being vacated by Master Gunnery Sergeant Nickolas Mitchell, USMC, the current Enlisted O'Rep. Nick has been effective by way of tutelage of TEAM members in organization and operational communications, a seminal requirement for effective teamwork, especially in the military. He is one jump away from achieving a USPA A license.



Nick Mitchell



Mike Davidson

Current Head Coach Mike Davidson, MAJ-R, USA, will continue as a TEAM volunteer and as the primary demonstration and practice demo pilot, a post he has held since 2008. There aren't enough words to display the value of Mike's USNAPT stewardship over the years. His navigation of TEAM tribulations, influence with other agencies as a former XO of the U.S. Army's Golden Knights, FAA interfacing, mentoring of TEAM members in military JM techniques, encouragement of graduates in their future pursuits, and a myriad of other beneficial qualities are dominant attributes in leadership development. His provision of a reliable aircraft and pilot for practice jumping at Blake Field, Hospital Point, and Worden Field, as well as parade demos and rugby games has been the anchor service for the USNAPT image on the Yard. He also flies the TEAM for public demos and air shows. Few appreciate the burden this requires, to privately have an airworthy aircraft, plus pilot, available on a regular basis; a unit which is familiar with the flight requirements of the FAA, communicating and coordinating with the academy and the jumpers.

Mike has also been influential in enlisting the training assistance of his son, Matt, for TEAM preparation in competition in Formation Skydiving. Matt is also a former Golden Knight, and a member of the current world champion 8-way team, GKXP8, fresh from their gold medal performance in Voss, Norway. ... Mike is also a former Team Leader of the United States Parachute Team. Much is owed to Mike.

An interesting moment of dialogue in **"Top Gun: Maverick"** is when the main character, Pete Mitchell is asked to describe himself. He replies, "I'm a Naval Aviator". Most certainly that description perennially describes Frank Weisser, now, but who was actually a fledgling quasi-naval aviator while a skydiver as a midshipman. He transitioned, just as so many others, from nervous student to superior performer. The 32 members of the current USNAPT are also, in that sense, quasi-naval aviators, operating in the aviation environment. Some will actually become Naval and Marine Corps aviators, some will opt for submarines, another device which operates in a 3-dimensional fluid environment, some will become Surface Warfare Operators, some SEALs. All demand exceptional performance for success. In any event, there is a cohesive element binding all of these disciplines: superior leadership - as a result of superior performance under duress. The USNAPT fills this demanding requirement. They are exceptional !!



*Frank Weisser
Naval Aviator*

This brings us to the taking place and proving their question of continuing USNAPT machinery is evolving nicely, which currently led by CDR Jason Duff, plus MAJ Jeff Ludwig, USMC, and CAPT Geneva Giaimo, USAF, Asst. Ofcr. Reps.



CDR Duff



MAJ Ludwig



CAPT Giaimo

current quandary. Major steps are worth. However, there is the maintenance subsidy. The includes TEAM administration, USN, the Officer Representative,

They have replaced the invaluable assistance of CAPT-R Donnie Kennedy, USN, the former Ofcr. Rep. who, as academy Director of Operations was instrumental in opening up the USNAPT activity agenda to widening operations, through M.O. approval and permission to jump onto the Yard, including parades. Donnie is now Executive Director of Events and Facilities for the Alumni Association and Foundation. He is still a full-time supporter of the TEAM.



Donnie Kennedy

Not unnoticed also is the support of Jeff Webb, '95, President and CEO of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association & Foundation, a former Navy SEAL. Jeff spent five years in Naval Special Warfare. He served as a SEAL Platoon Commander as well as a Task Unit Assistant at SEAL Team Eight. He deployed twice aboard EISENHOWER in those roles and operated in Europe and the Middle East.



Jeff Webb

From this point, though, the entreaty endures, to go forth to the supporters of the USNAPT, and, further, to an effort to enlist new support to intensify the fundraising struggle needed to subsidize operational activities on a continuing basis. This discussion has been a thumbnail description of the TEAM's recent evolution, but the past is past and the future is yet upon us. And so, please join the endeavor to maintain, and improve, the image and quality of this valuable organization of future leaders. **YOU** are important !! Please consider adding to these funding petitions:

USNAPT Program Maintenance Subsidy: www.usna.com/give/parachute-team

2023 Collegiates Fund: <https://gofund.me/77de695e>

Stay abreast of USNAPT Activities:

<https://www.facebook.com/usnasportparachuteteamalumni>

<https://usnaskydiving.org/HOME.aspx>

<https://supportusnaskydiving.com/>



*CAPT B, MAJ Ludwig,
CDR Duff, Frank Weisser*



*Matt Thompson, Frank Weisser, and Brian Fairweather
celebrate the Naval Academy return from the summer.*

*Frank as midshipman skydiver, 1998
Photo from SEP '98 Drop Zone Operator*



*What makes it all worthwhile:
Family.*



USNAPT 6-way Speed Star competition USPA
2022 Collegiates, Lake Elsinore, CA.

[\(see video\)](#)



Posing with CAPT B, l to r: CAPT Ken Levens, USMC,
USNA Class of '18, former USNAPT Captain,
RDML Robb Chadwick, USN (Ret.),
Chris Schrier, Team Supporter

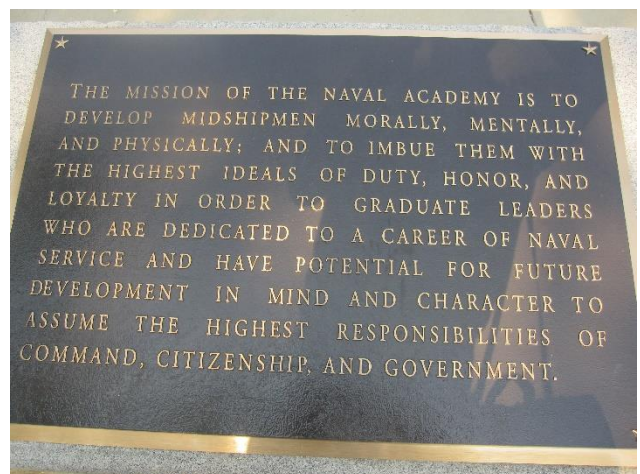


2022 COLLEGIATES CONTINGENT, Eloy, AZ -- Standing, l to r: Matt Davidson, Event Coach; LT Matt Cecala, USN; 2/C Eric Lim, Gavin Kim, Aron Sobers; 3/C Tom Sneed, JP Anhalt, Caleb Sheyda, Brett Dumais, Manolis Tsavaris; 1/C Matt Newton; 3/C Chris Kehr, 4/C Conner Mollberg, Henry Borthwick, Myles Hall, Ethan Clark, Chris Paris, Brody Boggs. Kneeling, l to r: 2/C Ambria Pipho, Nate Basford, Nick Froude; 1/C Ryan Grafman, Vince Tenebro, Jason Weiss, Brian Flaherty (Team Capt.), Megan Welsh; 3/C Mary Root, Jordyn Urrea; 4/C Grace Parker, Reagan Mar, Julian Saldana, Kobby Boateng; Bill Boniface, CAPT, USN (Ret.), USNAPT Alumni Rep.

Missing: MSGT Nick Mitchell, USMC



TEAM 5-way in new equipment, contributed
by various USNA graduation classes.



Bronze Plaque on USNA Yard