

WHEN IS FAILURE SUCCESS?

by Mike Schultz



Midn 1/C Tyler Hayes

It's when all your training and all your preparation have you at your designated post for performance of an objective, and then the performance is cancelled. ... Why, you say? Because in this instance, the cancellation proved as much about maturity, preparation, and safety as the performance would have proved about competence and skill.

On Friday, Oct. 5th, the USNAPT was scheduled to jump into Navy Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis. They were coordinating with the U. S. Navy Leap Frogs (LF), who were practicing for a demonstration jump the next day into the Navy/Air Force football game. The exercise was part of an ongoing process to qualify Midshipmen for making stadium demos, as well as on-Yard demos in support of Naval Academy recruitment, similar to the programs at USAFA in Colorado Springs and USMA in West Point, NY. [USNA Webpage](#) This occasion would allow the Mids to gain the valuable experience of observing the preparation and performance techniques of the LF. Also on site was Tom Falzone, USMA's parachute team coach, who has worked with previous Mids jumping into Michie Stadium at West Point.

The last NMCM stadium demo jump by Mids was in 2015 at the Army/Navy lacrosse game, but the ultimate objective is to appear at Navy football games. Preliminary evolution has been accomplished through jumps into the Rugby stadium for games, on the other side of the Severn River. That venue allows C license holders to perform, but the NMCMMS requires the PRO-R rating. The PRO-R rating refers to the restricted PRO rating, allowing Mids to exercise PRO privileges at home Academy events. Currently 1/C Tyler Hayes and Michal Bojsza (a Polish Army transfer student) are so qualified, with another 1/C and two 2/C in range for qualification, plus the USNAPT Officer Representative, LT Rob Roy.

Originally, the Mids were scheduled to jump with the Leap Frogs, using the Navy's Grumman C-2 COD (Carrier Onboard Delivery), but a ruling from above determined that Midshipmen who had not received military freefall wings were not eligible to jump this aircraft. Significantly, they were allowed to jump the Air National Guard's C-130 at an Air Show demo in Quonset Point, RI last spring. However, after this ruling, Tyler had to arrange with Mike Davidson, Maj. USA-R, the team's Head Coach, to use his Cessna 182, complete with last minute changes gratefully approved by Mike Bevan, of FAA's Baltimore FSDO, who allowed alteration of the



The Grumman C-2 Greyhound (COD) is a twin-engine, high-wing cargo aircraft, designed to carry supplies, mail, and passengers to and from aircraft carriers of the United States Navy. Its primary mission is carrier onboard delivery. The aircraft provides critical logistics support to carrier strike groups.

7711 form, to accommodate the two aircraft for the performance; a nice ATC dipsy doodle which was much appreciated. Mike D. would fly, with assistance from 2/C Lauren Modica, who is progressing nicely as the team's pilot, and who also performs as the team training officer. Lauren is also experienced as a USNAPT competition member; most recently at last April's ISAM ([Inter-Service Academy Meet](#)), held at West Point, and the [USPA Collegiate Nationals](#) in Eloy last New Year. She is also working on her PRO rating with Mike Davidson.

This entire process began by coordination with LT Matt Cecala (SEAL), the Leap



Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium; jumpers'-eye view – capacity 34,000, attendance record 38,792, set on October 7, 2017 as Navy defeated Air Force 48 – 45.

Frogs' OIC. Matt is a USNA graduate, Class of '14, and a former member of the USNAPT. The exercise was designed to give the USNAPT further experience in public performance at Academy venues, and was an excursion into the panorama of actions necessary to bring recognition of Team expertise to the attention of the administration.

The leadership and intricate involvement

required to interface with the various agencies necessary for the event, not to mention the dedication to training in the aviation arena, where safety is so dependent upon skill, leadership, and concentration, is a feature of the Team which is of interest to the Academy, and the public.

Interaction between the Leap Frogs and the USNAPT began on Thurs. evening, Oct. 3rd, when the LF appeared at 6 p.m. to meet with the USNAPT contingent who would participate with the LF in practicing for the stadium jump. At that time, the nine-man contingent of the LF met on the playing field at NMCMS with Tyler & Michal, the prospective Academy jumpers, plus Tom Falzone, and ground crew of 1/C Matt Bender, with 2/C Justin Rosas and Bethany Greene. Matt & Bethany are working on their PRO ratings. Justin is the USNAPT Ground Crew Officer.

The entire group conferred under the south end goal post, surveying the topography of the stadium and laying out an aerial entry strategy based upon supposed wind conditions. From there, the group proceeded to journey along the outer edge of the playing field, until the



Empty Stadium; ground level view

entire circumference of the landing area, and all pertinent landmarks had been noted and discussed, as related to a safe vertical entry, respectful of the spectators. Of course, the ultimate objective was to land on the 50-yard line, or close to it. This objective was not so critical to the LF because of their aerial program, but the objective of the USNAPT is to bring the U.S. flag into the center. ... Satisfied with the venue familiarity,

Matt Cecala later regaled the entire group at Buddy's Crabs & Ribs in the City Dock area of downtown.

The next day dawned bright, but with a hint of heavy winds for events scheduled for 1600 hrs., so further conferencing was necessary. The COD waited in Norfolk, but Mike Davidson's Cessna 182 had arrived at Bay Bridge Airport.

When 1100 hrs. came around, everyone was assembled at the USNA Paraloft to discuss synchrony, safety, and the ever-present scrutiny of those parties responsible for the USNAPT comportment. It was a given that the LF had their stuff in order, but the Mids & company were a separate entity. Many eyes were focused on evaluating the skill and intelligence of the USNAPT. ... It seemed as though mother nature was providing the exam chamber within which the answers would be demonstrated. At this time, Mike Davidson was coordinating with the LF schedule, becoming familiar with their program, planning the jump procedure for the Mids. 2/C Jackson South was orienting the LF with the paraloft, while ENS Simeon Brewster, a recent graduate of the USNAPT stood by for counseling. Simeon, along with Ken Levens held the USPA PRO-R rating while at the Academy. They also had participated in a joint demo session with the USMAPT, under Coach Falzone's direction, into West Point's Michie stadium, the previous year; so additional supervision and scrutiny were on hand to advise the Mids this day. ... It's here that weather uncertainty first began to insert itself into affairs. ([see loft conference](#))



SEAL Matt Cecala presents Leap Frogs plaque to USNAPT Captain Tyler Hayes

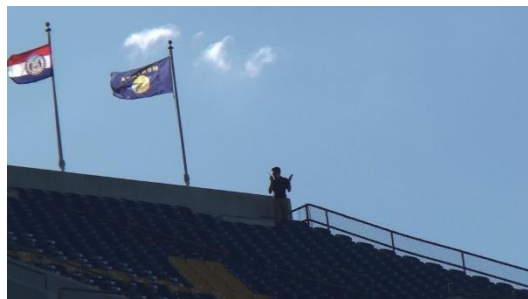
Along about lunchtime, some decisions had to be made; the winds forecast was on the high side. An antsy COD crew wanted to know if they should depart Norfolk for Andrews Air Force Base. Being a conservative safety aficionado, Matty C refused to guarantee the aircraft crew commander that they could jump. Within an hour, the COD was cancelled due to uncertainty. It was quite a haul and an expensive commitment for the Grumman to make when there was a good chance it would be for naught.

Navy's budgeting attitude.
No waste!

However, all other resources were in place, on site, ready to activate. There was still about three hours before practice event time. Effectively the Leap Frogs were on a stand-down. Their practice jump was not critical for showtime, which was at the football game the next day, when conditions looked ideal. The USNAPT kept all components at the ready, since

there was a possibility conditions would improve; and, in fact, it looked like they might. Regardless, this interlude was still an operative drill for the Mids and their Team. They had gleaned considerable expertise from the LF up to this point. There was no reason they could not proceed, being now divested from a concern for coordination.

As the scheduled hour approached, Mike Davidson, Lauren Modica, Tyler Hayes, Michal Bojsza, and Tom Falzone motored across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to the airport, ready to load the 182, along with streamers, smoke, a brigade flag and a U.S. flag. It was programmed that Tom would lead the other two jumpers into the stadium, if the situation was 'go'.



*1/C Matt Bender, wind watching high in the stands;
radio in one hand, anemometer in the other*

The gathering on the stadium playing field included Justin Rosas, ground crew officer, Bethany Greene, and Matt Cecala, who extricated himself from his crew to lend experienced eyes on the potential practice drama. Matt Bender was positioned at a high point in the stands with an anemometer to keep track of wind gusts. It was agreed that any gusts over 13 mph could halt activities, due to potential turbulence inside the stadium. ... On hand as observers were ENS Simeon Brewster, Mike Bevan of the local FAA FSDO office, a regional USPA S&TA (Safety & Training Adviser), and CAPT (USN-R) Bill Boniface, the USNAPT Alumni Representative, who was accompanied by his wife, Susan, an RN looking out for Bill. He had recent surgery on his shoulder, with his right arm in a sling.

Justin and Bethany had functioning radios, to keep track of Matt Bender's readings, and to communicate with the aircraft, which was now in the air. Bethany also had an anemometer, taking frequent wind readings on the field. The sky was clear; wind velocity would be the major criterion.



Cessna Jump Aircraft

The practice jump plan, in light of the winds uncertainty, was to depart Bay Bridge airport in the 182, establish communication with ATC, enter the demo airspace and throw the streamers. The behavior of the streamers was an important indicator, considering the marginal conditions; borderline at best. They're launched from the aircraft over the target center at 2,500 ft.. with their drift being an indication of the strength of the upper winds. This, combined with the surface readings from the ground crew, provides a more precise analysis of what the jumpers may expect after leaving the aircraft; teamwork in a critical manner. The only, at least the safest landing location was on the playing field. ([see video](#))

All eyes in the stadium were pointed aloft as the 182 droned into earshot. An interesting moment intervened as a monster jet, at jump altitude, blasted its way through

toward BWI. With the jump door open, it must have loomed gargantuan to the 182 occupants. ATC and jump aircraft were in synch as the ground quit shaking and the 182 turned on streamer run. The ground crew had laid out the target and raised a USNAPT banner blade for wind direction at the target.

“Streamers out!!” This announcement was followed by a ground crew radio comment indicating current wind reading. The following two minutes was abuzz with observing the streamers behavior combined with Bender’s readings and Bethany’s readings. Justin was on point to ensure all parties were informed up-to-the-moment. The ground crew counseled with the A/C to estimate the distance downwind from the target that the streamers landed.



Streamers

For a few more minutes the aircraft circled overhead, having climbed to 5,000 ft., the assigned exit altitude; ready for jump run. During this interlude, there was a consensus taken on the ground: ‘go’ or ‘no go’ recommendation to the jumpers. Four parties set forth their opinion: the Ground Crew Officer (based upon analysis from his crew, the S&TA, Simeon, and Matt Cecala, all having spent a half hour on the stadium floor, observing. It was unanimous, ‘No Go’. ... An enclosed stadium was not the occasion for challenging marginal conditions, especially on the first attempt at stadium jumping for two of the skydivers.

The team and their advisors had gone to the brink, exercising every phase of the program and applying good judgment at each demarcation of the process. Mother nature dictates, while we mere mortals decipher her intentions. The USNAPT should wait for another day to practice.

This recommendation was forwarded to the aircraft, the occupants of which had the final say on whether anyone would exit. Mike D. passed the ground decision to his passengers, and with a disappointed sigh, they all nodded assent. ... Tom could probably have overruled and exited the aircraft, his experience level afforded him the wisdom to know that this stadium and conditions was much easier than many for which he had performed. However, in the spirit of team, he helped Mike close the aircraft door and they began their return journey to Bay Bridge.

On the ground, Matt Cecala enjoined a debrief of all present, offering his observations of the sequence of events; a definite learning experience. Mike Bevan added this comment, “I think you all made the right decision!” Thus, this failure, ironically, was considered a success. We look forward to future visits by the U. S. Navy Leap Frogs, true generous professionals and totally great guys. Matt Cecala indicated a desire to establish a more frequent association with the USNAPT, which, of course, would be highly valued. We learn from our failures, they’re the building blocks of success; ... under the right leadership !!

EPILOG: The next day, the Leap Frogs inherited the learned wisdom, with an implicit added imprimatur from the weather gods. They made a spectacular aerial entry for the capacity crowd while the Navy football team toiled at ground level, winning the game over Air Force in last minute heroics, scoring the go-ahead touchdown with 23 seconds remaining.
([See Leap Frogs performance](#))

*Leap Frogs'
'drag stack'
with flag.*

