I began entering my skydives in my first log book in 1962, which coincidentally, more or less coincided with the infancy of the United States Army Parachute Team. In fact, several members of the early Team were my skydiving instructors, and one, Dick Fortenberry, flew the airplane from which I made my first sport parachute jump over Sicily Drop Zone at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The day of that jump, it had only been a few years since the inception of the team that we now call, "The Golden Knights," and little did I realize then, that I was witnessing skydiving history. In the ensuing years, as I continued to skydive, especially during first 20 years of the Team's history, its members were seen as the rock stars of the skydiving world.

I think that most jumpers today have little idea of what prompted the Team's formation and how tenuous was the ground on which they stood for the first few years. The U.S. Army Parachute Team today, and then, was and is the crystallization of one man's vision. This is the story of how and why it all came about.

The Birth of the U.S. Army Golden Knights

In the beginning…

…around six-thirty the morning of October the eighth, 1959, twenty-eight year old Specialist Fourth Class Loy Brydon, of Everett, Washington, assigned to Headquarters Battery, XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery, was probably waiting outside the mess hall standing in line with his fellow soldiers to get breakfast. At the mess hall's entrance, stood a Non-Commissioned Officer, an NCO, more than likely a Buck Sergeant, an E-5, and he was operating a small, chrome-plated hand-clicker used to count heads as the troops showed their ration cards.

The weather that morning at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was gray and overcast; the visibility was six-and-half miles. It did not rain the night before as forecast, and it was cool at 56 degrees. It wouldn't get a great deal warmer that day. Brydon, a squared-away soldier and volunteer, had been in the U.S. Army for seven years by that time and most likely looked down to check to see that his field jacket was properly buttoned before looking at the Corcoran jump boots on his feet that airborne soldiers are known to wear as he inspected the gleaming, mirror-like spit shine.

Inside the warm and steamy mess hall, cooks dressed in crisp, white uniforms, spatulas at the ready, stood behind a large, hot griddle, and impassively asked the troops as they moved through the queue, how they wanted their eggs cooked? Most said "scrambled" as that's how they would turn out anyway. Sliding their compartmented, metal trays along the serving line after their eggs were unceremoniously plopped alongside of, or on top of, three limp strips of barely warm, thin bacon, the troops would pause momentarily and study the scattered heap of pancakes cooked an hour earlier which lay within a stainless steel warming pan and they would consider if one or two of those and a ladle of the runny, warm maple syrup might taste good that morning?

As they drew their coffee from a spigot on a ten-gallon urn, the troops would peruse the dining room looking for a buddy to sit with or perhaps just an empty chair. As they did, the dining room orderlies, the DRO's, who had been rudely awakened at four-thirty that morning to start their day as Kitchen Police (K.P.'s) - other member's of Brydon's unit serving their assigned turn as mess hall help - wiped tables clean and straightened whatever condiments that sat in the middle of each of the thirty dining tables set within the cavernous, wooden World War Two era mess hall.

Accompanying breakfast, as it did at every meal, there was a mild but persistent chorus of murmuring chatter from the one hundred or so troops sitting in the mess hall eating their breakfast. Meanwhile, back in the kitchen, the Mess Sergeant yelled at the Pots-and-Pan Man - another soldier on K.P., the poor soul assigned to wash the hundreds of dirty trays, cups, tumblers, buckets of silverware and the ten-fold pots and pans created by feeding 250 men three times a day - instructing him to hurry the hell up. They were running out of trays and eating utensils. As rivulets of sweat ran down his flushed cheeks, the Pots-and-Pan Man probably muttered something obscene under his breath as he shoved yet another rack of dishes into the clattering dishwasher, its clouds of steam roiling upwards to rest in thin, wispy clouds along the ceiling of the small utility room.

Meanwhile, it appears from historical records, up on Main Post at Fort Bragg, in a small cubicle at Headquarters-and-Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, the grand, three-story brick building on Macomb Street, a clerk-typist, probably having just finished his own breakfast, might have been sitting at his desk inserting carbons between sheets of paper and was beginning to roll that into his typewriter. Having done so, he might have begun to type the following words - recorded here verbatim from a copy of the original General Order transcribed from the short-hand notes written on his steno pad. Whether or not that's the way it actually happened, the reality is that the following orders were, in fact, written and issued:

"Extract SO 260 Hq XVIII Abn Corps & Ft. Bragg NC, 8 Oct 59 Cont

44. FNE orgn inde this sta placed on SD W/Post Sp Svc this sta as members of the STRAC Sport Prcht Team during pd 12 Oct 59 to approx 12 Jul 60 unless sooner rescinded. UCMR proper org. No tvl involved."

The next lines he would type would list and temporarily re-assign for special duty seven individuals - enlisted, non-commissioned soldiers (along with two officers not shown on those orders) - from different Army units to the newly formed STRAC Sport Parachuting Team. The STRAC Team would be the genesis of what would later be established as a regular Army unit, initially a unit of the XVIII Airborne Corps, and later renamed the United States Army Parachute Team, and soon to be colloquially known as the "Golden Knights."

Those soldiers were, Sergeant First Class Harry E. Arter, Specialist Fourth Class Henry L. Arender, Master Sergeant John T. Hollis, Sergeant Danny R. Byard, Specialist Five Richard T. Fortenberry, Sergeant First Class Raymond L. Love and Specialist Fourth Class Loy Brydon.

That General Order was signed,

"FOR THE COMMANDER, J.W. Stilwell, JR, Brigadier General GS, Chief of Staff."

(Between April and May of 1960, Sergeant Jim Arender, Staff Sergeant Wilfred "Squeak" Charette III, Sergeant First Class Harold Lewis and Private First Class James Pearson would be added to the STRAC Team. Pearson would soon attend Officer's Candidate School and return as the U.S.A.P.T. Operations Officer

in April of 1961.)

There was so much irony in that General Order, it could have been sliced with a knife. The first cut would have been that the new team was only given *ten months* of life as per the orders. The second bit was that the orders stated that no travel was involved. Yes, 'no travel involved' meant no post-to-post transfers as far as those orders were concerned. But still, the estimated time of existence for the new team and the words, 'no travel' are laughable now over sixty years and millions of miles traveled by the team since then.

Meanwhile, in a much grander office, higher up on another floor of that same building on Macomb Street, most likely a large office with a grand mahogany desk, carpets on the floor and windows that over-looked Main Post Fort Bragg, Brigadier General J.W. Stilwell, Jr., the XVIII Airborne Corps Deputy Commanding General and Chief of Staff, was perhaps standing looking pensively out one of those windows, his feet about twelve inches apart, rocking slightly heel-to-toe, his hands clasped behind his back in a relaxed position of parade rest as he surveyed the manicured grounds beyond, and he might have been pondering the future of the men he had just pulled from their units while handing them the opportunity to make military and parachuting history.

Brigadier General

Joseph W. Stilwell, Jr.

Stilwell probably didn't think of it *exactly* this way then, but what he had just done, was to become the first producer of the longest-running recruiting effort and display of the U.S. Army's capability and potential for those considering enlisting in the military in the U.S. Army's history. The team was destined to become a road show of aerial prowess only rivaled by the Department of Defense's two other aerial demonstration teams, the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds and the U.S. Navy Blue Angels. His new team would begin small with only himself as the man with the authority and the resources to give it life. Unintentionally, perhaps, the production he created that day, with those orders, would grow from the original nine men - two officers and seven enlisted men - to a much grander and larger production with a cast of now over 120 people serving a multiplicity of vital roles to perform its mission.

Members of the eventual cast would come to encompass not just the demonstration parachutists themselves, but a command and headquarters section, a competition section, a tandem section and an aviation section with dedicated aircraft and crew. To support all those aspects of the team, its roster of personnel would eventually include both civilians and military to handle public affairs, to perform parachute rigging, provide aviation support, and to give supply and logistics support.

When those eleven men climbing to altitude today over the fairgrounds finally do make their appearance and stand, waving and smiling, taking their bows, before the day's admiring crowds, what the public doesn't see is the intricate and well-oiled work of the team's Commanding Officer and his full staff to make the arrangements and to provide the logistical support it takes to fly those eleven men around the country and the worlds and put on a show like today's.

But back to 1959…

- What Stillwell Must Have Understood –

As General Stilwell stood looking out that window, perhaps hearing the slapping of boot soles on the cobbled pavement beyond – the sound of a company of soldiers on their early morning run – maybe seeing their guidon pennant fluttering at the top of its wooden staff held by a soldier leading a four man wide column of 200 men running double-time in the sliding steps known as the "Airborne Shuffle," perhaps hearing the sing-song, rhythmic cadence of a Non-Commissioned Officer running alongside the column, and his lyrics being answered by his troopers in a unison shout of "Airborne! All the way, everyday!" – he would have known that the years between the end of the Korean War in the spring of 1953 and the present day 1959 were stressful ones for the U.S. Army.

At the time, the Army was forced to adjust to the budget and manpower

cuts that typify the end of a major war, while at the same time, maintaining an unprecedented level of preparedness due to the ongoing tensions between the United States and the two leaders of the Communist bloc – the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Moreover, the proliferation of atomic weapons, first used in 1945, had raised questions about the nature of future wars and the role that ground forces would play. The Army was struggling with an identity crisis, trying to prove to itself, and to others, that it remained relevant in the nuclear age.

Also, Stilwell surely must have seen the conflict in Vietnam coming.

After the First Indochina War, the conflict that had resulted in the military defeat of the French, a 1954 Geneva meeting had partitioned Vietnam into North and South. The French withdrawal had left behind it a Communist insurgency. During this period, North Vietnam recovered from the wounds of war, rebuilt nationally, and began to prepare for an anticipated war with the south. In South Vietnam, Ngô Đình Diệm consolidated power and encouraged anti-communism. This period was marked by ongoing U.S. support of varying natures to South Vietnam. Stilwell may have sensed that the U.S. Army stood on the brink of one of its most tumultuous wars.

And he would have known that the Army would need more manpower. But the retention of the draft, even as the Army shrunk dramatically in size, reflected an unpleasant reality – America's youth did not find the service an attractive career choice. And recruiting volunteers during periods of economic prosperity is always challenging. The boom years of the 1950's were no exception. For the bright and the ambitious, the civilian sector offered opportunities that the Army could not compete with at the time. Moreover, for those who chose to serve, the Navy and the Air Force seemed preferable. Service with either of those branches would avoid the unpleasant prospect of having to slog through the mud as an infantryman.

In light of that, Stilwell must have given thought to what the Navy and the Air Force were doing to enhance their own enlistments. The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds had been officially activated on June 1, 1953, and the Blue Angels aerial demonstration team had been formed in 1946 with both serving the purposes of enhancing their branch's image and to assist in recruiting. During that time, the U.S. Army was doing little beyond thumb-tacking recruiting posters to post office bulletin boards or placing sidewalk signs outside of recruiter's offices to entice new recruits. The Thunderbirds and Blue Angels were flashy and the kind of electrifying excitement that young men sought.

The military, of course, offered many positive benefits beyond a chance to serve one's country. Thanks to the passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944 and the Veterans Adjustment Act of 1952, millions of World War II and Korean War veterans received generous post-service education, training, and other

benefits. One could retire after twenty years, and during their service, soldiers received free family medical care, generous post exchange and commissary privileges, and, for some, training that might be useful in civilian life.

Unfortunately, in the growing economy of the 1950's, military pay did not keep pace with salaries in the civilian sector. Congress helped rectify the situation some in 1958 when it authorized proficiency pay and increased salaries and retirement benefits, but recruiting remained an uphill battle.

The Army especially had trouble recruiting and retaining the most desirable individuals. In the enlisted ranks, these were the men who scored highest on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. But because of the shortfall, the Army tended to assign the best and brightest recruits to elite units such as the airborne or to technical and staff assignments, leaving the rest of the Army starved for talent and manpower.

A similar practice occurred within the Non-Commissioned Officer's ranks. Shortages of quality NCO's led to the practice of assigning some of the weakest NCO's to basic training companies, a practice that made a bad first impression on new recruits and thus further sullied the institution's public image. The negative impression recruits had of their instructors did not improve much after they left the training centers. Surveys of men recently discharged from the Army at the time were finding that many considered Regular Army Non-Commissioned Officers to be "low level" men who couldn't meet the competition outside the Army and who were merely marking time until their retirement.

Given the Army's difficulty in attracting sufficient talent, the draft, even the relatively light one of the late 1950's and early 1960's, played an important role. Not only did the draft offer a chance to tap into a more promising talent pool than was generally willing to enlist, but its existence spurred some desirable individuals to enlist outright in the hopes of being able to influence the choice of their assignment, something draftees did not have an opportunity to do.

The draft had the further benefit of encouraging other quality individuals to join the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), an alternative choice which sheltered individuals from the possibility of being drafted upon graduation, and from which they would have an opportunity to pick a non-combat arms assignment.

Consequently, the Army rejected any suggestion that the draft be eliminated. One way the Army sought to attract candidates was to burnish its image as best it could among the American public. The military had learned about the power of film during World War II, and in the postwar years, it attempted to exploit this media to get out its message to the nation at large. It provided Hollywood with support in the making of such films as *To Hell and*

Back, the 1955 movie that told the story of Audie L. Murphy, one of the most highly decorated soldiers of World War II. It also took its case directly to the people with weekly radio broadcasts of *The Army Hour* and a television series called *The Big Picture* that showed the contemporary Army in a favorable light. The Army fully exploited its overseas mission, too, with recruiting materials promising that recruits would get to "…see all the fabulous sights of Europe." When this was not enough, the service resorted to more traditional methods of appealing to young men. During the 1950's and early 1960's, attractive actresses lent their charms to Army recruiting drives, including, ironically, Jane Fonda, who was "Miss Army Recruiting" for 1962. Of course, her reputation among Army and military veterans due to her interaction with North Vietnam in later years would suffer greatly.

So, it follows that Stilwell must have wanted to help change that dynamic and assist recruiting. His thinking then must have played some role in the formation of the early team. A demonstration parachute team *could* become another tool in the Army's recruiting kitbag. Additionally, Stilwell, a West Point graduate, knew from experience that good NCO's ran the Army at its core. Even from the beginning of the team, as it remains today, NCO's oversee the day-to-day operational aspects of the team while its commissioned leaders, with the exception of the aviation section, perform mostly administrative tasks.

To begin to change the public perception of Non-Commissioned Officers in the Army ranks, during the initial selection of members of the STRAC team, it *appears* that Stilwell had selected men like Master Sergeant John T. Hollis of the 82nd Airborne Division to help dispel the negative impressions the previously mentioned studies determined. In 1961, Hollis would become the newly authorized United States Army Parachute Team's First Sergeant, and later he would achieve the rank of Command Sergeant Major. His career would include foreign service during which he served tours of duty in Japan, Korea, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam. Along the way, CSM Hollis would earn three Bronze Star Medals, the Air Medal and two Army Commendation Medals.

With the appointment of Hollis, the top enlisted man of the team, Stilwell, the producer, had, *in effect*, his *director* of the show, and his *performers*, the exhibition parachutists. The front office of the show, its administration, would be commanded by Captain James Perry.

Today, in nearly every encounter with the public, as it has been since the first days of the team, whether it be an aerial demonstration, or greeting crowds and signing autographs while promoting the Army, or attending functions where dignitaries are gathered, it's the NCO's of the Team who are the face of the team and the U.S. Army. Today, the men and women who make the jumps and greet the crowds, soldiers like Logan Maples, are all Non-Commissioned Officers.

But, beyond putting the best face on the Army, Stilwell had a major

purpose in mind for his new team as he stood at the window thinking of those first seven members of the newly formed STRAC Sport Parachuting Team. Possibly, he may have seen this as a route to yet another star on his epaulets, or there was something *else* that motivated him; *more* likely the latter. It would quickly become obvious that he wanted to beat the Russians.

It helps to understand that J.W. Stilwell, Jr. was the son of General Joseph Warren "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, the much ballyhooed leader who served in the China-Burma-India Theater during World War II. Stilwell, Sr. was an American popular hero of the war for having led a column of his men in a grueling march walking out of Burma while being pursued by Imperial Japanese Armed Forces. Considered "prickly" and known for his ""no-nonsense" demeanor, after the collapse of the Allied defenses in Burma, which cut China off from all land and sea supply routes, Stilwell declined an airlift offer from General Chennault, and he led his staff of 117 out of Burma across 140 miles of mountainous, snake-infested and rugged jungle into Assam, India, on foot. They marched at what his men called the "Stilwell Stride" of 105 paces per minute. Stilwell, Jr. was made of the same stuff as his illustrious father.

So, it figures that the aforementioned 'major purpose' was also more than likely the larger part of Stilwell's motivation to create the STRAC Sport Parachuting Team. He was not about to let the U.S. Army be outdone. But the challenge to beat the Russians more than likely began higher in the sky than most skydives are made.

The 1957 Russian launch and earth orbit of Sputnik – a watermelon-sized satellite that did little more than circle the planet in low orbit and emit a weak beeping tone every few seconds – had commanded its place in the public consciousness – and it was a symbol of something more like a ominous boast. It was probably that symbolism that irked Stilwell more than anything else. One can only think, as many in the military must have, that what the launch of Sputnik really represented, in reality, was a frustrating challenge. And a real threat.

Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower was President of the United States from 1953 to 1961. Among other things of a military nature, the most basic of Eisenhower's assumptions was that the U.S. had nuclear superiority, and that had taken a serious blow in October and November of 1957 when the Soviet Union successfully had placed not one but *two* Sputnik satellites into earth orbit, the second satellite was even bigger in mass that the first one. But those launches had a more dire connotation: The same ballistic missiles that had launched the satellites could be fitted with atomic warheads and targeted at the United States! Americans who had heretofore counted themselves as safe from an inferior Soviet bomber force were now faced the threat of seemingly unstoppable intercontinental ballistic missiles with atomic warheads.

Although President Eisenhower continued to express his belief that

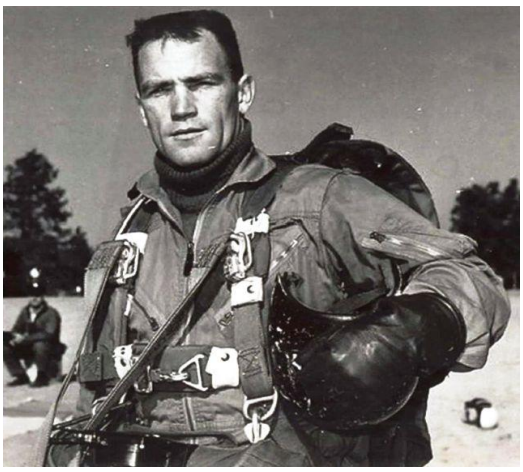
mutual nuclear deterrence or MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) would create conditions under which a conventional conflict might be waged in Europe *without* escalating to general atomic war, acknowledged that the matter required further study. In other words, he wasn't sure of his own assumptions. Further, the Russians were winning the Cold War in other ways.

Probably unnoticed by Ike were little known contests being held every few years in Europe – the World Parachuting Championships. These competitions had been dominated by the Russians and other Soviet bloc countries since the competition's beginning years prior. As an avid skydiver, it had to have been very much on Stilwell's mind. It is entirely conceivable that Stilwell wanted to "kill" two birds with one stone, and he may have believed – rightly so – that if he could muster some of the U.S. Army's best parachuting talent, he might take the Russians down a notch or two and in the process bring glory to, and enhance the image of the U.S. Army. Until the team was formed, the military had not been a significant presence at the World Parachuting Championships since the beginning of the competitions.

The First World Parachuting Championships were held in Yugoslavia in 1951. Both the men's World Champion, Pierre Lard, and the women's World Champion, Monique Laroche, were French. In 1954, Fred Mason, a U.S. Army Sergeant, was the first and only American to compete in the Second World Championships at St. Yan, France. Ivan Fetchichin of the Soviet Union would be crowned World Champion that year. Since the U.S. Army had not yet sanctioned free-fall parachuting activities, Mason received no recognition.

- Free-Fall Parachuting –

The same Loy Brydon who waited in the chow line that morning was well known to Stilwell.



Sergeant Loy Brydon on Sicily Drop Zone, 1962

Stilwell had recently been introduced to free-fall parachuting, a different

take on the act of airborne soldiers jumping out of airplanes. On his chest, Stilwell wore the silver jump wings of the airborne qualified soldier signifying that, at the basic level, he had been trained to be parachuted from a relatively low altitude, one soldier within a mass of soldiers, into a hostile environment to engage an enemy.

In 1958, Army regulations had been written that allowed those members of the Army who wished to participate in the new activity of "free-fall parachuting," or "sport" parachuting, later to be called "skydiving," the approval to do so as a sanctioned pastime. The early Golden Knights would come to resent the terms "sport parachuting" and "skydiving" as the Knights felt they weren't jumping for "sport," they were jumping as part of an important "mission." For the Knights, the preferred term was "Precision Free-Fall Parachutists."

Nevertheless, military sport parachute clubs were beginning to be formed at many Army installations. Fort Bragg had three. They were the Special Warfare Club or later, the Green Beret Club, the XVIII Airborne Corp Club and the 82nd Airborne Division Club. For years to come, those clubs and others like the ones at Fort Campbell and other Army installations worldwide would be the fertile grounds for the selection and addition of new U.S.A.P.T. members.

In the year prior to the formation of the STRAC Sport Parachuting Team, Stilwell had been introduced to what a young officer under his command, James M. Perry, had described as "delayed-fall jumping." In short order, with the assistance of Perry and others, Stilwell had begun to "skydive" and was building a resume' of sport jumps. He became hooked on the activity. Before his death in 1966, he would sit on the Board of Directors of the Parachute Club of America and would be a strong influence across all of sport parachuting nationally. He would ultimately hold a 'D' license, meaning that he had performed at least 200 free-fall jumps.

Perry along with Brydon and Byard, who had already been involved in the sport, participating in their free time off-base, traveled to Vancouver, Canada, in April of 1958 to try out for the U.S. Team, but they lost out to Lewis Sanborn, Nathan Pond, Richard Tompkins and James Pearson. Pearson, who would soon join the U.S.A.P.T. as its Operations Officer, was a member of the Seattle Skydivers at the time. However, Brydon was already making inroads as a winning competitive sport parachutist. He would later become one of skydiving's innovators creating canopy modifications to early parachutes improving their drive and accuracy. Even as he ate breakfast the morning of October the 8th, 1959, he had already been awarded The Mason Memorial Trophy for competing in and placing second at the Adriatic Cup Parachuting Competition at Tivat, Yugoslavia, the previous summer.

As Stilwell became familiar with these men through Perry, it is conceivable that a two-pronged plan began to form in his mind, and perhaps a

way to wage his own personal contest against the Communists. It would be a contest in an arena that he could control, unlike the one in space that he could not.

During the study of Stilwell through written documents and interviews with those who knew him, it became obvious that Stilwell had formulated a plan that would allow him to bring together a team of parachutists with two distinct aims in mind. The first was to create a full-time team of talented, Army parachuting competitors by reassigning them from the units that required their daily presence and putting them in a situation that would allow them the resources and the time to train for competition. The second was to justify the competitive role by also giving the Army an aerial demonstration team that would enhance the image of the service and perform recruiting assistance. As the producer, he was creating a show with multiple acts and story lines.

At first, because the STRAC Sport Parachuting Team comprised of the original seven men was not an "official" U.S. Army unit, the "special duty" orders had specified that its existence would be considered "temporary duty." Stilwell knew he needed time to demonstrate to the Army the STRAC team's viability as a regular unit, so that was the reason that the team was originally given ten months to operate as per the orders. It actually took only 8 months for the Army to approve the orders to create the unit known as The United States Army Parachute Team and to give it an official status. The bottom line was that if he was to field a team of competitors capable of beating the Russians, the team would need time to better hone their skills and they would need to justify their existence. Ergo, the team would act as ambassadors for the Army helping put the best face on the service and, hopefully, increasing recruitment.

It didn't take long for Stilwell's team of jumpers to begin to score the victories he sought and to create the worth the team needed to sustain itself

In fact, as a group, several of the original Knights even before getting orders to form the STRAC Team were already setting a precedent. This from the September-October 1959 issue of *Parachutist* magazine:

"A very successful meet was held over the Labor Day weekend, September 5th and 6th, 1959, at the Sport Parachuting Center in Orange, Massachusetts. The winners in the overall scoring for both events at Orange were: 1. Richard Fortenberry; 2. Loy Brydon; 3. Jacques lstel; 4. Danny Byard; 5. Harry Arter."

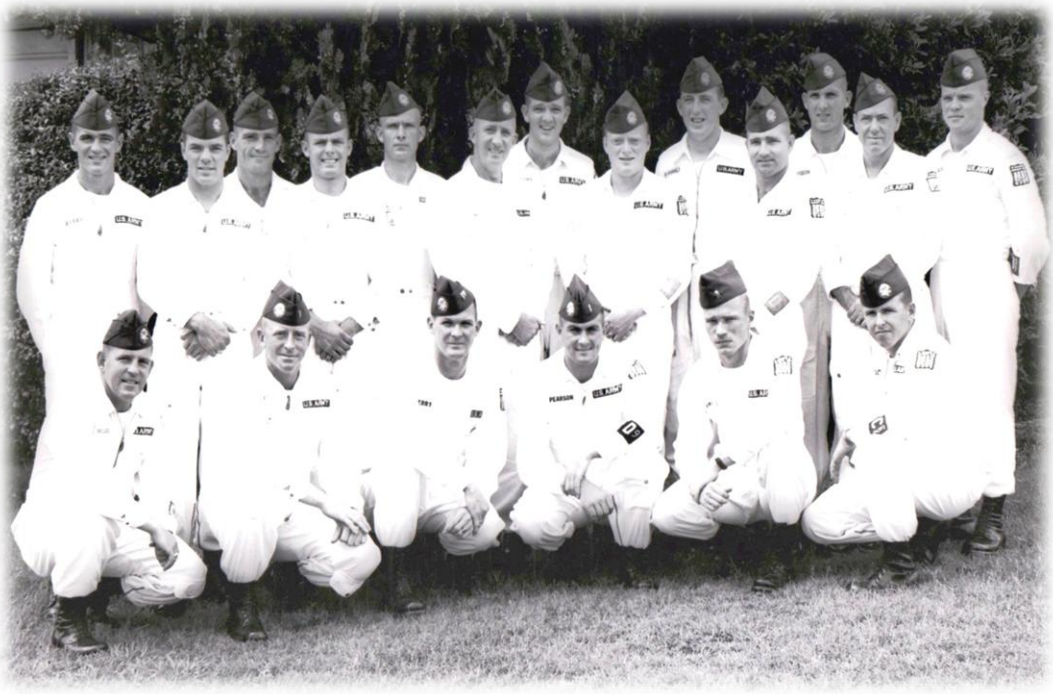
All but Istel were Stilwell's men.

But they would soon top that. At the U.S. Team Try-Outs held at Fort Bragg in 1960, of the 37 competitors vying for the team, the top seven finishers, and thereby the new U.S. Team that would compete in Bulgaria later that year were, in this order, Loy Brydon, Harry Arter, Jim Arender, Dick

Fortenberry, James Pearson, Danny Byard and Raymond Love – all U.S.A.P.T. members.

Then in May of 1960, the orders to activate the team as an official unit were issued. And suddenly, the newly formed U.S. Army Parachute Team was busy meeting its newly approved personnel strength, adding to and subtracting from their initial STRAC Team roster. In anticipation of those orders, invitations to join the team had been tentatively made, and some initial try-outs of prospective team members had been informally held. The consequences were that first official compliment of troops would be comprised of nineteen men.

The Original Nineteen of the U.S. Army Parachute Team



Not in order of the line-up pictured above, they were, Captain Jim Perry, Officer-in-Charge, Second Lieutenant Roy Martin, Executive Officer, Second Lieutenant James Pearson, Operations Officer, and Master Sergeant John Hollis, First Sergeant. The Parachutists were Sergeant First Class Gerald Bourquin, Sergeant First Class William Edge, Sergeant First Class Harold Lewis, Sergeant First Class Ralph Palmer, Sergeant Loy Brydon, Sergeant Danny Byard, Sergeant Wilfred Charette, Sergeant Bobby Letbetter, Sergeant Joe Norman, Sergeant Alfonso Solis, Specialist Fifth Class Richard Fortenberry, Private First Class Robert McDonnell, Private First Class Keith Jorgensen, Private First Class Lee Smith and Specialist Fourth Class Coy McDonald.