

U.S. Naval Academy Parachute Team

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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U.S. Naval Academy Parachute Team

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q1: How long has the USNA Parachute Team been in existence?

A: The “USNA Parachute Club” ECA was active from 1967-1983. It was restarted again as an ECA in 2008 as the “USNA Parachute Team” and has been highly active in competitions and demonstrations for the past 14 years.

Q2: How many jumps does the team conduct in a typical academic year?

A: In a typical academic year, the team will conduct roughly 2,000 jumps. During the COVID-19 restricted year, the team was unable to jump or train for a large part of the year, but in the final two months of academic year 2020-21, they were able to collectively make over 400 jumps, including currency and practice jumps onto the Yard and into the stadium.

Q3: What financial and/or material support does the team get from the Naval Academy?

A: As an ECA, the team currently receives no financial support from the school. The team is completely midshipman self-funded and gift-funded from alumni and others.

Q4: What is the primary reason to have a full-time coach for the team?

A: For the team to represent the Brigade and the school and effectively compete with other service academy and collegiate parachute teams, a HIGH DEGREE OF PROFICIENCY is vital. Proficiency, in turn, promotes ENHANCED SAFETY in operations – always a goal. As both other major service academies recognized long ago, cadets (in our case, midshipmen) need expert consistent coaching to be able to train and coach and help each other.

The Superintendent, Commandant and NAAA Athletic Director need to have complete confidence in the experience and skills of midshipman jumpers when they very publicly represent the school in this unique and demanding sport, and a coach is the key.

At West Point, the coach leads every demonstration jump – a model that Navy would emulate to match its success in not only proficiency, but in a safety record that’s the envy of virtually every collegiate parachute team today.

Q5: USAFA and West Point Parachute teams have been a ubiquitous fixture at Cadet Wing and Cadet Corps events and outside venues for decades. How are those teams different from Navy’s?

A: The USAFA and USMA Parachute Teams have for many years, after moving from ECA status in their earlier years, had professional coaches and NCO coaching staffs paid for through appropriated funds (paid under federal legislation in Air Force and Army budgets). Appropriated funding for the Navy team as an ECA is not currently under consideration.

Q6: Who has been instructing and training the midshipmen in sport parachuting up to this point?

Since the modern team's formation in 2008, a couple of highly skilled, volunteer expert parachutists (one a local long-time jumper and USA team leader and the other a former U.S. Army Parachute Team "Golden Knight" who lives and works in Delaware and occasionally serves as the team's jump pilot) have offered part-time volunteer coaching for the team whenever they could.

However, active participation from even this part-time help is winding down. The local volunteer is now 83 years old in his last year of service to the team; the second, out-of-area volunteer is 67 years old. This makes the need for a full-time coach more imperative than ever for program consistency and longevity.

Q7: Why can't the Navy team just use a parachuting expert on the Yard to act as its coach? Doesn't the USNA Executive Department or faculty have SEALs, EOD, Force Recon or other jump-qualified staff available to fill the coach role?

A: A very frequently asked question and a reasonable one. The simple answer is that there has never been anyone assigned to the Academy with enough significant sport parachuting experience to coach a team. Experienced sport jumpers and subject matter experts on sport parachuting regimens and disciplines are simply unavailable on the Yard. Military skills that involve freefall parachuting are based on combat jumping disciplines and are not the same as sport parachuting, which has evolved over the years into several disparate jump disciplines. This is why Air Force and West Point long ago moved to hiring expert sport parachuting professionals as full-time asset for their teams.

Even if there were such a qualified person on the Yard, repeated PCS transfers would disrupt the consistency and continuity of midshipman jump instruction and training. A consistent and continuous program is a key factor in both proficiency and safety, as the Air Force and Army programs have demonstrated time and again.

Q8: Is the USNA Parachute Team hoping to build on the models of the Air Force Academy or West Point teams?

A: The Navy team looks to West Point's parachute team as its model, given its program size, more modest budget, and primary focus on demonstration events representing the Corps of Cadets. Air Force's program is funded far beyond what Navy would ever be able to emulate – with their own aircraft and active-duty pilots, runway, travel, and a large program involving much of the Cadet Wing – and now even building their own wind tunnel on campus.

Q9: What would the cost be for a full-time Parachute Team coach at USNA?

A: Based on other service academy parachute team coach salaries, the cost would be roughly \$80,000/year. This involves attracting an experienced professional to the high-cost Annapolis area; having him/her daily instruct and train midshipmen of various experience and skill levels; jump with the midshipmen on selected weekdays

and most weekends; coordinate with the administration and the FAA regularly; and lead midshipman team jumpers into demonstration events at various venues.

He would also serve as the subject matter expert (SME) on midshipman sport parachuting activities for the Superintendent and Commandant of Midshipmen.

Q10: How would the full-time coach position continue after the initial three-year evaluation period this current appeal is aimed at?

A: The Naval Academy Foundation requires three years' salary up front for the position as an evaluation period for the team coach position. Follow-on salary after that period envisions a class or classes willing to make the USNA Parachute Team annual salary a small part of their class' fundraising goal for their class campaigns.

In this regard, the chance for alumni and Navy supporters and fans to regularly observe highly visible parachute team activities under expert coaching over the initial three-year period and the modest annual salary can be expected to be prime motivators in this consideration by classes.

It's a given that Navy fans love to see parachute demonstrations at stadium and other events, as evidenced by parachute jump performances by outside jumpers at Navy football home games and many other events. What the current lineup lacks is highlighting MIDSHPMAN capabilities and talents to alumni and the general public, rather than "rented" civilian parachutists or outside teams. The strength of the Air Force and Army parachuting programs is their continual highlighting of their cadets to the school and the public in a popular and unique way.

Q11: Does the Academy administration support the team's effort to hire a full-time coach?

A: The former Superintendent approved our raising of funds for a full-time coach for the team in 2018 and the USNA Foundation opened a dedicated fund for the purpose.

The fund ("USNA Parachute Team Coach Fund #65490001") today is nearing the half-way point toward the initial three-year goal, with roughly \$134,000 still to be raised to make a full-time team coach a reality.

However, it should be noted that solicitations for this fund are solicitations by alumni and other private supporters and are not solicitations from the U.S. Naval Academy.

Q12: How can a person (or class or alumni chapter) contribute to the USNA Parachute Team Coach Fund?

See the separate attachment entitled "How to Contribute" attached to this e-mail for specifics. In short, you may mail a contribution or make online one-time donations or pledges spread out over a three-year period. The latter can be done on-line using the USNA Alumni Association and Foundation website: <https://www.usna.com/give> or you can call the Foundation Rep, Dan Quattrini '81 (952) 210-5533 to do a quick walkthrough of the steps.

Any potential donor may also contact CAPT (Ret.) Bill Boniface '72, the team's Alumni Representative and Team Support Coordinator, at (301) 335-2585 or boniface72@gmail.com for any questions or further guidance.

Q13: Does an alumnus/alumna's contributions to the team's Coach Fund receive credit in their overall alumni giving to the USNA Foundation?

A: Yes. Contributions to the USNA Parachute Team Coach Fund count toward the USNA Foundation's individual giving record (and are tax deductible). Because individual class campaigns have specific targets, contributions to the team may not necessarily be counted toward your class campaign, however, so you should check with the class' Foundation rep in those cases.

Q14: If a contributor works for a company that has corporate matching programs for employee charitable contributions, is it possible to have his/her donation matched at the Foundation?

A: Yes. Corporate matches are always welcome! Check with the specific company to see what their internal policies are to make sure this kind of contribution to the USNA Foundation is matchable under their rules.

Q15: Is there an Officer Representative from the staff for the team?

A: Yes, the team's Officer Rep is currently a Navy Captain and aviator who works for the Superintendent and has one more year onboard. He is a skilled leader but is not an experienced sport jumper.

He has an Assistant O Rep, a young Marine captain, who helps with leadership duties but is also not a sport jumper. Both have made a jump or two with the team but have only a modicum of expertise or experience in the actual jump area. Their jobs are primarily to direct and lead the midshipman team leadership, interface with the administration, and ensure team operations are conducted in a professional and safe manner – but not to teach or coach actual parachuting skills.

Q16: Does the team have local instruction and training facilities available to them?

A: Yes. The team today has a world-class instruction, training and equipment packing and storage facility right on the Yard behind Halligan Hall. Since April 2019, with the generous financial help of alumni and other supporters, the former 3,500 square foot former Printing Office has been transformed into a facility where every aspect of sport parachuting is taught and drilled well before and midshipman boards a jump aircraft.

Thanks to generous alumni and other supporters' help, the mids also today have an excellent array of new, state-of-the art parachuting equipment that includes all the latest safety features.

Q17: Does the team take part in any competitions with other service academies or colleges?

A: Yes! The team competes in the annual National Collegiate Skydiving Championships each year over the Christmas Break, which are typically conducted in Florida and Arizona – but are this year in southern California.

Additionally, Navy competes with Air Force and West Point every spring in the Inter-Service Academy Meet (ISAM), usually on The Plain at West Point.

While midshipmen have had some success in competing with our sister service academies, Air Force and Army's full-time coached teams DOMINATE the competitions to this point.

Q18: Where do the midshipmen typically conduct their jump operations?

A: Midshipmen practice jump onto the Yard whenever feasible, but their predominant drop zones are at civilian skydiving centers in Ridgely, Maryland; Williamstown, New Jersey; and Suffolk, Virginia. It's worth noting that when they jump at these civilian drop zones, midshipmen pay for every jump out of their own pockets (a standard jump from 10,000 feet costs a discounted \$22...)

Q19: Where does the team get aircraft support for midshipman jump activities?

A: Midshipmen primarily jump from civilian drop zone aircraft at their own expense. They occasionally can jump from the Cessna of their part-time volunteer pilot and during competitions, they are able to jump from West Point military aircraft or USAFA's military assets.

The team continues to explore military aircraft (predominantly National Guard or Reserve) as future jump platform possibilities, but that has always been an uphill climb due to frequently changing regulations and highly restrictive limits on flight hour availability.

Q20: Does the team jump into air shows or community events?

Yes, the team has been able to represent the school at several public venues. They've jumped into the Rhode Island Air Show, headlined alongside the Blue Angels, with over 100,000 spectators on hand; the Wings & Wheels Air Shows at both Georgetown, Delaware and Salisbury, Maryland in front of thousands of spectators; and have jumped into both Michie Stadium at West Point and their own stadium for Army-Navy Lacrosse matches, as well as on the Naval Support Activity Annapolis' fields for Navy rugby home events.

Q21: Do the midshipmen conduct jump demonstrations into the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium?

A: While it's the dream of every midshipman jumper to make a jump into a home football game at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial stadium, the last and only such demonstration was conducted at the Navy-Virginia football game in 1979! Today, NAAA hires a professional civilian jumper to do most demonstrations into home games, and occasionally contracts the U.S. Navy Parachute team "Leap Frogs."

Again, while these demonstrations are always crowd-pleasers, neither demonstration highlights MIDSHIPMAN skills and capabilities, as cadets do at every home football game at Air Force and Army.

Under the current circumstances, until Navy has a full-time coach to train and lead them in, mids can be expected to make only practice jumps into the stadium.