



The United States Army Parachute Team Golden Knights Celebrate 60 Years Media Release 2019



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BY Donna Dixon

For over sixty years members of the U. S. Army Parachute Team have been marking the milestones of achievement and an evolution of excellence serving as “Ambassadors of the Army.” The Golden Knights portray the image of being the most formidable parachuting competitors and demonstrators in the world today.

If you mention the name “Golden Knights” to the American Public in any of the fifty states, most likely what comes to mind is a phenomenal demonstration they watched in past years at an air show or sporting event. If you mention the “Golden Knights” to sport parachutist, they will think of the competitors they jumped against or heard about in parachute meets across the country or abroad.

TEAM HISTORY

The Strategic Army Command Parachute Team, or STRAC, was formed in 1959 by nineteen “Airborne” Soldiers from various military units. Brigadier General Joseph Stilwell Jr. was responsible for gathering these Soldiers with the original intent to compete during the Cold War effort. This new U.S. All-Army team swept the international competition circuit, in what was then the Soviet dominated sport of skydiving. Later that year, on November 1st, this newly formed team performed their first demonstration in Danville, Virginia.

On April 7, 1961, the Department of Defense officially activated the STRAC team as the United States Army Parachute Team (USAPT.) The team is one of three DoD sanctioned aerial demonstration teams, along with the Thunderbirds and Blue Angels.

1961 the team had a meeting to select a team nick name and they chose “the Golden Knights.” On October 15, 1962 the team confirmed the nickname the “Golden Knights” on the competition field of battle. Golden, signifying the gold medals the team had won; Knights, proving that they were world champions and had “conquered the skies.”



Black Team flies the American Flag to the target at Marine Corp Air Station, Iwakuni, Japan.

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TEAM MISSION

As the Army Ambassador, the United States Army Parachute Team conducts worldwide parachute demonstrations, competitions and a tandem orientation program to connect the U.S. Army with the American public and enhance the Army's recruiting efforts, while simultaneously providing technical expertise in support of military free fall programs.

The mission of today's Army are still the same as it was 244 years ago when the Army was established; Prevent, Shape and Win against our adversaries.

By request, the team will test and evaluate new parachuting equipment and techniques that assist in improving operations and safety for the military free fall teams.

The Team has increased its support of the operational force for military freefall Soldiers with personalized coaching and assistance in maintaining and improving military freefall infiltration skills and techniques, while preparing for deployment and rotating teams in support of the Special Operations Headquarters.



Members of the Black Demonstration Team break off from a Baton Pass over Homestead ARB, Florida.

THE TEAM

Serving under the leadership of the United States Army Recruiting Command and Marketing Engagement Brigade as the "Official Ambassadors of the Army," the USAPT annually reaches a third of our nation by performing spectacular live parachute demonstrations for the American public, manifesting the "Band of Excellence" as displayed by all U.S. Army Soldiers around the world. The single main ingredient contributing to the success of the Army Parachute Team is without doubt "teamwork."

The Golden Knights have performed more than 21,000 shows in all 50 states and 48 countries, reaching more than 20,000 people per show. Through demonstrations and public speaking with the Army's target audience, at air shows, schools, sporting events and hospitals the team is able to direct potential applicants to the on-site Army Recruiters.

The hundred and two men and women who make up the Golden Knights are separated into eight sections - The Black and Gold demonstration teams, a tandem team, two competition teams, a select training team, an aviation detachment and the headquarters section.



The Team lines up for introduction at the end of the airshow performance.

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THE DEMONSTRATION TEAMS

Millions of people throughout the world see the Golden Knights each year, at over 70 demonstration sites across the nation and abroad. These Army Ambassadors perform precision free fall demonstrations to connect the US Army with people in towns who rarely, if ever, see a Soldier. These men and women, of the Black and Gold demonstration teams, tell their Army story to all they meet to increase the propensity to join the all volunteer force. Preparation for the demonstration itself begins hours prior to the performance. The Aviation Detachment (Team Six) prepares the aircraft for takeoff, smoke is rigged, flags packed, weather checked and media briefs are given to the media riders by the designated safety demonstrator. The C-31A Friendship Fokker or the C147A Dash 8 takes off 30-40 minutes prior to time on target. The flight pattern is established, black and gold wind drift indicators are dropped and they climb to altitude.



Members of the Demonstration Team fly the American flag and night pyrotechnics into Pittsburgh Steelers Stadium, Heinz Field.

THE HEADQUARTERS SECTION

The Headquarters section enables the demonstrators and competitors the flexibility to concentrate on putting on phenomenal shows and bringing home gold medals. Headquarters elements control the logistics and support for the team. These duties include show scheduling, military schools, waivers, personnel records, evaluations, leave and travel orders, uniforms, equipment contracts, maintenance, parachute maintenance, repair, reserve parachute repacks and inspections, Media Relations/Public Affairs, local and national media, Office of Chief of Public Affairs, media coordination, graphic illustrations, photography, lithoes, video shooting, editing and production and budget.



Members of the Army Parachute Team display a Pyrotechnic side by side formation during winter training.

The demonstration teams have two different shows that can be conducted from an altitude of 12,500 feet, (mass and full.) The mass show entails one jumper exiting the aircraft and flying our national colors. This Soldier will then narrate the show for the audience, while the rest of the team exits the aircraft maneuvering together to form one large mass formation.

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Here the Team proudly displays their newest member of the fleet, the C-47a (DHC-8 315).

The full show consists of four separate maneuvers, which demonstrate the maneuverability of the human body while falling at speeds in excess of 120mph, which can be altered due to weather or other concerns, once again displaying amazing talent and flexibility of the team.



SFC Jim Hackett takes MG Frank Muth for a Tandem over Laurinburg, North Carolina..

The baton pass, entails two jumpers exiting the aircraft separately and flying together to exchange a 14 inch mahogany baton. The cutaway maneuver is designed to show what would occur if the jumper's parachute was to malfunction. The diamond track demonstrates the incredible amount of lateral movement a jumper can obtain in free fall. The diamond formation has four jumpers exiting the aircraft and maneuvering their bodies closer together until they are mere inches apart, forming a diamond shape in the sky.

Several members of the Golden Knights are trained as free-fall photographers. Wearing specially designed helmets rigged with both digital video and still cameras, they skillfully fly their bodies around various team formations, documenting the events for publicity and training purposes.

TANDEM SECTION

This show season forges on celebrating the twentieth year of The USAPT's Tandem Orientation Program. (TOP's) Army Strong Experience, has been an astronomical success helping people understand the training and professionalism of Soldiers, while enhancing the team image. It brings the American public closer to the sport of parachuting and the opportunity to get to know actual Soldiers in the United States Army.

The Tandem Team consists of Soldiers selected from a core of highly qualified parachutists from within the unit. The Tandem Team provides the Army message with the unique experience of tandem parachuting Soldiers and Centers of Influence who have never jumped before. These COI's put their lives directly in the hands of our Soldiers who demonstrate the positive aspects of teamwork, courage, discipline, professionalism and excellence resident within the operational force. Tandem opportunities result in a positive Army image through the news media and to the American public.



SFC Jennifer Espinosa gears up CSM Tabitha Gavia for her Tandem at Laurinburg, North Carolina.

KNIGHTS 5

This once-in-a-lifetime experience demonstrates the great capability, 'first hand' and reiterates to our young citizens the many opportunities available to them. Those who have jumped with the tandem team include: the 41st President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush, Geraldo Rivera, Chuck Norris, Bill Murray, the cast members of the TV show "The Unit," Dennis Haysbert and Robert Patrick and New Orleans Saints, quarterback Drew Brees to name a few.



Members of the Eight Way Competition Team perform winter training over Laurinburg, North Carolina.

COMPETITION TEAMS

The Golden Knights competition teams have continually been given the highest accolades in parachuting competitions, respect not based on only their reputation, but also on a continuing record of accomplishments.

The Free fall formation skydiving consist of a specified number of jumpers linking together to form geometrical formations with in a set time limit. These competition teams consist of an Eight-way team and a Four-way team. Vertical Formation Skydiving (VFS) is free fall formation skydiving with a twist. The competitions have the challenge of flying head down while competing.

The competition teams sport an impressive record of 490 national champions, 130 world champions, 50 national and ten world team titles.

The Golden Knights 8-Way Competition Team is the current World Champions and have been bestowed the honor as National Champions for eight consecutive years.

The Golden Knights have won an impressive record of over 460 national championships and over 100 world championships. Over the past 60 years, the United States Army Parachute Team has broken approximately 350 World Records, to include military records held in the Council International du Sports Militaire (CISM).

These achievements have made them not only the most successful DoD sports team, but also the most successful parachute team in the world.

The Golden Knights Competition Team participates in several categories; accuracy, free-fall formation, canopy piloting, canopy relative work, free flying and vertical relative work. Not only are the Golden Knights superb competitors, they are true sportsmen.



Members of the Vertical Formation Skydiving Team, (VFS), train over Homestead ARB, Florida.



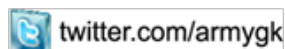
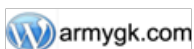
AVIATION

The Aviation Section, known as “Team Six,” is the backbone of the parachute team. The Aviators consist of both Soldiers and civilian former Golden Knight pilots who ensure all teams arrive safely to their destinations and enable the jumpers to use the aircraft as a jump platform, for demonstrations, tandems and competitions.

The Aviation Detachment have flown more than 114,050 hours under the most demanding weather and air show air traffic conditions. The pilots and crew members accomplish the team mission using a fleet of five aircraft: a Fokker C-31A “Troopships” (also called the “Friendship,”) a C147A (Dash 8) and three DHC-6-400 Twin Otters, otherwise known within the Army as the UV-18, Viking Twin Otters.

The aviation detachment and headquarters section work endlessly in support of the demonstration, tandem and competition teams. They ensure the numerous missions of the Golden Knights are accomplished with ease.

The men and women who wear the distinctive black and gold uniform of the United States Army Parachute Team represent the “Band of Excellence” and the “Warrior Ethos” continually demonstrated by all U.S. Army Soldiers World-wide and represent the greatest free-fall team in the world. Traveling across the nation and around the world, serving as Ambassadors of the U.S. Army, the Golden Knights are demonstrating not just precision parachuting, but all the skills in the Army from Airborne Ranger to X-Ray Technician.



These professional Soldiers proudly serve the country with pride, skill and enthusiasm.

The Army has more than 150 job specialties for active duty Soldiers For more information about the many opportunities available in today's Army visit www.goarmy.com.

For information about the Golden Knights, including media support, individual team member biographies, pictures, show schedules, and more go to www.armygk.com.



As current World Champions in 8 Way Formation Skydiving, our team proudly displays the Ottley Sword. It has been passed 23 times since 1975 and possessed 18 times by the United States, 3 times by France and twice by Russia.

USAPT

Gold Demonstration Team 2019



SFC Joe Abeln
Missouri



SSG Blake Gaynor
Texas



SFC Mike Koch
Wisconsin



SSG Dan Gerlach
Florida



SFC Jacob Kerkow
Minnesota



SGT Jason Bauder
Colorado



SGT Adam Munoz
Nevada



SSG Ryan Reis
Washington



SSG Mitchell Stockenberg
Virginia



SSG Houston Creech
North Carolina



SSG Michael Connors
California