



# The United States Army Parachute Team Golden Knights Media Release 2012



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BY Donna Dixon

For over fifty-three 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’s only official Demonstration team. 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 someone today in any of the fifty states, and most likely what comes to mind is a phenomenal demonstration they watched last year at an air show or sporting event. But if you mention it to a sport parachutist, they will most probably 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.

In 1961, the Department of Defense announced on June 15th, that the STRAC team would become the United States Army Parachute Team. The team is one of three authorized DoD aerial demonstration teams, along with the Thunderbirds and Blue Angels.

On October 15, 1962 the team earned 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 the fact that the Team had “conquered the skies.”



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## TEAM MISSION

Missions of today's Army are still the same as 237 years ago when the Army was established to serve our nation. The Team's mission is to conduct parachute demonstrations, tandem jumps and to compete in national and international competitions in support of the United States Army Accessions Command's tactical, operational and strategic missions; creating a greater propensity to serve in the U.S. Army, while connecting America with America's Army. On order, the team will test and evaluate new parachuting equipment and techniques that assist in improving operations and safety for the military freefall 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 to Afghanistan in support of the Special Operations Headquarters.



## THE TEAM

As the "Official Ambassadors of the Army," the Team 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 16,000 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 eighty-nine men and women who make up the Golden Knights are separated into eight sections - two demonstration teams, a tandem team, three competition teams, an aviation detachment and a headquarters section.



*Gold Demonstration Team Leader SFC JD Berentis leads a 2-stack formation in front of the Statue Of Liberty.*

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## THE DEMONSTRATION TEAMS



Millions of people throughout the world see the Golden Knights each year, at over 200 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, who perform with the Black and Gold demonstration teams, help to tell their Army story to all they meet, and to increase the propensity to join the all volunteer force. Preparation for the demonstration itself begins hours prior to the performance. “Team six” prepares the aircraft for takeoff, smoke is rigged, flags packed, weather checked and media briefs are giving to the media riders by the designated safety demonstrator. The C-31A Friendship Fokker 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.

## THE HEADQUARTERS SECTION

The Headquarters mission enables the demonstrators and competitors to concentrate on putting on phenomenal shows and bringing home the gold. Headquarters elements Command and control logistics and personal support for the team. These duties include Operations that handles show scheduling, schools, waivers; Administration takes care of the Soldiers personnel records, evaluations, leave and travel orders; Finance handles budget issues to assure the mission is completed; Supply provides all uniforms, equipment contracts and maintenance; Riggers provide parachute maintenance, repair, reserve parachute repacks and inspections; and Media Relations/Public Affairs handles all local and National Media, Office of Chief of Public Affairs, Graphic Illustrations, photography, lithoes, video shooting, editing and production.



The demonstration teams perform two different shows from an altitude of 12,500 feet. 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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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.

The first maneuver, 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 final maneuver of the full show is the diamond formation. Four jumpers exit the aircraft and constantly maneuver 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 twelfth year of The Army's Tandem Orientation Program. (TOP) has been an astronomical success helping people understand the training and professionalism of our Soldiers while enhancing the team image by bringing 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 unique experience of tandem parachuting Soldiers who have never jumped before and Centers of Influence that can help share the Army's message. 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.



This once-in-a-lifetime experience also 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.



## 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, two four-way teams and this year will feature a ladies four way competition team. Canopy Piloting Champion, SFC Greg Windmiller is the 2 time US National champion in canopy piloting in Speed, the current world record holder for speed and holds every record in the United States in Canopy piloting.

To date, competition teams have managed to virtually “walk away” with most of the top honors in sport parachuting events in which they have participated. The competition teams sport an impressive record of 460 national champions, 100 world champions, 32 national and ten world team titles.

## KNIGHTS 5

Over the past 52 years, the United States Army Parachute Team has broken 348 World Records, to include military records held in the COUNSEIL International du Sports Militaire (CISM).

In the last three years alone, the competition teams have earned 154 gold medals, 85 silver medals, and 48 bronze medals.

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; style, 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.

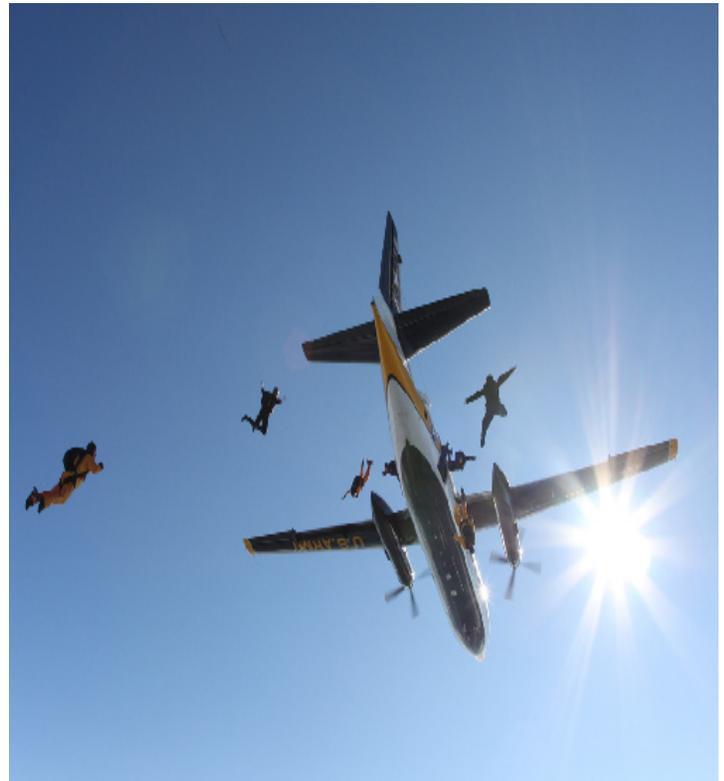


AVIATION

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 shows, tandems and competitions. The Aviation Detachment flew more than 111,050 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 four aircraft: two Fokker C-31A “Troopships” (also called the “Friendship”) and two UVA- 18

De Havilland 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.

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” that are 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](http://www.goarmy.com).

For information about the Golden Knights, including media support, individual team member biographies, pictures, show schedules, and more go to [www.armygoldenknights.com](http://www.armygoldenknights.com).



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