



Training History

Parachuting at the U.S. Air Force Academy began in 1964 when a group of ambitious cadets took to the skies. The activity, at the time, was off-limits to cadets. Knowing full well the consequences if caught participating, their involvements were nonetheless revealed through their own irrepressible success. That spring, Cadet First Class (senior) Jay Kelley and Cadet Third Class (sophomore) Pete Johnston paired and won a novice team accuracy event—the Academy's first gold medal in collegiate competition. Their achievements that day resulted in an invitational demonstration at the Pueblo Army Depot, after which the commander at Fort Carson sent a very nice letter to the Academy's superintendent, thanking him for allowing the fine young men of his skydiving team to participate".[citation needed] After a thorough investigation, the Commandant of Cadets, Brigadier General Robert W. Strong Jr. "had a dilemma on his hands. After all, balancing against the weight of these young men's sin was the positive publicity they had brought upon themselves and the Academy. However illegal their activities, they were on to something good".[citation needed]

Each year since then, more than 800 cadets, officers, and enlisted members, from both U.S. and foreign services, complete five free fall jumps and earn their parachutist badge and rating. The Air Force Academy offers the only jump program in the world authorized to allow students to perform unassisted free fall delays on their first jump without any prior jump experience.[4] Although parachutist wings are awarded, they are non-operational in any Department of Defense unit; to be in an airborne operational unit or



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A brief summary of the 49-year history of parachuting here at USAFA. It all started in the spring of 1962 when a band of bootleg jumpers made their first parachute jumps as cadets. Using condemned SERE rigs and local aviation pilots, these cadets made several jumps in the Colorado area. During that spring, a few cadets by the names of Arnoff, Davis, Kelley, McCurdy and Sijan – at their own risk and expense—made a number of demonstration and competition jumps to include our 1st collegiate-national appearance in Wisconsin winning a gold medal. They had no sanctioning from the Academy; truthfully, the Academy had no idea. When words of their jumping escapades got back to the superintendent, the Academy leadership was facing a dilemma—punish these outlaws or reward these collegiate competitors—needless to say, there were some rocky times those first two years, but after receiving a challenge from the Commandant of West Point to compete in a Para meet—club status resulted in May