



Issue 4  
Volume 31  
Nov 2023

# The Canopy

North Central Florida All Airborne Chapter

*Connecting sky  
soldiers, past  
and present.*



Photo by Spc. Vincent Levelev, 82nd Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade

## 2023 Best Combat Diver Competition

I continue with the second part of my coverage from the combat diver competition held during the end of September, **page 4**.

## From the chapter

New members attend the October meeting and the Belk charity sale, **page 10**.

## Airborne Unit updates

82nd Airborne Division jumps into JRTC, **page 11**. 101st Airborne Division trains on fast ropes and SPIES **page 13**.



### Army Base Renaming Cheat Sheet

Ft. Benning ⇒ Ft. Moore	Ft. Bragg ⇒ Ft. Liberty
Ft. Gordon ⇒ Ft. Eisenhower	Ft. A.P. Hill ⇒ Ft. Walker
Ft. Hood ⇒ Ft. Cavazos	Ft. Lee ⇒ Ft. Gregg-Adams
Ft. Pickett ⇒ Ft. Barfoot	Ft. Polk ⇒ Ft. Johnson
Ft. Rucker ⇒ Ft. Novosel	

## Directory & Chapter Calendar

Chapter Officers		
<b>Chairman</b>	Tony Alger	(719) 310-8951
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Jerry Brust	(405) 823-4483
<b>Treasurer</b>	Heath Davenport	(571) 641-9057
<b>Secretary</b>	Rich Troop	(610) 823-7505
<b>Sergeant at Arms</b>	Frank Dochniak	(352) 259-2441
<b>Service Officer</b>	Joyce Damon	(352) 208-4963
<b>Recruiting / Villages</b>	Tony Alger	(719) 310-8951
<b>Recruiting / Ocala</b>	Tig Blackman	(352) 591-4752
<b>Exec Committee</b>	Frank Dochniak	(352) 259-2441
<b>Canopy Editor</b>	Ron Dahlgren	(407) 577-1746

### Upcoming Events

Saturday, Nov 11 <sup>th</sup>	Veterans Day
Saturday, Nov 11 <sup>th</sup> , 1000 hrs	Program at The Villages Veteran's Memorial Park in Spanish Springs
Saturday, Nov 11 <sup>th</sup> , 1300 hrs	Chapter Meeting at VFW Post 8083
Monday, Nov 13 <sup>th</sup> , 1700 hrs	Golden Corral Feeding Veterans

### From The Editor

The airborne unit public affairs offices were extremely helpful for the content this month. You'll note the 11th Airborne Division update is missing - don't worry! They have a lot of content that will be ready for our December issue. The JRTC pictures were a real treat. I did two rotations down in the swamp during my time with the 504. Both times our jumps were canceled, so I've never experienced the drop zone, but I'll tell you one thing - you need to pack double the usual amount of socks and t-shirts. Water everywhere and frequent rains. My favorite part of JRTC was getting all the service & support troops involved. It was educational to see how the combat support hospital ties in, for instance. Have you spent time at JRTC? Maybe you were OPFOR? Share your stories with me at <ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com>.



Airborne All The Way!

*Ron Dahlgren*

Editor, The Canopy

<https://www.the-canopy.org>

## Chairman's Message

Thanksgiving is around the corner and then our Christmas Party on Dec 9, 12:30-3:00 p.m. Please mark your calendars. Lots to do. Your Executive Board is hard at work getting all the coordination and planning for the end of year event. Dan Marrin, my favorite (Leg) Infantry Lieutenant, has agreed to play for us again. Remember he does this for free because he likes supporting veterans organizations with his music. Please look for our Invitation and Meal Order form in the Canopy and download it, or webpage or at the next meeting on Nov 11. Please bring your money or check. I am well aware of our inflation dilemma and am trying to keep the price, like last year, in the acceptable range of \$15.00 each for members and spouses. Any additional guest will be \$20.00 each. At this point we'll need lots of help for decorations, place settings, little party favors and desserts. Any spouses out there that can help would be greatly appreciated. I'll be inviting the VFW Commander to our Christmas Party.



Our Oct meeting had 5 new faces and three new spouses show up. Only wish more of our members were there at the meeting. Two were All American members who transferred to us and the other three (18th Abn Corps, 101st Abn Div, 82nd Abn Div). Welcome to the Chapter.

Also the BELK Charity Drive is back in play! I was able to get a few hours of time to sell Belks Charity Tickets outside their store Sunday, Oct 15. A big thank you goes out to Rich Troop, Rich Becker, Heath Davenport, Ron Dahlgren and especially his son Grayson for helping sell tickets. I believe Grayson sold the most tickets, Airborne! Also supporting us was Galen Mitchell and Leo McInnis who relieved a couple of us there. All in all a great effort. I'll be sending Belks an 82nd Certificate of Appreciation for helping us get our donations.

Our November meeting requires us to hold elections for Officers for the coming year of 2024. I've not heard anything from members wanting to step up and volunteer to help run things in the Chapter. I've not heard any nominations either. I have asked a couple of members but have been turned down. Please call me if you think you can help. It's only a couple hours a month and I'd help you with your duties if needed. Please consider the challenge.

Finally, one of our troopers, Adrian Stocker, is getting a heart procedure on Oct 19. Before he joined us, he was a guest speaker at our Chapter meeting a year ago. Keep him in your prayers along with Lee Damon and Fran Dolan. Please attend the next meeting Nov 11. See you on the manifest.

*Tony Alger*, Chairman, North Central Florida All-Airborne Chapter

### *10 Most Recent Canopy Boosters - Thank you for your support!*

Galen Mitchell

Heath Davenport

Nick Harty

Darla & Jay Tatman

Howard Northrup

Jerry & Robby Brust

Frank Dochniak

Regis Rossa

Marianne & George Zablocki

Arthur Tate



## 2024 Best Combat Diver Competition

by Ron Dahlgren



Photo by 3rd POB (A) (D)

**Naval Air Station Key West, FL:** The Special Forces Underwater Operations Center (SFUWO) hosted the 2023 Best Combat Diver Competition from September 25th to September 27th. In October's issue of *The Canopy*, I covered my arrival and some of the events, concluding with day two's airborne operation and kayak race in Fleming DZ. We pick up the narrative around 1000 hrs on the second day, September 26th, when I'm given a chance to talk with the cadre of the SFUWO.

## Day Two, Interview with the Cadre

Back at the SFUWO admin building, I have the opportunity to speak with a cadre member about the competition and today's remaining events. This cadre member, using the pseudonym Rusty, runs the water infiltration part of the CDQC content and helped to design the events.

Rusty tells me they took the skeleton of the events used when 3rd Special Forces Group was running the competition and refined them while keeping the focus on CDQC tasks. He thinks the most challenging event for the teams will be the underwater navigation event later tonight. The divers will need to focus on terrain association, fin kick speed, and factoring in the effect of the current to find their targets. I ask him about the fin kick speed, comparing that to the pace count I learned when doing land navigation exercises. Rusty says it's very similar and individual to the diver. Divers have many opportunities to measure and refine their understanding of fin kick speed during the CQDC training.

We talk about the 10 events in the competition and Rusty points out that a lot of wargaming was done with the event design. The cadre talked through the events from several angles thinking about what could go wrong, how ties might occur, how grading might be made easier or more fair. He is proud of the result.

One of the pool events happening this afternoon is a one-breath lap event. The teams will be measured on how far they can swim along the bottom of the pool on a single breath. I ask Rusty about a strategy for that event. He tells me it's important to perform prep-breathing and to take slow long strokes underwater. Pushing yourself too hard, he tells me, will use up all your oxygen too quickly.

## Pool Events

The next set of events is held at the pool across the street from the SFUWO admin building. The safety brief is scheduled for 1330 with a go-time of 1400. There will be three events taking place this afternoon. The pool is L-shaped, with the base of the "L" being used. It measures 30 meters from one end to the other (well, 30.48 meters, but who's counting).

I walk over in time to listen to the safety brief from a blackhat to the dive teams. He covers the rules in detail under an awning while the divers sit on or at picnic tables listening. The events have a focus on teamwork, communication, and coordination.

A diver asks for clarification on one event, asking if he is required to tell the safety "I feel fine" every time. The safety answers that the divers are not required to say "I feel fine" each time they surface. This is a well-known aspect of the CDQC. When there is a risk of loss of motor control (LMC), or blacking out, the diver may be asked to present an OK-sign by hand and say "I feel fine." It's apparent that the divers have had this drilled into them during their time at the course.

When asked about pushing the limit on handling "the clump" during an event, the safety says, "It's like they say in driver's training: all rollovers start with one wheel off the ground". This gets a laugh from the men.



Photo by K. Kassens USAJFKSWCS



Photo by K. Kassens USAJFKSWCS

## Underwater Laps One One Breath

A blackhat with a megaphone makes the event announcements. Two teams of two enter the pool at a time, given about two minutes to prepare before the event begins. Ahead of each group a 1 minute warning is announced for the teams to perform prep breathing. Each diver has a "breath box" they have trained. This is a form of controlled breathing intended to saturate the blood with oxygen. 3-5 seconds in, hold for a moment, then a long slow exhale. The long slow exhale is the key. The event staff gives a one minute warning, then thirty seconds, a countdown from five, then calls "official start time" and begins counting upwards. The teams are given a 10 second window to finish "breathing down".

As the safeties follow along, they swim at the same speed in a calm and still side stroke with masks in the water observing the competitors. Around the deck there are many observers. Guests, family members, and media are situated around the pool. There is a two-foot wide safety area around the pool, marked off with red tape, that must be kept clear of everyone except staff. As the divers swim from one end of the pool to the other, safeties following, event staff pace alongside in their buffer area. This is a very quiet time. The crowd is quiet, the swimmers are quiet. The sound is the rhythmic hiss of snorkel breathing.

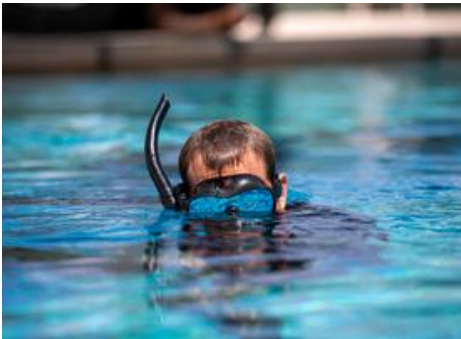


Photo by Sgt Emely Opio-Wright 1st SFC

As the time ticks by, I feel a growing sense of tension, wondering how far these guys can go on a single breath. During the event, one of the divers pushes himself too far and experiences a "shallow water blackout" just after surfacing. The safety pulls him to the gunwale and the medical team takes a look at him, providing him with oxygen. The process repeats for each of the 13 teams. The teams that compete later in the rotation have watched those go before them and mentally mark their goal to meet or exceed those that came before. Each time a diver surfaces to indicate they have reached their limit, they provide the "ok" hand sign and say "I feel fine". Another shallow-water blackout occurs with the diver slurring "I feel fine". It is apparent the phrase has been practiced to the point of being near automatic. The third time this happens, I get a sort of feeling of dread about watching men push themselves to - and sometimes beyond - their limit.



Photo by 3rd POB (A) (D)

One competitor gets a round of applause for making it down and back twice, then down again on a single breath. A superhuman task. At the event's conclusion, he will be celebrated as making it 332' underwater in a single breath.

## Clump Relay

The next event for the afternoon pool activities, billed as a "mystery event", is revealed to be a relay involving a 20 pound underwater "clump". The clump is a small yellow brick with a groove on each face. It is to be moved down to the end of the pool and back, sliding along the bottom, for time. Both team members must have a hand on the clump before it can be moved. One team member is allowed to surface for air at a time. If neither diver has a hand on the clump at any point, the team is disqualified. If the clump leaves the bottom of the pool, they are disqualified. The event staff also make sure to specify that interfering with another team's progress will also lead to disqualification. The inclusion of that final part seems like a nod to the special forces community's reputation for improvising and adapting to challenges.

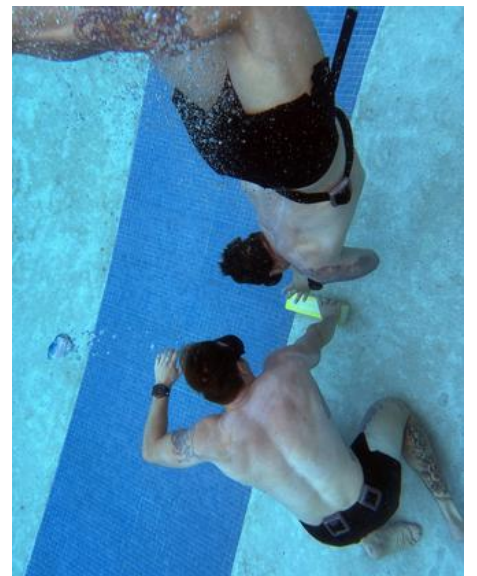
As before, two teams enter at a time, wearing weight belts. They are given a couple of minutes before the event begins, with a time announcement one-minute out, thirty seconds out, and then a countdown from five. With the first set of teams, a team is disqualified before making it halfway down to the end. The other team continues making steady progress. They have a strategy - both push the clump as far as they can until diver 1 indicates to diver 2 that they need a breath. Diver 2 patiently waits below with the clump as diver 1 surfaces to get two fast recovery breaths. He expels air on the way up, then quickly takes a breath in, performs a 3-4 second exhale, then takes in another breath and dives back down to relieve his partner. After the partner refills, they start the process over again, moving the clump as far as they can push it.

Progress continues, but the pushes get shorter and shorter as the event goes on. During the last 1/4 of the way back to the start, they are making little progress with each push. They are clearly hypoxic.

As the event continues, I ask around about techniques for this event. What I hear are two strategies, seemingly at odds with one-another. The first technique starts with a big push up front, followed by diminishing pushes to bring the clump back home. "Like pushups, you do 30, then you do 20, then you do 10, then five". The second technique was to push a moderate amount up front. The idea being that a hard push up front would burn up oxygen, leaving the divers hypoxic early on. In that state, the two short recovery breaths wouldn't do much to help them continue.



Photos by K. Kassens USAJFKSWCS





Photos by K. Kassens USAJFKSWCS

As the teams compete, I note two types of submersions when the divers return to the clump after getting a breath. In one, they simply lower themselves down. In the other, they flip so their legs are up in the air as they submerge. I learn these are known as a clear water dive and a murky water dive. At least one commenter indicated the legs-up version was more efficient and better suited for this task.

I walk around catching incidental conversation from the teams that have completed the event and from those that are waiting to compete. I overhear "I was about to black out", and think to myself again about how these competitors are experts at pushing themselves to the limit. I want to ask about this skill when I have a chance. I hear teams talking about standings, wondering where they are posted and who's in the lead. Another competitor says he saw scores earlier and there was not a lot of spread among the teams. It will be a tight competition. The teams push themselves, but this is a brutal event. Only 8 of the 13 teams complete it.



As the last team works its way back to the finish, I see all five safety swimmers set in a circle around them, tracking their progress underwater. At the conclusion, a blackhat announces the winning team with a time of seven minutes, nine seconds.

### **Max Buddy Tread with 15 Pound Weight**



The final pool event today is a "max tread" event. Teams will be tasked with keeping a fifteen pound weight out of the water for as long as possible. The team can hold the weight together, or pass it back and forth as much as needed. This event, like the clump relay, highlights teamwork and self-discipline. The pool is large enough for 4 teams to work at a time. To optimize pool use, the starts are not coordinated, but noted individually. A pool safety releases the clump to the team as a staff member on the gunwale notes the start time. All of the teams begin with a "pizza pie" strategy. One diver holds the weight on a single hand above their shoulder until they need to pass it off to their teammate. As the event starts, I ask a blackhat what sort of times he expects to see in this event. He has some difficulty coming up with a specific time, but says maybe four to eight minutes. With the first couple of teams, this is correct.

Then a team enters and begins with a novel but hilarious strategy. Rather than the pizza pie, this team has one diver with the clump balanced on their head and the other diver using one arm to stabilize



the weight. The blackhats immediately crack some jokes, with the announcer giving them a light jeering over the megaphone, "interesting strategy team five". The team is in good humor and cracks back with smiles. As time passes, it becomes evident they have hit on a wise strategy. While other teams enter and timeout, this team has not even switched the weight a single time. The staff is commenting to each other on the merits - the diver with the weight can use all of their limbs to tread water. "Calm as Hindu cows", another staff member remarks. There is a good amount of humor between the teams and the staff.

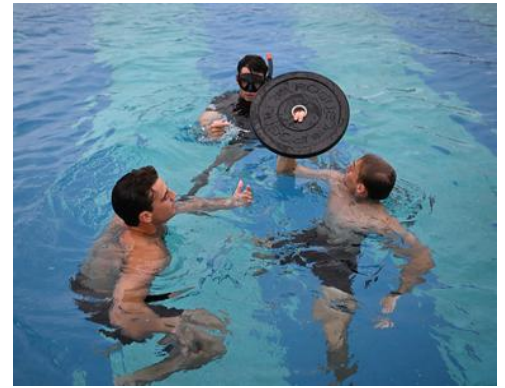


Photo by K. Kassens USAJFKSWCS

Following teams copy the technique, also seeing its wisdom and modeling the adaptability of the special forces soldier. This event is long running with excitement coming as teams seem to be hitting their limit. The teams that try the "on head" strategy also tap out before team five. The observers attribute this to being incredible at treading water in sync with one another. A calm egg-beater in coordination with one another. At a little past sixteen minutes, the team finally reaches their limit. Their record will be broken shortly though, with another "on head" strategy team showing an incredible amount of endurance. The winning team keeps the plate out of the water for nearly 25 minutes.



**Next month: interview with a team and navigation dive photos.**



## From The Chapter



### Belk Fundraiser Sale

On Sunday, October 15th, members of the chapter assembled at the Belk on Bichara Blvd in The Villages. Our chairman had secured us **the very first slot** for the Belk charity sale event. This first slot allowed us to ask for donations from people that were not yet jaded by the donation season. We pitched our cause to shoppers from 1100 to 1400 hours. As Tony

mentioned in his update, my son was an MVP. Who could resist an eight year-old?

### October Chapter Meeting

We met at 1300 on Saturday, October 14th, at VFW Post 8083, as usual. Highlights included a glut of new members, Linda Hall's excellent potato salad, and some excitement about starting plans for the Christmas Party.

One new member, Thurston Helmes, shared a fun story. On a cruise that was stopped in Gibraltar, Thurston wanted to represent the airborne forces as there were some veteran British Paras in the area. Unfortunately, the ship stopped in an area with monkeys - monkeys that loved brightly colored, salty headgear. As Thurston tells it, he felt a \*thwomp\* as a monkey flew past and snatched his beret. He needed the beret for an upcoming dinner event and would not have time to find a replacement. A chase followed! For twenty minutes, Thurston followed. He was determined not to let it escape. He found a mop to give him some range and eventually managed to confront the animal as it sat on a tree and gnawed on the backing.

With a threat of violence, a cold stare, and a shake of the mop, Thurston convinced the monkey to drop his beret. Other than some bite-marks on the backing, it was good to go and ready for his dinner.



Photos by Ron Dahlgren. This was only part of the group.

---

### Linda's Famous Potato Salad

Boil 3# potatoes in salted water.

Chop 1+ Cup onions, 1+ Cup celery.

Sauce: whisk 2-3 eggs in a glass bowl. Add 1 Cup cider vinegar, and 1 Cup Stevia or sugar, and 2 Tablespoons butter. Whisk again. Microwave until thick. It will thicken as cools(if not thick enough, add another whisked egg). Stir every few minutes. Cool. Then add 2 cups of mayonnaise and whisk together.

In large bowl, layer thinly sliced potatoes, with onions, celery, sauce, salt, pepper & parsley- about 3 layers of each to reduce stirring and breaking up potatoes, then stir together. Taste test, adjust seasoning, top with sliced hard boiled eggs. Dust with Paprika or Parsley. Refrigerate for a few hours.



Seen here - the donation boot, courtesy of Hope.



## 82nd Airborne's 2nd BCT enjoy JRTC

More than 4,000 paratroopers participated in the JRTC rotation

**Ft Johnson, LA** - Paratroopers with the 2nd BCT deployed to a JRTC rotation from the end of September to early October. A quick check of historical weather data for the region shows highs in the low 90s, lows in the mid 70s. Being Louisiana, you can be sure there was rain. The troops rigged in-flight and jumped in with a night-time mass tactical to kick off their rotation. Your author has done two rotations at JRTC. It can be fun and educational in a lot of ways, but also a grueling and smelly environment after ten days in the swamp!



Photos by Spc Hannah Stewart, 49th Public Affairs Detachment



Photo by Spc. Hannah Stewart, 49th Public Affairs Detachment



Photo by Spc. Hannah Stewart, 49th PAD



Photo by Spc. Hannah Stewart, 49th PAD



Photo by Spc. Lilliana Magoon, 49th PAD



## 101st Conducts SPIES and FRIES Training

Photos by Pfc. Brianna Badder



**Fort Campbell, Ky** - On October 12th, soldiers assigned to the 101st performed training on the FRIES/SPIES systems. These are the "fast rope insertion and extraction systems" and "special purpose insertion and extraction systems" respectively. I was curious about what it felt like to train on this setup, so I spoke with Master Sgt. Jacob Connor, Public Affairs Senior Enlisted Advisor, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). MSG Connor has performed this same training and has first hand experience to share.

**The Canopy:** What can you tell me about the experience of being extracted using one of these setups?

**MSG Connor:** It is scary at first, but you know to trust your equipment and your teammates. It is one of the best experiences in training I have gotten to participate in my career. I have never had to conduct an extraction outside of training, but knowing I get to work with the professionals I do every day, I am confident if the situation called for it, your Screaming Eagles have you covered.

**The Canopy:** What does it feel like?

**MSG Connor:** The feeling to be up in the air after being extracted is like no other I have ever felt. There is a sense of fright with a big dose of freedom.





**The Canopy:** Does the wind blind you without eye-pro, once you're on your way?

**MSG Connor:** Trick question because we always wear our PPE. The down force of the helicopter blades makes it feel like you're in a tunnel. We are trained to keep our heads on a swivel to be on the lookout for any threat or possible dangers that may harm the team or the extraction.

**The Canopy:** How do you avoid squashing the guy below you when you land?

**MSG Connor:** To avoid squashing the other guy when you land, you have to follow the procedures as they're taught. It takes a lot of coordination and training to execute properly. Once the first person touches the ground, they must then move away from the aircraft to allow the second, third and so on [to] get on the ground. Once on the ground, they will then make sure the rope is away from the rotors so the aircraft can land safely.

**The Canopy:** Why the specific posture with your arms and legs spread?

**MSG Connor:** The specific posture allows all crew members to know that you are safe. You must always keep your thumb up to signal to all members that you are okay. The legs are spread is a natural position to be comfortable when hanging from the rope with only a carabiner. Though one thinks that they can do things differently with their legs, they are sadly mistaken. I know I have tried and failed.



# Become a sponsor!

The Canopy is seeking businesses to partner with as sponsors. Your sponsorship helps to bring The Canopy to veteran airborne troops and sends a message to our community! Reach out to Ron Dahlgren <[ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com](mailto:ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com)> for details!

## Become a Booster!

Being a booster helps cover the production and publication costs of The Canopy. We list the 10 most recent boosters in each issue. To become a booster, send a check for \$25 (or more!) payable to:

The Canopy  
Box 1324  
Minneola, FL 34755-1324

## Join The Canopy!

Does your local airborne association chapter have a newsletter? If not, The Canopy may be right for you. Have your secretary or chairman reach out to Ron at <[ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com](mailto:ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com)> to talk about the particulars.



Photo by Ron Dahlgren. South-eastern Afghanistan, early 2003. Be thankful this photo isn't scratch and sniff.

---

## THE CANOPY

c/o SWGY, Inc.

Box 1324

Minneola, FL 34755-1324

