

# Leatherneck

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## AIRBORNE TRAINING

Jump school at  
Fort Benning

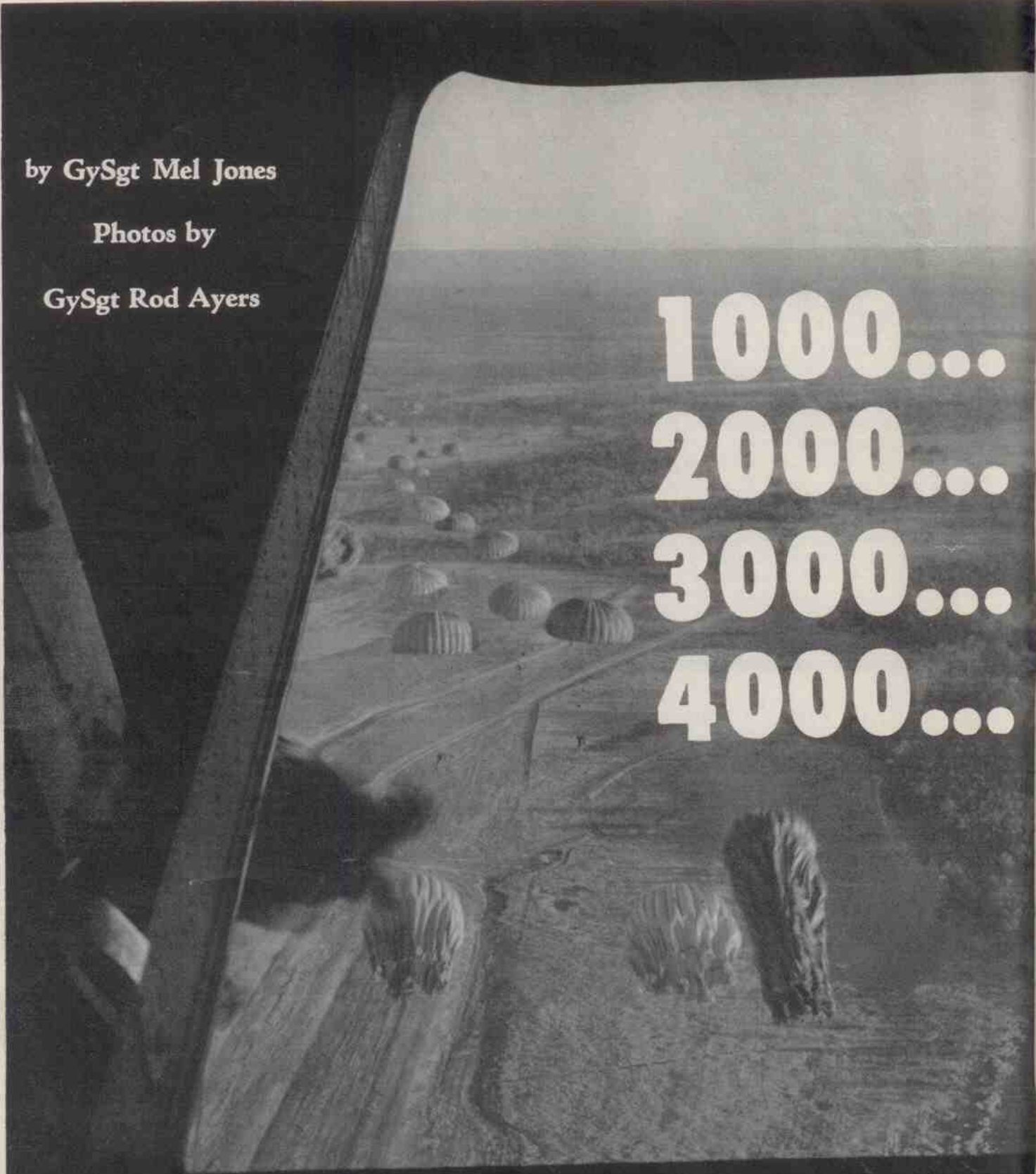


191 N. Little main  
M. E. HOWEY  
1855 E. ROSE APT 26B  
ORANGE CALIF  
1063 B-05862 202794

by GySgt Mel Jones

Photos by

GySgt Rod Ayers



**1000...**  
**2000...**  
**3000...**  
**4000...**

**Shortly after a Marine bellows those four numbers for the first time, he knows why Airborne is no glory school.**

**“Y**OU MAY have the idea this is a glory school. It's not. You're gonna sweat here. Your muscles are goin' to ache. You'll wish you never heard of us. But you'll learn. You know why you'll learn? Because *we're* not going to be responsible for your death!”

Hard words.

But, it takes blunt language to condition the average man to a foreign element, such as the sky—and parachuting.

The man with the frank introduction is one of 266 instructors at the Army Airborne-Air Mobility Department, Fort Benning, Ga. He helps train men who've never before taken a step and found nothing beneath them but air. And, far below, the ground. This man is a perfectionist in his job. He tells why:

“The sky, even more than the sea, is unforgiving of even the slightest mistake. After a malfunction, if you freeze comin' down, they'll sweep you up with a blotter.”

This instructor, and the others like him (the cadre, he calls them), trains between 450 to 750 men a week. There are that many in a student company, and each week, one company is forming while another is graduating. The entire airborne course takes a month, but the stages of training progress weekly.

All the services send students to Benning, as do some allied countries. And all the students learn how to become military parachutists (the preferred term amongst the airborne breed) for the same reason . . . to gain entry.

Each service, however, has its own reasons for desiring entry.

As far as the Army is concerned, gaining entry is like having a key to someone's back door. Entire units, up to and including divisions, mass jump behind enemy lines, then trigger any combination of tactical operations. Airborne outfits can secure and hold bridgeheads, roads, airfields, etc. Or, they can countermarch and drive back in the direction they originated from, nut-cracking the enemy between themselves and another force. They can destroy, and thereby deny, huge supply and assembly areas used by the other guys. The possibilities are numerous. Ask any airborne trooper the next time you have an hour or so to spare.

Consequently, more than 90 per cent of the students at Benning are soldiers. After their basic airborne training, they check into one of two airborne divisions here in the States, or into a brigade in Germany, or a battle group on Okinawa. Some graduates report to the beret brigade, more technically known as Special Forces.

The Air Force is primarily interested

in entry for more humane reasons. It has para-rescue teams to drop into remote areas, or far out at sea.

As far as the Navy is concerned, the emphasis is on underwater demolitions teams. Their interest in parachuting is about the same as the Corps' . . . it's a method of popping into the enemy's seabag without his knowing you're there.

Mind you, we're not saying that *all* Air Force students are para-rescue men, or that *all* sailors are UDT-ers. Just the majority.

Now, to the Corps.

Three types of Marines are enrolled at Benning. And, just to beat you to the gagline, they're *not* the adventurers, the unsuspecting, and the just-plain-kooky. They are Force Reconners, Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison (Anglico) men and Air Delivery personnel. By far, the Force peeping-thomases do the most jumping, so we'll save them 'til last.

There are three air delivery platoons in the Corps; one at Lejeune, another at Pendleton and the remaining one at Iwakuni. Their job? To air drop howitzers or eggs, six-bys or bread . . . it all depends on what the ground commander finds himself short of and difficult to receive by any other means. Air delivery Marines can drop almost anything, except themselves.

It's a curious paradox at first glance. The men have to be jump qualified, but they don't jump. Stare at it hard enough, though, and it begins to make sense. Air deliverers repair and pack hundreds of parachutes, and if any one course teaches you to respect parachutes, airborne training does. Too, these Marines spend mucho hours popping packages out of aircraft hatchways. A misstep, a shift of cargo weight, and chances are at least one Marine isn't going to land with the plane. Finally, although tactical considerations do not *now* require air delivery jumps, who's to guess about future concepts?

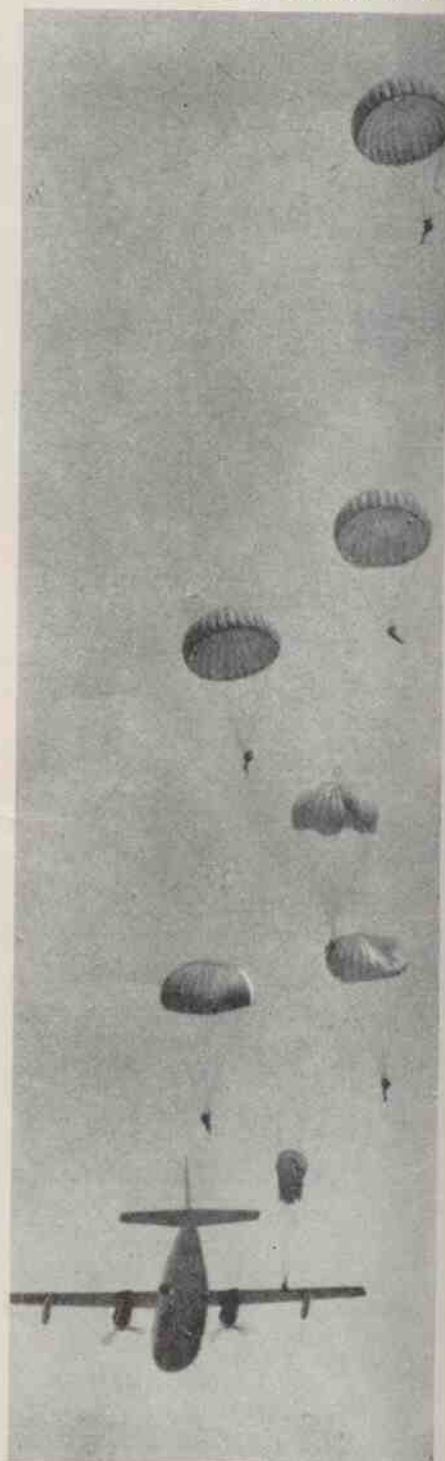
Anglico folk . . . now they jump. At least, some of them do. There are some changes being made, however. Generally speaking, Anglico Marines are jump qualified because there's a distinct possibility they'll be attached to Army airborne units.

Which brings us “up the hill . . . down the hill . . . all the way” to Force Recon.

To be blunt about it, the reconners jump qualify because they want to be sneaky. Being polite, they desire to land behind enemy lines to accomplish covert missions. Which means they'd *better* be sneaky.

As any Marine who's ever been cornered by a Force Recon Marine knows, these particular agents penetrate into

*When the students enter Benning, they're ground-bound. But, four weeks later . . .*



for  
ool.

## AIRBORNE (cont.)

Joe Badguy's territory and gather intelligence material. They're liable to make their entry days—or even weeks—in advance of an invasion. There are a variety of entry means, but swimming and parachuting are the predominant ones. They learn the basics of the latter at Benning.

It doesn't stop there, though. Once they get back to their units, they go on to more sophisticated learnin', which, of course, is true of all airborne graduates.

Reconners have a slightly different personal load to adjust before jumping. Basically, it's about the same as the gear packing they did for their equipment jump at Benning. But there are differences, like which pocket to carry the camera in.

The biggest problem facing them is adjusting to the aircraft they'll be using. In school, the Marines exited from transports, using static lines every time. Chances are, they won't be so lucky in go-for-broke circumstances.

Cargo planes, though spacious and more convenient, have a tendency to show up on enemy radar screens as plump, plodding bogeys. So, naturally, said enemy will dispatch his fastest fighters or missiles to whomp said bogey, which may not seem at all cricket, but it certainly goes to prove the ancient saw about everything being fair in love, war and payday poker. At any rate, a fighter or missile can finish a recon mission before it has really begun.

Most Force Recon parachutists exit from high speed aircraft, such as jets. Jets aren't built for static line installation, and even if they were, the idea is as impractical as expecting a sergeant major to smile on Monday morning. A man jumping from a jet has to wait at least five seconds for his body speed to slow down, or there's a distinct possibility his spine will be yanked right out of his frame when the chute opens.

The Reconner, therefore, learns how to free fall after leaving Benning. This knowledge is an extension, not a contradiction, of what is learned at the school.

There are two other practices a recon parachutist has to adopt after leaving Benning. He has to clean his drop zone (DZ), then get out. He isn't taught these at the school (although he does carry his chute out of the DZ after every jump) because of the variance of Army and Recon applications. The airborne soldier is concerned with three problems: (1) get down, (2) assembly of personnel and equipment on the

ground, and (3) commence tactical operations. The Recon snooper drops the airborne (3) and adds two rules of his own: (3) get rid of parachutes and all signs of entry, and (4) get the hell out of the area.

So much for additional training insofar as parachuting is concerned.

The regulars of the three Marine types we mentioned aren't the only ones who attend Benning. Their Reserve counterparts also receive airborne training.

The emphasis on jumping has increased since last year's Reserve Establishment overhaul. Seven outfits are in the process of becoming jump qualified. To be specific:

Four Force Recon companies; the 3d from Mobile, Ala.; the 4th from San Bernardino, Calif.; the 5th from Albuquerque, N.M.; and the 6th from Pearl Harbor.

Two Anglico companies; the 3d from Long Beach, Calif., and the 4th from Miami, Fla.

And the 1st Air Delivery Company, from San Jose, Calif.

A couple of sentences of praise for these Reservists. They're establishing fine records at Benning, and they're doing so under more-or-less hardship circumstances. You see, the Army will not half-train a parachutist. *Everyone* completes the month-long course, which makes it a bit difficult for men who

*Jump training is an endless round of physicals, PT tests and exercises.*

have to face civilian bosses with the problem.

But the majority of the Reservists are getting the schooling, practically all of them at Benning. One unit, the Hawaiian reconners, are snapping in at the Army's sub-school on Okinawa.

As you can see, the Corps has more than a nodding interest in Fort Benning, Ga. So let's take a look at it. Not the base, because if you're an airborne student, you'll see very little of it.

Which focuses an idea. Let's enroll you. For the next few pages, you're going to be "Airborne, Airborne . . . all the way."

Checking in is simple, and routine. A Marine liaison team will safe-conduct your administrative matters, leaving you the maximum amount of time for an aerial education. You'll need it.

Your student company is formed, with the senior company grade officer in charge (officers and enlisted are integrated). You're shown a demonstration of the equipment you'll use, then, my friend, it's out on the cables.

The cables are just that, a series of wires on the ground indicating precisely where the company will fall in. Here, you'll receive your inspections each morning. For the first week, at least. And here you meet one of those perfectionists. Listen:

"Let's get a few things straight. Whenever you address me or any other instructor, unless he's an officer, you use the word 'Sergeant.' You say 'Sir' if he's an officer. Whenever we tell you something, we'll finish by asking 'Is



that clear?' You will answer 'Clear, Sergeant!' or 'Clear, Sir!' if you understand what you've been told. You will then be told to recover, at which time you sound off with 'Airborne!' loudly, and continue with your training. Is that clear?"

"Clear, Sergeant!"

Your mouth tastes a bit dry as you bellow your answer. There's something familiar here . . . the bearing of the man talking, the firm, no-doubt manner in which he speaks, the way other instructors circulate among you, steel-eyed, waiting; and the sounds of other companies shouting out in the training areas. Sure seems like you've been in a spot like this before.

You have . . . in boot camp, or at Quantico, if you happen to be an officer student. You're going to notice the similarity throughout. In intensity of training and application of discipline, the school greatly resembles these renowned establishments.

But you're not going into shock this time. You've been through this before. You know what to expect, and you know why the pressure's being applied . . . to instill discipline and pride. You have both already, so from now on you're going to keep your jaw closed and your eyes and ears tuned to high frequency. That's what your predecessors did, and they're responsible for the regard the instructors have for Marines.

Your first week at Benning may be spent at PCC, the Pre-Course Conditioning section, only the Army calls their sections "subcommittees." It will be your toughest week, if you have to take PCC, and you will if you can't pass the muscle-splitting PT test you're given when you first arrive. If you do pass it, you skip PCC and go on to Ground Week.

Every morning begins with a personnel inspection, and woe to the student with long hair, or the one who has an Irish Pennant longer than one-thousandth of an inch.

Then comes an hour of calawhoopies . . . every morning. In fact, every day for the first three weeks of training.

Physical fitness should be emblazoned in neon at the school so that everyone could realize the importance the instructors place on having a sound body. There's valid reasoning behind it. Witness this dialogue from an instructor to a student who was goofing off while doing push-ups:

"What d'ya think you're doin', lad? You can get an installment plan at a department store, not here. When I tell you I want 10 push-ups, I mean right now. Clear?"

"Cle . . . ar, Ser . . . geant!"

"You think we're pickin' on you, lad? You think I like to stand here and listen to you groan like a bull with a sword



(ABOVE) There's one way to make parachute landing falls; the right way.

(BELOW) They call it "Pushing away Georgia" and it's a gentle reminder.



## AIRBORNE (cont.)

in him? You know why your body has to be fit? Because you're goin' to need the mental alertness and coordination a sound body gives you. You won't get hurt, if your body can take it. So, push away Georgia, lad."

You will, during that first week. In fact, it'll seem as if you're either pushing or tromping the whole continental United States into the core of the earth.

On Friday of that week, you're given Benning's equivalent of the physical readiness test. It's a tough one, which includes a confidence course. If you fail it, you start the week all over again.

One more word concerning fitness. You're given *one* formal test, at the end of the first week. If, however, the instructors feel that you need retesting at any time throughout the course, you'll be tried again. Fail, and you're set back. The same applies if you lose your drive; your motivation. *Except* for the final week. You can't repeat that. Fail it, and you've wasted a lot of time.

As training progresses, you become aware of what the airborne folk call the five basic jump techniques. All of your subsequent schooling will be to perfect these principles, so you learn what they are in a hurry:

1. How to control your body inside an aircraft and the knowledge of the nine jump commands (which we'll cover later).
2. Control of your body from the split second you leave the plane until you feel the shock of the chute canopy inflating.
3. Control of the parachute during descent.
4. Making contact with the ground.
5. Control of the chute after landing.

You also begin working with some of the apparatus, the involved training aids which help you master the jump techniques.

The mock door is actually a series of replicas of aircraft fuselages sitting on the ground, and a shed with benches which passes for a fuselage. During the hours devoted to mock door, you're taught the intricacies of a parachute, and static jumping. You find how aircraft are loaded. Some sticks (airborne term for a unit about the size of a squad) sit against the fuselage's bulkhead and others are on an inside row, facing the bulkhead. And you practice the nine basic jump commands, which you must know so well you can respond to them on a hand-and-arm signal: Get ready! Outboard personnel stand up! (They do, flipping up their seats and facing the hatchway.) Inboard personnel stand up! (Ditto.) Hook up! (The static line

snap is hooked to the anchor cable.) Check static lines! (Each jumper checks the static line and back pack of the man to his front. The last two men pivot and check each other's.) Check your equipment! (Each man inspects the front of his own gear.) Sound off for equipment check! (From rear to front, each man shouts his number and the fact that he's O.K.) Stand in the door! (Knees bent, body erect, head and eyes to the front.) GO!

Time and again you practice at a mock door, until you feel you know it so well you'll probably hop out of the sack tomorrow, following the jump commands. And when you hit the deck, you'll execute a perfect PLF and make a rapid recovery.

You're introduced to PLFs during the first week, too. You get to know them quite well as the days progress.

A PLF is a parachute landing fall, or, the way you make contact with the

ground. Now, the casual man would say, "There's only one way. Whap!" The perfectionists at Benning disagree:

"When you hit the ground, you're traveling between 17 and 22 feet per second. That's equivalent to leaping off a 10 foot wall. Most jump casualties occur upon contact with the ground. And remember, if you become a casualty, you're a liability to your outfit."

So, you learn how to land without snapping bones. You find that you prepare for contact when you're at tree-top level. Reach up and grab the parachute risers. Keep your head erect, eyes straight to the front so that you're unaware of precisely when you'll hit. Body relaxed, feet and knees together, knees slightly bent, toes pointed slightly downward. Then, whap!

Immediately upon contact, twist your body in one of four directions; front, rear, right or left. The direction will depend upon which way you're being

*The man's facial expression gives a slight idea of how it feels to hit the deck improperly. He'll hear from the perfectionist behind him.*



carried by the wind. Go with a breeze. Be sure to absorb the shock on the fleshy portions of your body; the balls of the feet, the calf of the leg, the thigh, the sitter-downer and the push-up muscles, or fleshy portion of the shoulders.

You'll practice this a few thousand times, too . . . on two-foot platforms, then four-foot platforms, on inclined ramps which you run up and jump off to give you the lateral feeling of landing and, later on, off the swing landing trainer, which is a combination of sway-and-drop from a 10-foot tower.

Most of the mock door and PLF emphasis will come in your second week of training, into which you're about ready to graduate—after a sentence or two.

Before the first week is finished, you become especially aware of a couple of administrative matters. You're graded on everything; inspections, physical progress, proficiency on apparatus, desire . . . the works. You'll continue to be graded, but only on a sheet the instructor carries. There's no formal scoring system. You know *immediately*, however, when you've goofed. If it's a major infraction, you're gigged. Too many gigs and back you go. If, on the other hand, you merely forget an answer or two, you're told to drop. Drop means push-ups, however many you're advised to do. This is *not* a form of punishment. It's to remind you not to forget again; that you make *no* mistakes when you have a chute on your back. Or else . . .

So, having been dropped a few times, and even possibly gigged once, you move on to the second phase, Ground Week.

Here, you get repetition upon repetition of what you became acquainted with in PCC, especially mock door and PLF training. But there's new material, too.

You spend at least an hour in a suspended harness, which is a regulation parachute harness, with you inside, hoisted off the deck. Here, you are taught how to slip, or how to control your chute during descent. You know by now that you're always looking below and around you, to assure that you don't collide with another parachutist or some unfriendly object like a high tension wire, on the ground. If you are heading for trouble, you slip away from it. Reach high on the set of risers corresponding to the direction you want to go (two right ones for right slip, etc.), ease them down to your chest. This pulls down one side of the canopy, forcing air from the other. Ergo, you fly laterally.

In later suspended harness sessions, you'll learn how to prepare for unavoidable landings in trees, water and



(ABOVE) A specially designed parachute is rigged for a 250-foot tower.

(BELOW) First, it's off small platforms, then 34-foot, then 250-foot towers.

