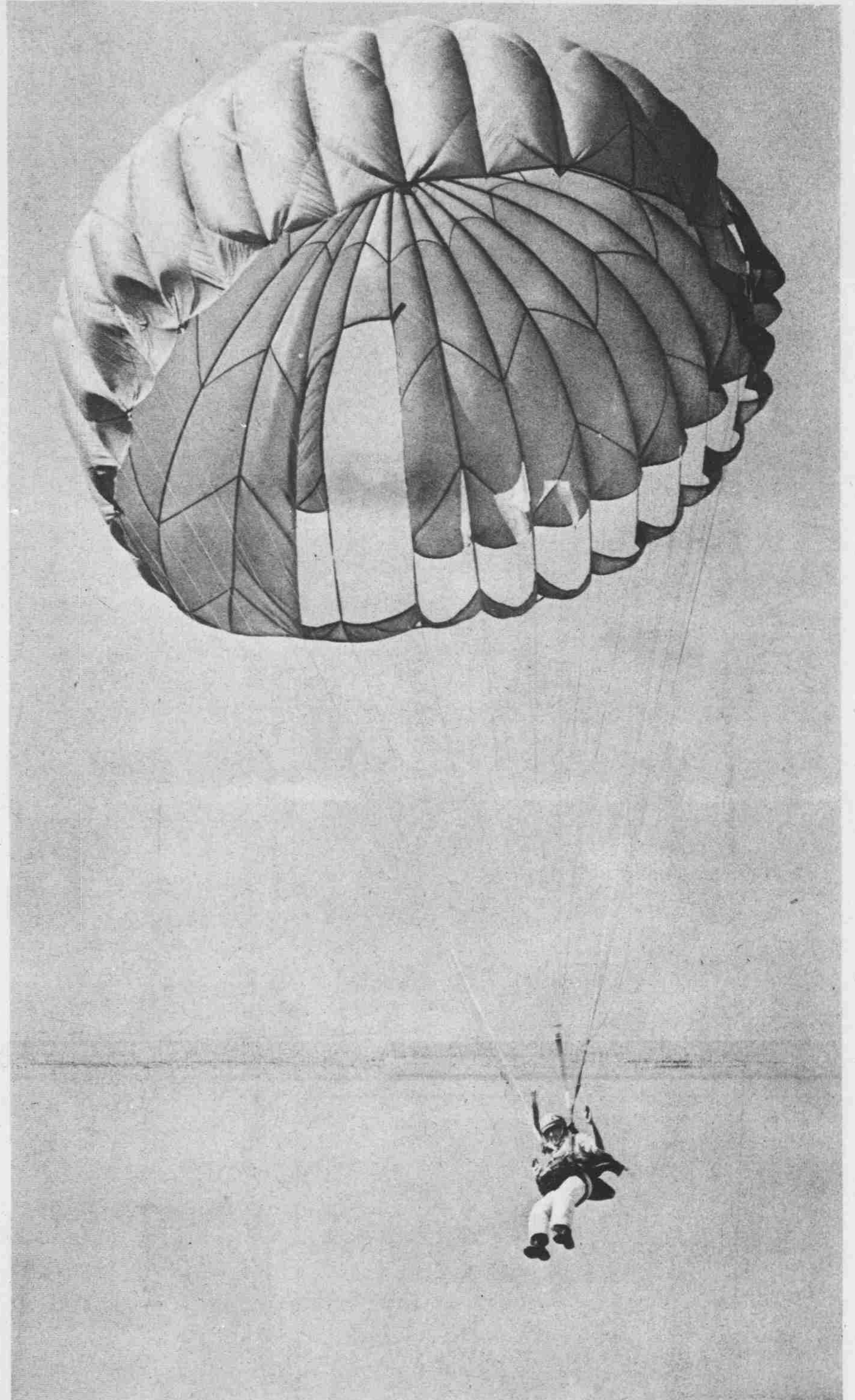


Jump!



'A sport for thrillseekers'

Students learning parachuting

By CLINTON WEAVER
Staff Writer

The plane approaches, 3,000 feet above its target. A small figure appears, jumps, then zooms straight for land. But a giant, mushroom-shaped canopy unfolds in the breeze, its strings go taut, and the figure slowly descends to the ground.

That's the scene each Saturday at the Franklin County Sport Parachute Center near Louisburg, where members of the UNC Parachute Club gather to jump.

Fifteen members belong to the club, says Mary Huntley, this year's president. "Anyone who's interested can learn, and anyone who joins can jump."

For a \$75 fee, students can get professional training and their first jump from a plane, Huntley says. After the first jump, students pay \$10 for each outing, as club members.

Sue Copeland, a UNC senior who joined last month, says parachuting "is the best natural high you can have."

The first time out, "I didn't really feel anything," Copeland says. "Then, on the final turn (of the airplane), I got a little scared. But when I got onto the strut (the platform above the plane's wheel), I felt like, 'By golly, I'm gonna do it.'"

It wasn't until arriving home that afternoon that she began considering what she had done. "And then I got a little scared," she says.

Copeland began parachuting after reading ads for the parachute club in *The Daily Tar Heel*. She and a friend, Alan Proffitt, agreed they'd join.

Like all beginning jumpers, they went through a ground training course on their first day at the parachute center. Instructors offered lessons on a replica of the jump planes.

"Basically, they got you out there," Proffitt says, "and you familiarized yourself with the parachute and how it functions. . . . Then they taught you how to get into the plane and how to fall out of it."

It may sound easy, but Proffitt says falling out of a plane is more complicated than it seems. "You don't really jump out of a door. You stand on the wheel, and the wind's blowing and you

hold onto the strut. Then the jumpmaster hits you on the leg and you fall."

The first time out, "I was really nervous," Proffitt says. "It was something I was interested in, but you're a little bit afraid."

The fall "is a little bit like flying," he says. "But there's so many things that you have to think about and it's such a short time, you really don't have time to notice much of anything."

Proffitt and Copeland are both still on "static line jumps." A cord runs from the plane to the student in case something goes wrong.

All students must make five jumps successfully before they move on to "delays," Huntley says. Delays are free falls in which the student waits for five to 30 seconds before pulling the cord.

"Nobody goes to the next level," Huntley says, "until the people on the ground, the pilot and especially the jumpmaster feel they are ready."

In all, students must make 23 good jumps, including 18 delays, before they are considered "off-student status." Then, they no longer have jumpmasters, Huntley says. "What that means is you, and you alone, are responsible for yourself."

Huntley has been jumping for a year, but she hasn't reached delays yet. "It depends on how many jumps you make and over what length of time."

She says her first day at the parachute center was exciting. "I was petrified on the trip up to Louisburg."

"Once I was in the plane, I was afraid again," Huntley says. "Leaving the plane was exciting, but I was really confused. I was confused until the chute opened, but the ride down was really beautiful. It was really peaceful under the canopy."

Not all rides are so smooth, however. One time, Huntley's chute got caught in some power lines, but she was able to reach the ground. "I got out of my chute very quickly."

Others have also had bad landings. "Lots land in trees," Huntley says, "but the worst they've had is just scratches on their hands. . . . It's always the person who jumps fault."

Though there are dangers, the rewards seem worth the risks. "It's a thrill," Huntley says. "It's adrenaline. It's a sport for thrillseekers, but it's not for people who are looking for danger. "As in any sport, there's a satisfaction in doing things right."



Bail out!

Kevin Hall, a freshman from Asheville, and Elizabeth Huffstetter, a freshman from Gastonia, made their first jumps the weekend before fall break, after a day of training with Smitty, their jumpmaster. The day included hanging from a wooden scaffold (upper left), Smitty outfitting them with their jumping suits and parachutes (lower right) and the actual jump and the walk back down to the hangar. Photos by Charles Ledford.

