

MacDill Riggers Perfect Free Fall Skills

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Published August 04, 2016*



ORLANDO, Fla. -- Parachute riggers from multiple commands at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida traveled to Orlando to perfect their free-fall skills in a wind tunnel, Aug. 1, 2016.

The wind tunnel, civilian operated, provided parachute riggers with an opportunity to practice free-fall jumps in a safe controlled environment.

Free-fall jumpers have the capability to land in areas without being seen or heard, and are usually used for special operation missions. Depending on the jump required to complete the mission, a jumper will jump from altitudes of 35,000 feet or 12,500 feet.

“We use the wind tunnel to become more accurate with body positioning during a free-fall situation,” said Army Staff Sgt. Robert Little, a parachute rigger assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command. “The smallest movements can adjust how you’re flying and the tunnel provides a layer of safety for flyers.”

The wind tunnel is a close replica of a free-fall environment, but intensified because the wind pressure can be adjusted based on an individual’s skill level and body composition.

“It [wind tunnel] intensifies all the movements a person would make in free-fall,” said Little. “It exaggerates any flaws the person is flying with, and gives them an opportunity to see what needs correction to be a better skilled flyer.”

The tunnel also provides jumpers with reference points to help them become more aware of how even the slightest movement affect their positioning.

“In the wind tunnel, you have a lot of reference points such as glass walls and a safety net, where you have nothing in the wide open air,” said Little. “The more you increase your skills and awareness in the wind tunnel, the more accurately you will be using your body position in free fall to stay with your team.”

Using the wind tunnel also takes the element of gravity away for flyers so they can focus on movements.

“While in the tunnel, you don’t have to fight gravity because they are throwing wind at you, so you are just fighting the wind,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Oscar Angel, a parachute rigger assigned to Joint Communications Support Element. “When you are free falling you are falling straight down.”

The success of the training sharpens the skills needed for free-fall jumpers to be effective and proficient in completing their missions. The jumpers go to the wind tunnel once a month to stay proficient and build upon their skills.

