

Tenth World POPS Meet

4-12 Jun 2010

Reggio Emilia, Italy



USA POPS at the 10th World POPS Meet. Photo by Paul French.



USA POPS at the opening ceremony of the 10th World POPS Meet.



Team SOS USA XP sponsored by [Paraclete XP](#) . Team members: Harry Hopkins, George Nissan, Bruce Travis, and Ed Miller. Videographer: Jim Stengell.



Congratulations to Team SOS USA XP sponsored by [Paraclete XP](#) . This team has taken first place in both the POPS National 4-way and SOS National 4-way events. Team members: George Nissan, Bruce Travis, Harry Hopkins, and Ed Miller. Videographer: Jim Stengell.

Photos by Tom Zukowski unless noted otherwise.

The Journey to Italy

by Harry Hopkins

It is said that the destination is not as important as the journey. As four travelers sharing the journey to Reggio Emilia, Italy for the 10th Pop's World Meet and Championships it was (and still is) a wonderful adventure.

Our journey began as Ed Miller, Bruce Travis and Harry Hopkins met at the SOS World Record in Deland, Florida in 2009. After participating in setting the current record during the very cold week in Deland, Ed, Bruce and Harry decided to compete in the new SOS 4X category at the 2010 POP's World Meet.

George Nisson joined us to complete the 4X. All of us are Americans, all combat veterans, all served in Vietnam, all over 60. After letters to USA Top POP, Tom Zukowski and SOS guru Pat Moorehead, we were welcomed as Team SOS USA XP.

Our plan was to spend training time flying in coached tunnel sessions with limited actual aircraft time.

The first session together was in the tunnel at Perris, California just prior to the 2010 SOS record attempts in Elsinore. We had a very productive time together and our coach, Chris Farina with Perris Fury did a great job with the rough material he was given. Each tunnel session our team skills advanced noticeably.

We were able to make two jumps at Skydive Elsinore from a Twin Otter. Both jumps we used a Zircon exit and transitioned to the first point. We were all pleased with the exit and point production on each dive and were very confident that we were headed in the right direction.

Although we were not able to establish a new SOS record that week in Skydive Elsinore we were exposed to excellent organizing and many hours of fun companionship with all the participants. Everyone was fully behind SOS USA XP and wished us success. We were now a team as we faced the journey together.

Ed, George and Harry were able to make 10 to 20 jumps together the next few weekends at Skydive San Marcos in central Texas. We added one more from the experienced local jumpers to fill our 4X team and practiced. Thanks to all of you surrogates who took the slot of Bruce for our training, it worked.

Our final tunnel time was at Paraclete in Fayetteville, NC. Tim D'Annunzio had graciously donated two hours of tunnel time and two hours of coaching to our team. Thank you very much, Mr. D'Annunzio and the staff and workers of Paraclete. Also, as a team we arranged for another hour of time on our own, knowing that the tunnel time would be invaluable to us.

Our coach at Paraclete was Kirk Verner. Kirk, a member of the Paraclete XP four way team had a very well laid out program for us to follow. He understood our goals and cheerfully guided us step by step to those goals. The dives and various drills Kirk had us attempt were specifically designed to strengthen our weaknesses and improve our overall performance.

Kirk did an outstanding job and when he was through with us, had exceeded all of our expectations by double. A lot of the credit for our performance goes to Kirk as he went above and beyond to hone our sky skills and prepare us mentally for international competition. We will never be able to thank you enough Kirk.

The last few days in North Carolina we spent at the Raeford drop zone. It was a treat to finally jump where so much history has been made. Flying to altitude with the Golden

Knights, Paraclete XP and other local celebrities of skydiving was a very special time for our team. After seeing so much talent on the ride up we couldn't help but skydive better. We were cheered on (literally) by a group of women who were recent widows of soldiers killed overseas. They had come as a group to make tandem skydives, bond with each other and progress in their lives. The four of us, being combat veterans, were moved by their stories and their determination to continue. We cheered them as they made their jumps and they cheered us in return. It was good. We are much closer as a team, now. Sharing experiences and tall tales has worked to solidify us. We are confident and sure of our abilities and have a solid plan which is working well. Each step in our journey is better and more fruitful than any of us imagined at the start. We look forward with eager anticipation.

Some of us arrived in Italy a few days early so we could acclimate and do some sight seeing. Absolutely beautiful country in North central Italy. Farmland with clusters of buildings every mile and a small village every seven or eight miles. The larger cities had an ancient central portion with newer growth spread around the center. The Italians have done a good job of preserving the older parts of each city. The cathedrals, museums, art galleries, roads, government buildings, etc. have been saved to a great extent and are as beautiful as we had imagined. The scale of some of the structures is immense, very magnificent. We've got the pictures to prove it!

The food was an adventure all by itself. All of it was good and plentiful. A perfect rest period between sight seeing adventures.

After we all had arrived it was time for a visit to the drop zone and registration. Registration was an exercise in patience. The drop zone was ideal. Located on the side of one long runway, by itself, with acres of flat unobstructed terrain it was perfect for jumping. In the far distance there were hills and mountains with snow on the sides. Mid 80's with a very slight breeze, very nice indeed.

After registration we wanted to make a few familiarization jumps. As we were getting ready for our first jump, Jim Stengell introduced himself and asked if he could video our jump. Ed vouched for him and we all agreed. Jim was at the meet to coach the Swiss POP's 4X team. He is also a tunnel coach and videographer at Eloy, Arizona.

We made our first jump in Italy, first jump at the drop zone, first jump out of a Beech 99, first jump with Jim. Didn't buy any beer and had a ball. Amazingly the air is exactly the same in Italy as it is in Texas! Our three dives that day went very well and Jim was a natural fit performing flawlessly. He offered to serve as our team video and after checking with the proper powers and ironing out a few details he was a member of the team. Although he was just a youngster and nowhere sixty we let him hang out with us anyway.

International 4 Way competition was the first event on the schedule so we were there early in the morning awaiting the plane load and exit order. The Beech 99 holds 18 people so we had three complete teams on each load. We were second out on load 7.

The Italian team was the only competition team on load 8. In all there were 22 teams. The majority were SOS teams with the remaining teams POP's.

After three rounds of competition it was determined that SOS USA XP, four SOS veterans and their younger videographer had finished in first place, the Italian SOS Team was second and the German POP's, Carpe Diem in third.

Team Italy could not have been more gracious to us. Handshakes and high fives all around as they presented us with a fine bottle of wine in celebration.

The following day we managed to make a few jumps with the Italians with Claudio organizing. Lots of fun even with the slight language mishaps. A very enjoyable day.

All of us had a great time. The people were friendly, the food excellent and the weather couldn't have been better. The USA Top Pop, Tom Zukowski and SOS founder Pat Moorehead along with the other national leaders did a great job of smoothing the way and handling problems that arose.

For four old Vietnam vets this portion of our journey was filled with friendship, joy, success and many fond memories. To everyone who shared this portion of our journey as Team SOS USA XP became the inaugural World Champions of SOS Four Way Competition we thank you and salute you for your help and encouragement.

Blue skies,
Harry Hopkins D-9394
SOS USA XP member