

Wanting to take part in the Dive Control Specialist program I have written this essay. It's intent is to relay why I want to be part of the program. I have written a narrative that shows how the similarities of the Dive Con program and of my past military experiences (being a paratrooper in particular) and how they inter-relate thus being the reasoning behind my request to be part of the program. My plan is for a section of this narrative to be part of a text I wish to publish one day in the future. Enjoy.

Sitting on the wooden benches gets annoying. Strapped up with my T-10 parachute, it's webbing confines the movement of the legs, chest and arms. It doesn't help that as soon as the Jump Masters Inspection is complete, it guarantees that you have to use the bathroom. Waiting, and waiting, listening to the roar of the aircraft outside and smelling the hint of jet fuel as it wafts in the air, it starts to stir ones excitement of knowing what's coming up. Listening to the background conversations, occasionally you hear murmur of shifting winds, or possible canceled aircraft full of jumpers simply because the winds won't die down on the drop zone. Safety is an ever-important factor.

Finally it's boarding time, a grey green trail of human ants labor to the aircraft-loading bay in front of me. The waddle, the only indicator that the load of parachutes and equipment we carry weigh us down. I climb aboard, joking with my fellow airborne troopers about the latest goings on, teasing the new "cherry" jumpers in the ranks aboard with scary jump stories. To us veteran paratroopers, this is just another day at work. About to make a refresher jump, after just returning from my fourth deployment to Iraq a few weeks before. Ahhh, Iraq where the bonds of camaraderie were further solidified. Brother supporting brother.

The red light is on. As the bird approaches the drop zone we go through the ritual of the equipment check. The door is open and the Jump Master ensures the way is safe as cherry and veteran paratroopers alike begin to feel the anticipation. The Jump Master sounds off with a resounding "ONE MINUTE!"; which is echoed by the line of troopers. The open door looms further up the line of webbed orange aircraft seats, shining light in and allowing flashes of ground and sky to be seen from my position three jumpers away. "THIRTY SECONDS!", the heart begins to beat even faster. Even as a veteran I feel it, I can imagine how the cherry jumpers are feeling, wondering if they will freeze in the door. The red light flashes over to green.

"GREEN LIGHT, GO!!!!!!" the line of troopers hurriedly waddle to the door, hand off their bright yellow static line to the Jump Master Safety, turn and disappear through the gateway to the sky. I follow the row, and leap into the cold February daylight. Going from 150knots (173mph) to practically nothing in four seconds is a stressing rush that few people get to experience. In theory you have 4 seconds after the exit of the aircraft to feel what is known as the "opening shock" of the main parachute canopy inflating via it's static line being pulled tight from the departing aircraft, thus opening the canopy. In this time ones body goes through an experience not unlike sitting in the front seat of a major rollercoaster, leaning forward experiencing G-forces on its scariest turn. Just before 4 seconds if a paratrooper

feels no opening shock, he has little time to pull the handle where his right hand currently rest to deploy his reserve parachute saving his or her life.

Four seconds. I count, “one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand”an internal monologue of swear words march through my mind as the realization that I’m still falling hits me. I keep a level head and muscle memory kicks in. I look up, I have a canopy wrapped up in itself, and looks like it’s tied in knots, this desperate situation is known as a streamer or roman candle. It’s a scarily accurate description of an empty canopy, which rises above a falling trooper like a plume of smoke as they plummet without control towards the earth. We train for this. I firmly pull the handle of my reserve parachute, so hard it pulls free of its package completely! Nothing happens. “Oh god help me!”, my mind screams as the ground rushes closer and closer. I pull at the sides of the canvas material that holds the reserve parachute in, hoping to get something to help slow my..... thump, darkness.

Waking up in the hospital was a jarring experience. I was being moved from a normal stretcher to a backboard so the staff could fit me in a CT scan machine to check how extensive the internal injuries were. Clouded by narcotics the days immediately following were hazy to say the least. A broken pelvis, with 4 breaks of the pubic ring itself, lower spine damage, internal damage to the kidney, pancreas, colon, as well as a head injury, and a fractured eye socket were amongst my list of injuries, but I am alive. I’m told that I’m lucky to be alive. I’m told that in time I will walk again with a lot of effort and retraining of the body. I can accept that. I’m told I will never jump again, and my heart breaks. I wonder how will I ever do what I love, living a life of adventure again?

While admitted to the hospital I had a parade of visitors. They were my second family, my buddy SOF operators and fellow paratroopers, and brothers in arms. The Airborne and Special Operations communities are small, and the bonds you build are close ones. The reasons I love the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community are numerous. Firstly, It’s that very camaraderie that’s hard to duplicate. Second I love teaching, mentoring and developing the skills of the junior Soldiers, and watching them carryout the operations that you have in your past. Thirdly, it’s the professional attitude, and never giving up.

Coincidentally these are all the same reasons I apply for the Dive Control Specialist program. Taking part in the Scuba Warrior Program I’ve seen first hand the instructors, dive cons, and fellow Scuba Warrior Alumni Team (SWAT) divers sense of family, and professionalism. Close friends, who care about what they do. The transition out of the Army after my injuries is a turbulent time. After more than 20 years of service in the Army & especially in the Special Operations field I like to think I have adopted the mindset not just of a Soldier, but of a true professional SOF Operator.

Teaching and mentoring Soldiers never really changes. Whether it’s teaching junior Soldier how develop their leadership skills in order to be a leader one day, how to properly prepare their gear for an airborne operation, foreign soldiers how to conduct human intelligence collection missions, or Wounded Warriors how to safely scuba dive thus aiding them in the recovery of their physical and emotional

injuries, the concepts remain a constant. Be a mentor, teach by example, test their skills, ensure their safety, and motivate them to learn more. After military life where better is their a field that can utilize this thinking than teaching Soldiers a skill that incorporates these areas such as scuba diving.

Safety is paramount in diving as well. One must have a clear head in order to react to any emergencies underwater just like in the sky. Mike Biggs, my instructor stresses that every day, safety and redundancy. Having a tank of spare air known as a Pony Bottle is just like having reserve parachute. I've witnessed Mike's quick reaction to assist divers who ran low on air, or who got so anxious that they were a threat to their own safety. The skills are stressed; the training is gone over again and again. Just like the pre-jump brief before a parachute drop, scuba divers get their dive brief. Paratroopers go over the skills they need to react to an emergency in the air, scuba divers do the same for the sea.

So it's clear, the Army instilled a sense of never giving up in me. Giving up on adventure is not the option. My favorite thing to do is stir that spirit of adventure in others as well. Stir it with a sense of safety and responsibility combined. Diving allows me that, and as a Dive Control Specialist I get to help stir that spirit in others while also ensuring the safety of other divers.

As I sit on the dock, I realize all the divers are anxious to get on the boat and in the water. The Buoyancy Control Device (BDC), which holds the scuba tank constricts the chest, and arms a bit. Why is it every time I'm suited up for a dive, the urge to go to the bathroom will hit, and that's no fun in a dry-suit. Sitting listening to the engine rumbling as the boat splashes along, it's ever inviting sound is music to the ears. Joking and talking with the other divers about life in general, about the changes in the Army today verses the day we all joined. As the craft approaches the dive site, we stand and go through an equipment check. Finally, time to hit the water, we all labor to the opening where we will step off the deck, waited down by tanks, regulators and equipment; all walking in a waddle. Wait, I smile as I realize this all seems comfortably familiar.

By Kenneth Young