

JOB MARKET | VOCATIONS: THE PARACHUTE RIGGER

The Work Before the Parachute Jump

By **PATRICIA R. OLSEN** FEB. 1, 2014

Sgt. Virginia Musall, 28, is a parachute rigger for the Army at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Q. What does a parachute rigger do?

A. My unit packs parachutes for soldiers who are dropped into areas where the terrain makes it difficult for land travel or it's too dangerous. Packing includes spreading the chute out flat on a long, rectangular table, straightening any tangled suspension lines, folding the chute and inserting it into a bag similar to a backpack. I check the work of four other riggers. You have to run around the table, and the work is labor-intensive. The chutes can weigh up to 36 pounds. In packing the chutes, we go through a process that involves up to 12 safety checks, depending on the type of parachute.



Do you jump from planes yourself?

Riggers are required to do one jump every quarter, or four jumps a year. The first time I was a little nervous, but I just stood up, hooked a cord on the parachute to a steel cable in the aircraft and jumped. The next thing I knew I was on the ground.

Have you ever had a jump that didn't work out as planned?

I have. Last November, I drifted away from the target area, landed in a tree and hung from a branch 50 feet off the ground for two hours. Six or eight of my fellow soldiers waited below and kept me company until I could be rescued. A wrecker truck with a telescoping arm raised a soldier to a few feet below me, and I climbed down to him. That got my adrenaline pumping.

Have you ever been deployed?

Yes. In 2012, I served in Afghanistan. We dropped supplies like food, water and ammunition to soldiers, and items they might get at a U.S.O., such as for personal hygiene. We loved being able to surprise the soldiers occasionally with treats such as lobster and home-baked goods.

What are your future plans?

I'm studying for a college degree in legal studies, online, through [American Military University](http://AmericanMilitaryUniversity.com). I'd like to do something in the legal field eventually. I have a full-time course of study, and my rigger job is full time, so I have some late nights.