

## JBER parachute rigger always sure of responsibility

Friday, April 10, 2015 16:27



by Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson  
JBER Public Affairs

4/10/2015 - **JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** - "Maybe it was the sound of the plane that freaked me out," said Spc. Brittany Williams. "It was really loud."

The C-130 Hercules began its short ascent to 1,200 feet while five noncommissioned officers attempted to placate Williams and the other trainees suffering a heightened understanding of their own mortality.

"Stand up and hook up," the jumpmaster shouted, his command competing with the roaring wind and whining engines, each fighting to be heard over the other.

"I was losing it," Williams said. "Why am I here? Why am I doing this? Why did I join the Army?"

"Stand by."

This is it. This is the moment, Williams told herself.

"Green light! Go!"

"When I heard that, my emotions froze," Williams said. "It was very surreal."

Williams handed her static line to the jumpmaster without fear and jumped out into the air. She trusted whoever prepared her parachute knew what he was doing; and that the security checks in place were sufficient.

As she plummeted toward the ground, she tried to count to four by thousands, but only managed a grunt before her parachute opened, suspending her in the air.

“That moment when my parachute opened,” Williams said, “I was so happy.”

Now, as a parachute rigger assigned to the 4th Quartermaster Company, 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne), 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, U.S. Army Alaska, Williams is the one making sure somebody else makes it safely to the ground. 15 'somebodies' a day to be exact.

The minimum time standard for packing a T-11 personnel parachute system is two per hour, and 15 is the maximum a rigger can pack in a day.

Riggers at the JMC always do the maximum.

“First, you have to breathe,” Williams said. “That's what goes through my mind. Breathe, and pack each chute as if I were going to jump it myself.”

Only after earning their wings in jump school can a trainee be accepted into rigger school.

During school, riggers spend weeks learning the intricacies of packing the T-10, T-11, and MC-6 parachutes.

They also learn the Rigger's Pledge, and one particular line manifests itself in a very real way during their training.

I will pack every parachute as though I am to jump with it myself, and will stand ready to jump with any parachute which I have certified as properly packed.

After they have been taught proper procedures, they jump using a parachute they packed themselves.

Williams said this cements the grave responsibility every rigger faces each time they pack a chute, and forces them to have confidence in their own competence.

“At first, it was mind-boggling,” Williams said. “You really have to have confidence in yourself and your chute.”

Williams said throughout their career as parachute riggers, they must maintain active airborne status by jumping a minimum of four times a year - once every three months.

“I trust that the other riggers know exactly what they are doing, and that the checks are secure,” said Pfc. Luke Whittington, a parachute rigger assigned to the HHC, 725th Brigade Support Battalion. “They do their best on every chute, and they excel.”

At the JMC, Soldiers surround long wooden tables covered with parachutes in various stages of packing.

Red-hatted NCOs - responsible for inspecting each chute at each step of the process - move through the facility.

Packing a T-11 main parachute requires 12 steps, and 12 inspections before the inspector allows the rigger to proceed.

“It was really hard at first,” Williams said. “But you gain more confidence in yourself as you get inspected.”

After the chute clears the scrutiny of the IP, it goes to a final inspector who checks it for malfunctions before it is placed in the parachute cage.

Once in the cage, the parachutes go through yet another check before being considered ready for issue.

Lastly, the jumpmaster checks each paratrooper's chute before they jump, consulting with the parachute riggers on standby to serve as subject matter experts should the jumpmaster have any concerns.

The T-11 main parachute is checked a minimum of 16 times before a paratrooper places his life in the harness.

“I feel confident about each parachute coming out of this shop,” Whittington said. “It doesn't matter who packs it.”

“You have to have a strong mind and a strong body to pack parachutes,” Williams said. “My muscles will lock up, my elbows hurt, and my fingers will bleed, but [I] just have to ignore it. The chutes still need to be packed with the same quantity and the same quality.”

I will keep constantly in mind that until men grow wings, their parachutes must be dependable.

I will be sure - always.

Source: <http://military-online.blogspot.com/2015/04/jber-parachute-rigger-always-sure-of.html>