

# The Airborne Part of an Airborne Ranger

“There was blood upon the risers; there were brains upon the chute,  
Intestines were a-dangling from his paratrooper’s suit,  
He was a mess; they picked him up, and poured him from his boots,  
He ain’t gonna jump no more.  
Gory, gory, what a hell of a way to die,  
Gory, gory, what a hell of a way to die,  
Gory, gory, what a hell of a way to die,  
He ain’t gonna jump no more!”

-Blood Upon the Risers: World War 2 American Paratrooper Song

One of the best and worst parts of being an Airborne Ranger is the airborne part. Civilian types tend to have a misconception of what jumping out of airplanes is like in the Army. When they picture it, they think of all those skydiving videos where you pleasantly enjoy the view as you have the thrill of a lifetime, screaming at the top of your lungs, and with adrenaline pumping through your system. Then you land softly and celebrate because you faced one of your fears. During the whole thing you took pictures; you then post them on Facebook, and people comment about how truly wild and crazy you are. The whole thing probably took about three or four hours.

Like everything else in the Army, it’s a longer, more painful process. I’m not particularly scared of heights, but jumping out of an airplane was one of the training events I dreaded the most during my time in uniform. The process goes as follows:

You see on the training calendar that there is a jump coming up. You wonder if there is a way you can sham your way out of it, but sadly for you, you’re unable to weasel out. Fuck it. You joined the Army to jump out of airplanes and kill people, right?

To minimize the odds of you killing or maiming yourself and your buddies, the day before, you go through sustainment training. Sustainment training is where you get repounded into your head all the proper steps and procedures for conducting airborne operations that you learned in Airborne School. This involves going through a dry run of all the things you’re supposed to do as a group when you jump into the abyss. You play out perfectly the appropriate actions when you hook-up: Hand-off the static line, jump with your legs together in a tight body position, counting to four-thousand, and feeling the opening shock of the parachute. Then you make sure to check your canopy has no holes in it by looking up; if you’re unable to put your head up it’s because your risers are twisted, you bicycle kick to untwist yourself. You keep a sharp lookout during decent, make sure to avoid other jumpers, trees, telephone wires, and other potential hazards. You then play out what you will do if you do run into any of those hazards. You then prepare to land, putting a slight bend in your

knee, keeping your eyes to the horizon. You then land by hitting the balls of your feet followed by your calves, thighs, buttocks, and pull up muscle. They actually call it the pull up muscle. That's the end of sustainment training and now you are ready for your jump.

The next day, you go to the airfield to rig up your chute, harness, weapon, and put on your 45-plus-pound rucksack. God help you if you're a mortarman or a machine gun gunner; you have a shit-ton more weight to carry. You then get inspected by a Jump Master to make sure you didn't rig yourself all sorts of fucked up.

This is where the fun begins. The bird is probably going to be delayed by an hour or two. Meanwhile the harness is crushing your balls, and you're unable to move effectively because you have your heavy ass rucksack dangling from your waist. You're sitting down, using your helmet as a support for your lower back. While you're waiting for an unknowable amount of time, you fall asleep. Suddenly, you're awoken, still groggy; you are told to get up. You struggle to get yourself up and fumble around like a football, until one of your buddies takes pity on you and offers you a helpful hand. As you get to your feet, you realize you have to take a piss. Too late, dick face, your 50-plus buddies are already lining up to get on the bird. You don't really walk to the bird but instead press forward in waddle-like, hunched over fashion in order to support the weight you're carrying.

You approach the C-17, a humongous fortress of an airplane whose size leaves you in awe. Instantly the distinct smell of jet fuel and heat of the engines hit you. You follow the men in front up the ramp of the C-17 and take a seat. The ramp goes up, the plane taxis on the run way and takes off. As the plane settles into flight, the once roaring sounds of the engines turns into a hum.

Even if it's not your first jump, the feeling of uneasiness and fear never completely go away. This shit is fucking dangerous even with all the precautions the military takes. On my first jump in battalion, we had one of our men get his parachute tangled with two other jumpers and got killed in the horrible training accident. The other two Rangers suffered serious injuries. Broken ankles, legs, backs, and concussions occur enough to be a legitimate concern each time one rigs up their chute.

At times the flight only takes twenty minutes, at others several hours. The two side doors of the C-17 open, and your ears are consumed by the fury of the wind. It's hard to hear anything else. You see the Jump Master give you the signal to "Hook Up," and in unison everyone echoes the command. "Check equipment!" screams the Jump Master. You paranoiably check all your straps and hooks, making sure none of them somehow came undone. Then the soldier in the very back slaps the ass of the one in front of him while saying "Okay." This creates an ass slapping domino effect that continues until it reaches the very first jumper

who then says, “Okay Jump Master!”

You stand there with your ruck hanging between your legs waiting to jump. Its heavy, uncomfortable, and you’re hating your life. You probably should have just gone to college. Your back is cramping up; you lean to the side of the plane to help support yourself and relieve some of the stress. The plane is encountering some turbulence, and you know this jump is going to fucking suck. After being tortured by this, you’re not even scared of jumping anymore. You just want to get the fuck off the bird so you can take the goddamn ruck off from in between your legs.

“One minute,” echoes through the plane. You’re looking in front of you, eyes on the red light which will soon turn green. Finally, you’re getting off this fucking bird. “30 seconds,” the birds coming upon the drop zone, and you’re completely focused on what you’re going to do next. The Jump Master has placed the first jumper in front of the door. The light turns green and “Go!” orders the Jump Master as he slaps the first jumper’s ass signaling him to jump. With one-second spacing between them, each man proceeds after the other. Your mind goes blank as you walk towards the door, all the training kicks in and everything you’re suppose to do has become muscle memory at this point. You hand off your static line, make a right face, and jump. You count to four-thousand, keeping your body tight as you get sucked out. Your chute opens and the once deafening sound of jet engines and wind is replaced by the tranquility of the being airborne as you slowly descend to the Earth. You begin to look in all directions and see your buddies all around you. You’re hoping you don’t run into one of them. You see one is getting too close, and you pull the risers in an attempt to slip away, but they really don’t do much. He spreads-eagle and he bounces off your chute, going on his merry way.

Now you must prepare to land. You drop your ruck, grab your risers, hold them firmly, keep your eyes on the horizon, and bend your knees slightly. You hope you don’t land on thorn bushes or if you’re doing an air field seizure, on the tarmac. You hit the ground hard. It knocks the wind out of you. You lay there for a moment or two, trying to figure out if you’re hurt or have broken anything. Luckily everything seems to be fine, and you begin to perform your final point of performance: taking that piss you’ve been holding in since you got on the bird.