

Former Special Forces Soldier Proves Attitude Is Everything

By Samantha L. Quigley
American Forces Press Service

ORLANDO, Fla., Dec. 10, 2004 – Dana Bowman was a member of the Special Forces and the Army's elite parachute team, the Golden Knights, during his military career. He retired from the military in 1996 with the rank of sergeant 1st class.

While he has continued parachuting, Bowman has gone on to become a seaplane certified pilot, a commercial hot air balloon pilot and a commercial helicopter instructor pilot. This is in addition to earning a commercial aviation degree.

But this is only part of the reason he was asked to speak at the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes: 1st Annual Road to Recovery and Tribute here Dec. 9.

The other reason for his speech goes back to Feb. 6, 1994.

The Golden Knights Parachute team was practicing in Yuma, Ariz. Bowman and his teammate, Sgt. Jose Aguillon, were practicing a maneuver they had done dozens of times without incident. It required them to move away from each other and then turn 180 degrees back toward each other, causing their paths to cross.

The two collided. Aguillon's outstretched arm sheared off both of Bowman's legs – one above the knee and one below. Aguillon was killed instantly.

Five months after the accident, Bowman sneaked out of Washington's Walter Reed Army Medical Center and returned to the Golden Knights to prove he could still participate. Nine months after the accident, he made history by becoming the first double amputee to re-enlist in the Army.

"(I) showed the military and the Pentagon, believe it or not, that there was still a place for me," he said.

Bowman worked hard to get to where he is now. Both he and his doctors at the time of the accident credit his rapid recovery to his good physical condition.



Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Dana Bowman speaks to the wounded and disabled veterans at the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes: 1st Annual Road to Recovery Tribute and Conference in Orlando, Fla., on Dec. 9. Bowman, the first double amputee to re-enlist in the Army, lost both of his legs in a mid-air collision while training with The Golden Knights parachute team in Yuma, Ariz., in 1994. Photo by Samantha L. Quigley

He did struggle and stumble a bit along the way, but realized that was all part of the process, he said. And that was the message he delivered to the wounded and disabled veterans attending the conference: Falling down is OK – in fact, he said he broke more than a few prosthetic legs parachuting after the accident - but you have to get up and try again.

He knows of what he speaks. Bowman has made more than 1,000 jumps since his accident. And he challenged those present to do the same -- to take part in life.

"I challenge each and every one of you here today to take part. It's important," he said. Perhaps more importantly, by showing a film of him achieving his goals of continuing to parachute and learning to fly a helicopter requiring a great deal of footwork among other activities after becoming a double amputee, Bowman showed the assembled disabled veterans that with the right attitude, they can still grab life by the horns.

"It's having a great attitude. It's using technology," Bowman said. "Your disabilities are the things you think you can't do."

He worked with the Department of Veterans Affairs to earn his bachelor's degree in commercial aviation from the University of North Dakota.

Bowman said his motto rings true: "It's not the disability, it's the ability."