

## "Imagine That...(2) - Hazardous Duty Incentive Pay (HDIP): Anything for a Buck?"

By Carl "J.C." Pantejo, Copyright May 2008

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"[Life] Amazing! Isn't it?..."

- Volunteering for Extra Pay -

I was always pretty "open-minded" about extra pay. What the Hell, I got'ta work anyway, right? Why not get a little extra, for just a little extra misery.

One time I volunteered for Experimental Pay that involved me doing a cold-weather mission "while wearing a core body temperature data collection device."

The data was needed to engineer better anti-exposure gear for missions where hypothermia was a real danger; and also to design nutritionally sound, cold-weather MRE's (meals, ready to eat) individualized to the size and activity of each operator.

In reality, the "...while wearing a core body temperature data collection device" was the official way of saying that I and my whole team were doing our jobs in a very cold region WITH RECTAL THERMOMETERS FIRMLY LODGED UP OUR BUTTS AND ANCHORED THERE BY AN INFLATABLE BULB AT THE END OF EACH PROBE!

Needless to say, it was a hassle to take a dump – and rather painful if you forgot to deflate the bulb!

Another time, when the military was designing new ejection seat trainers for their jet pilots, I volunteered for ejection seat training duty. In the old days, the trainers used live charges instead of pneumatic propulsion and hydraulic breaks. I "shrunk" a centimeter or two (because of spinal disc compression), but later regained my full, manly height of 5' 5" a few months later.

One more Extra-Pay Duty story?

O.K.

A study was ordered to measure the effects of full body armor (Kevlar) in the event of emergency egress from a downed helicopter. I got first dibs on this assignment because...well, mainly because no one else volunteered!

That should've been a sign.

Anyway, I strapped into the 9D5 NAWSTP (Naval Aviation Water Survival Training Program) helicopter emergency multi-egress/crash simulator.

The simulator resembles a giant oil drum. The inside "cabin" is about the size of the cabin of a troop transport helo. It is suspended above a small, training tank (pool) by thick, steel cables. When the operator/engineer is prompted, he releases tension on the supporting cables and the device slams into the water (just like a real helo would during an emergency crash landing into the ocean). Then, as all top-heavy helicopters do, the device begins to turn upside down.

I knew/taught all the correct egress procedures.

I remained strapped into the seat. I took a nice, long breath before the water level reached my mouth and nose. I kept a little internal air pressure in my nose to keep the water from filling up my sinuses.

(It's always amusing to me how a huge Marine can morph into a panicky, little baby when confronted with an underwater emergency - simulated or not. The disorientation and water up the nose causes many rough and tumble, macho, overly muscled Marines to panic, unbuckle too early, and get trapped in the trainer.

I think the only other thing that produces more sheer terror in these finely tuned, mindless killing machines [translated: first-wave, canon fodder] is the sight of an immunization needle.

I sh\*t you not! I've had many a monster Marine pass out when I waved a needle and syringe in front of him!

It's hilarious and not really a problem.

My only concern is that the big boy doesn't hurt himself with his fall to the ground, slump into the chair, or the instant, involuntary prone position on the gurney. After a nice chuckle, I just inject the passed out Marine with the originally prescribed medication, break an ammonium nitrate ampule under his nose, and tell the now awake killer that the brain surgery/castration/rectal exam is over and done with - no problem.)

Back to the helo crash simulation.

Inverted, I waited for all violent motion to stop. I took a handhold of the seat beside me and reached for my buckle. It was stuck/jammed. No worries. I'd taught this to my survival students and done this procedure thousands of times. I hit the locking mechanism with my fist, making sure it was fully locked down; then tried to open the buckle again. It opened. Cool.

But the normal smooth, underwater weightlessness I'd experienced in the past was replaced with a vicious surge to the surface. Like a bug on a car's windshield, I was plastered on the upside down deck of the simulator.

"Imagine That." Kevlar floats!

The body armor was so buoyant that I was stuck, upside down on the deck of the 9D5. Even worse, the rest of the gear I had on was getting snagged on everything in my egress path. Cargo hooks, helo frame, and seats proved to be just one more thing to disentangle myself from before I could leave the simulator.

I'm not sure how long I'd been holding my breath. Activity and emotional state can severely cut your breath holding time.

Outside the trainer, the safety diver, a buddy of mine, motioned the "need assistance" signal.

I smiled and waived him off.

Finally, I said "f\*ck it," grabbed my HEEDs (helicopter emergency egress device – a small SCUBA bottle the size of a large café-latte at Starbucks), purged the mini-regulator of water, and took a breath of compressed air.

This was always a last resort because ascent to the surface and breathing had to be controlled afterwards. On a breath hold, one could rule out the dangers of DCS (decompression sickness) and AGE (arterial gas embolism - the more serious condition when a bubble travels through the blood vessels and lodges in some rather inconvenient places; namely the heart or brain).

Oh well, it was going to be a longer day than I expected.

Without the immediate need for air, I methodically doffed the Kevlar vest, and hooked it around my arm. I looked at my buddy and waived my middle finger at the Kevlar vest.

My buddy took out his regulator, smiled, and stuck his thumb in his mouth. Then he simulated poking himself in the ass with it. The meaning was obvious: F\*ck me! I'm never wearing Kevlar in a helicopter flying over the water!

And neither will I.

- A Bad Day at work -

Back to the situation at hand: "Big Army Parachute, Not-So-Big Man."

I knew it was going to be a bad day when the archaic body harness of the big parachute and opening shock made me feel like I was being split in half - from the crotch up!

After beating on my numbed legs, I immediately checked my canopy and saw the next hint of my bad day.

Reflexively, I said out loud, "Imagine That" (my personal "bleeding down" catch-phrase).

For those of you who haven't been indoctrinated into the wonderful world of hazardous duty, let me cue you in. Almost all operators have a "bleeding down or releasing pressure," personal catch-phrase they say to themselves to instantly calm down.

These catch-phrases serve a vital purpose. They put you into a mindset that's conducive to survival, especially when you're "having a bad day at work."

Catch-phrases will:

1. Delete damaging/time-consuming emotions from your current scenario.
2. Help you mentally step out of a hazardous/time-sensitive situation to facilitate quick – often life-saving - decisions objectively (as an observer, not a participant).
3. Relax you (even make you laugh) as you marvel at the absurdity of life!

Again, I said, "Imagine That."

Above my head, instead of a heavenly full, round canopy, I saw what resembled a huge, used condom! Either a line-over or static electricity was preventing air from inflating my chute.

I was oscillating wildly.

All my attempts to inflate the main chute proved unsuccessful. I spread the main shoulder risers – nothing. I did a pull-up and climbed up on one riser and let go – hoping that the popping, spring action of my bodyweight would let some air enter the canopy. No joy. I looked for the usual 4-line release system (a way of controlling/steering a parachute by releasing four lines at the rear of the canopy), but then remembered that this was an old army chute with no such capabilities.

I pondered whether I should try and find the possible line-over and start cutting lines (one by one) with my hooked shroud line cutter.

By experience, I could "feel" that I had not regained terminal velocity (about 147 mph)...yet. It was probably because of the minor friction caused by the "Used Rubber" flailing above me. Physicists will tell you that one square yard will decrease your free-fall momentum by up to 20 per cent.

But a quick glance at the on-rushing ground (perception of ground color begins around the 10,000 to 12,000 foot ceiling) and verification with my wrist altimeter told me that I really didn't have much time for playing Sherlock Holmes/Brain Surgeon with any offending shroud lines.

Damn, I hate it when this happens...

[Continued in "Imagine That...(3) - Medical Turf Wars and Angels of Mercy Revisited."]

Your friend in this Intrepid Journey called Life,

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Hazardous Duty Incentive Pay, Kevlar, hypothermia, experimental, hashish, line-over.

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(By Carl “J.C.” Pantejo and published internet-wide, keyword: [title of article] or “Carl Pantejo”)

### About the Author

He is a retired U.S. Military veteran. Believing that school was too boring, he dropped out of High School early; only to earn an A.A., B.S., and MBA in less than 4 years much later in life – while working full-time as a Navy/Marine Corps Medic. In spite of a fear of heights and deep water, he free-fall parachuted out of airplanes and performed diving ops in very deep, open ocean water. Pantejo@ynvurcepublishing.com  
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