

Stars and Stripes
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AF Sgt. Makes 800th Jump

“I Come Down Easy”

SEMBACH, Germany

After 24 years of military life and 800 parachute jumps you'd think 43-year-old T. Sgt. Alfred O. Souza might consider calling it quits.

But the rugged combat veteran, now assigned here with the 7th Air Commando Sq. has no thoughts of retiring as he continues a pace that would bush many younger men.

Souza's unit is loaded with Vietnam returnees who are specialists at just about everything from jungle survival to mountain climbing.

Assigned with the 7th's air-borne electronic maintenance section, he is NCOIC of the unit's Combat Control Team.

Witty and fast on the uptake, the dark haired commando speaks English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Souza started his service early in 1943 as a member of the Army's famous Merrill's Marauders. Always a man of action, he fought in the Burmese jungles in the rugged Merrill outfit.

Once, fighting a platoon-sized skirmish against the Japanese, Souza was separated from his unit for 72 days. He lived off the land, eating everything from lizards to rice, and got handouts from friendly native's, he says.

In 1965 Souza spent a year in Vietnam with the 1st Air Cavalry, Div (Airmobile).

Souza's present-day duties fall into a precise pattern. As NCOIC of the Combat Control team, his crew must jump in advance of the main element and mark drop zones, day or night.

With full gear, Souza may have as much as 95 pounds. “But,” Souza says, “I come down easy.”

Souza made his 800th military parachute jump last month. He e and proudly wears the master parachute badge and beret.

"There's no age limit for jumping", Souza says. But military parachutists in the 7th must pass a "Phase 3" flight physical annually, insuring that they are fit to continue jumping. No need to

worry, Souza looks as fit at 43, as a 20-year-old youngster fresh out of airborne or Special Forces training.

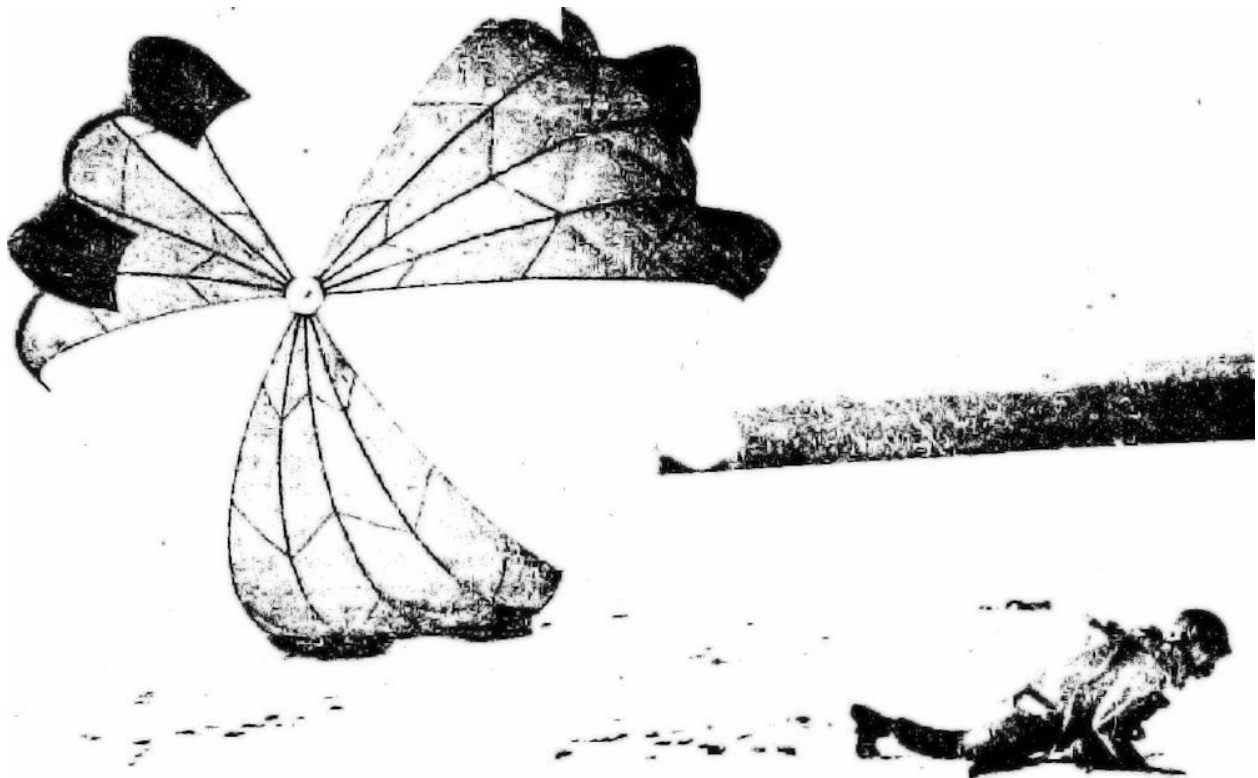
The sergeant's only two injuries in 21 years of jumping were minor. One came during a high altitude jump—his highest—from 20,500 feet at Fort Bragg, N.C. in 1964. Souza's parachute streamed out between his legs, creating what he calls a "bad opening." The result was torn leg ligaments, which fortunately only temporarily slowed down the tough paratrooper.

The other injury occurred here in 1967 when opening shock caused a neck abrasion.

What are Souza's feelings at jump time? "I take it in my stride normally," he said. "Only occasionally do I get a little edgy before a jump."

He said the main thing is the pre-jump equipment checkout.

Souza took his jump training at Fort Benning, Ga. in 1947 when the course was still of six-week's duration. During his Army years he was a member of the 101st Airborne Div and other units.



DOWN TO EARTH JOB; Souza makes a landing in a snow covered area near Sembach

Sent by Patrick Aguilar