

Watch out Jaws, here comes a Combat Diver!

Kevin Bubolz, a 20-year-old student in the ROTC Army program at Marquette University, was selected to be one of the first ROTC cadets to participate in the Special Forces Combat Diving Qualification Course in Key West, Florida this past summer. There, he went through hard extensive training that would result in him becoming certified in Special Forces Combat.

Kevin Bubolz may just look like a built, Abercrombie & Fitch-wearing pretty boy on the exterior, becoming easily noticeable by ladies wherever he goes. But, he was actually the first student from Marquette University ever to participate in the Special Forces Combat Diving Qualification Course in Key West, Florida, this past summer.



Taking interest in the military at an early age, too early to even remember, Bubolz jokingly stated that from the second he could crawl as a baby, he knew it was an “army” crawl. Other than his grandfather having been in the Marines for about four years, Bubolz is the first of his family to have taken the military this seriously.

“Although probably a generic answer,” he stated, “my favorite part about being in the Army is knowing that I am serving my country, and feeling as though my life has a purpose.”

ROTC

Currently a junior at Marquette, Bubolz is ranked at the top of his class in the ROTC Army program where the main focus is teaching cadets to become Army officers where they will be a leaders, counselors, strategists and motivators. This past spring, Bubolz was offered an opportunity of a lifetime: to participate in the Special Forces Combat Diver Qualification Course, which is generally only reserved for Special Forces Soldiers and Army Rangers. This is the first time the course has ever opened their doors to ROTC cadets. The course is designed to teach Special Forces Soldiers how to complete a mission using water as an advantage.

Bubolz and his friends coming out of the water while completing a mission set by the instructors.

As a combat diver, “We primarily focus on using the water to approach an objective undetected, get in and get out without anybody even knowing you were there,” said Bubolz.

The first Marquette student to ever take part in this course, Bubolz was one of eight ROTC cadets to actually pass the Combat Diver Qualification Course. They were accompanied by 46 others, including Special Forces Soldiers, men having just served in Iraq and other soldiers from around the country. A total of 32 soldiers passed the course along with Bubolz.

“It’s not that I beat the 17 soldiers that did not pass, the course is just simply not for everybody. Not everybody is comfortable in the water.” Bubolz stated, “They are still heroes and have done things that people couldn’t even imagine.”

Combat Diver

Bubolz explained that the first day of Combat Diving involved a lot of physical training, testing whether or not they would be able to handle the rest of the course. This was all after they had to pass a two week training course at West Point Academy, in New York, prior to being able to go to Key West for Combat Diving.

A majority of the course involved paying close attention to detail, one day including how to “jock up,” which is what they call putting on all of their gear. The importance of paying close attention to detail may one day save their lives while underwater. The instructors want them to know how to put all of their gear on, in order, in case it was to be thrown off

underwater in rough surf conditions. After a quick demonstration, they were then told to complete the thirty step process themselves in five minutes. If they were to mess up one step or go out of order at all, they were “smoked,” told to swim the length of the pool, back and forth, without taking a breath while completing various tasks.

Bubolz said that one of the most difficult activities in the school was the “One-Man Comp.” During this activity, he was blindfolded underwater with his scuba tank and gear. For the first ten minutes, the instructors simulated rough surf conditions.

He stated that “They would come down, throw you around, flip you upside down, push you, hit you, just like these things could happen to you in the ocean. They then pull your air source from you.”

Bubolz and his other Combat Divers were then put on their knees at the bottom of the pool where their instructors came up behind them and removed their air hoses. They would tie the air hoses to other hoses and tubes and continually tangle and hide them in the divers’ equipment, simulating confusion after rough surf. Bubolz recalls how every time he calmly retrieved his air hose and put it in his mouth for a breath, it was immediately ripped out again, sometimes leaving him to start again with only half a breath in him.

He explained, “Mentally there were times where I reached my edge...[but] everybody had the mentality that they would rather pass out and blackout underwater than panic and give up.”

Looking back at his favorite part of the whole experience, Kevin and his fellow divers jumped out of a C-130 plane, a large military plane, and parachuted into the ocean on a “mission objective.” Traveling under the depths of the ocean on Diver Propulsion Devices, DPD’s, miniaturized, high-tech, two-person subs, Bubolz was tapped by his fellow diver on the DPD with him. There were dolphins swimming with them.

One of Bubolz’s closest friends at Marquette, David Fornetti had the privilege of communicating with Kevin almost every day he was at Combat Diving School. Fornetti stated that one of the most interesting stories he heard of was when Bubolz and his fellow classmates were coming up onto a public beach from out of the water; they were fully equipped with Combat Diving gear and fake guns.

Fornetti explained and laughed, “We talked and laughed about the looks on people’s faces that were just sitting on the beach, having no idea what was going on...I mean, wouldn’t you freak out if you saw men in all black military gear rise up out of the water with guns?”

Coming Back

Currently back at Marquette, Bubolz has become a bit more popular in the ROTC Army program. After passing the Special Forces Combat Diving Qualification Course, all of his Officers and instructors at Marquette would not stop hounding him for information about what it was like and how he felt about the whole experience.

Also, many things in the ROTC Army program have become much easier for him now, referencing that most of the water exercises the ROTC Army program has them partake in would be considered “play time” at the Combat Diving School. At Marquette, the ROTC Army cadets have to tread water for about 20 minutes. On the first day of Combat Diving School, Bubolz had to tread water for over an hour, just to warm up. Overall, he said that it was one of the greatest experiences he could have ever asked for.

He explained that even if he could, he would not go back to change one thing about his Combat Diving experience stating, “It was the time of my life.”