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DSS Special Agent Zach Bowen (in a Red/White/Blue T-shirt) escorts U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Ronald Johnson (in a black jumpsuit) to the plane for a bit of skydiving in the Ilopango Airshow, Ilopango, El Salvador, Feb. 1, 2020. (U.S. Department of State photo)

Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) special agents come from diverse backgrounds and possess unique skills that come in handy when protecting ambassadors and foreign diplomats with specialized hobbies. If a protectee wants to run in a marathon, surf big waves or jump out of an airplane, DSS has a special agent ready to go.

Just such an opportunity came up at the Ilopango Airshow in El Salvador in early February. The airshow attracts tens of thousands of spectators, and the U.S. ambassador is often a guest of honor. This year, Ambassador Ronald Johnson was a guest and a participant. He parachuted in the airshow with Salvadoran civilian and military skydivers—and was accompanied by DSS Special Agent Zachary Bowen.

Ambassador Johnson and Special Agent Bowen are licensed expert skydivers with more than 2,000 jumps. The clear skies above Ilopango and 80-degree temps made it the perfect day to skydive.



DSS Special Agent Zach Bowen (in Red/White/Blue T-shirt) checks the parachute worn by U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Ronald Johnson (in black jumpsuit) before skydiving in the Ilopango Airshow, Ilopango, El Salvador, Feb. 1, 2020. (U.S. Department of State photo)

The airplane ascended to 10,000 feet, and one-by-one the Salvadoran skydivers disappeared into the blue sky beyond the open door. Special Agent Bowen braced himself on the outside of the airplane to film the ambassador's exit, and together they jumped.

They enjoyed 45 seconds of freefall, and the ambassador executed a few 360 degree turns and a backflip before pulling the ripcord and deploying his parachute.

Watch the video below.

U S Ambassador to El Salvador Ronald Johnson skydives in the Ilopango Airshow



U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Ronald Johnson skydives in the Ilopango Airshow, Ilopango, El Salvador, Feb. 1, 2020. (U.S. Department of State photo)

The ambassador was clearly enjoying himself, but unexpected wind changes or a malfunctioning parachute could have pushed him off course. Had he not made it to the designated landing area where his protective detail was waiting, Special Agent Bowen was prepared to land with him, report their position and protect him if necessary. Fortunately, all went as planned and they nailed the landing.

“It was an honor to accompany the ambassador while he was freefalling over El Salvador,” said Bowen. “DSS agents protect anywhere, anytime—and sometimes we have a hell of a lot of fun doing it.”

TAGS

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