

Release Authority

LCDR Dawn Stankus



[PAO@cvn76.navy.mil](mailto:PAO@cvn76.navy.mil)

619-545-4205

## **Never give up: A dual citizen reaches for her dream**

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cameron C. Edy

No matter the obstacle in her path nor challenges she may face, Logistics Specialist 3rd Class Silvia Bohorquez will not give up until she achieves her dream.

When she was eight-years-old her mother took her to the ocean, in her native country Colombia, where they visited a naval base and she saw the U.S. Navy for the first time.

"I saw the white uniforms, and just behind them a massive Navy ship, and I fell in love," said Bohorquez. "I turned to my mom and said 'mom, that's what I want to do when I grow up,' and since then my mind was made up. I actually tried to join when I was 16, and walked right into the recruiter's office when I was visiting [the U.S.] as a tourist. The second they found out I wasn't an American citizen, the recruiters had to turn me away."

At 18 years old, she moved to Broward, Florida on a working visa and earned her American citizenship eight years later. She returned to the recruiter with her heart set on U.S. naval special warfare.

"The recruiters they told me that I couldn't go spec-ops because I was born in Colombia and I still hold dual-citizenship," said Bohorquez. "I became 'undesigned,' which then led to the deck department on USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), and [on my path to] becoming a SAR [search-and-rescue] swimmer."

She was within reach of her goal, but she still had to prove she had what it takes. After countless requests to join the SAR program, she finally got her chance.

"I told my divisional officer 'I want to do this!' After being turned away, I just kept it up until one day they said 'go to the pool,'" said Bohorquez. "I walked in and was the only female. Everyone around me

was big and muscled. They started off with '5-4's, meaning a 500-meter swim and 400-meter sidestroke while dragging a partner behind you – all under 27 minutes. They told me I didn't have to do it, but I wanted to. I grabbed the biggest guy, pure muscle, 300 pounds, and I finished the exercise in 19 minutes. That's the day I got the full support of the team and became part of the SAR program."

Bohorquez is comfortable in the water but her biggest impediment during her on-station training was the pull-up portion of the physical screening test (PST). Loaded with weights, she worked pull-ups every day, ran between sets, and mixed pushups in the workouts. Once her chain of command was confident in her ability they sent her to school.

"I was in quarters, and my Chief just let it out. 'You're going to school,'" said Bohorquez. "I get there, jet-lagged, last one to arrive, and I think 'I can't believe I'm here.' And immediately after the paperwork, I get hit with the P-S-T and the first part of it is pull-ups. I thought I was just going to hit the bar and do my thing, but we start on-count. Those first four were a struggle, but after that, we go at our own pace, and once I passed I knew I could handle everything else. Then people started dropping [out of the program]."

The course is not just a swim test. SAR school is as taxing as it is comprehensive, teaching students everything from how to disconnect pilot uniforms and handle parachute wraps, to the treatment of spinal injuries while in the water. This is all amidst a rigorous physical training schedule; training the body while sharpening the mind.

Bohorquez expected training at the SAR school on Naval Base San Diego to be difficult, but there was one aspect she did not expect: There were no other females there. Bohorquez was the first female SAR-candidate her instructor had ever taught. While she explained how supportive everyone was throughout the course, she noted some unpredictable challenges in the process.

"You always have to have a partner," said Bohorquez. "I was number 21, always kind of alone. When I had to use the head, I had to use the instructor head, announce 'female on-deck', and leave a note on the door. And I went through the pool changing room alone too. It's funny – when leaving the area, you

have to shout 'last man,' let everyone know there's no-one alone in the pool, and I'm number 21, so I was always the last out. The instructors came and asked, 'are you ok saying last man? Would you rather say last female?' I didn't care, something like that doesn't bother me. I just wanted to swim. What stuck with me was how supportive everyone was throughout the school."

Bohorquez completed the school and returned to Blue Ridge as the only SAR-qualified female in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations at that time. But then it came time to pick a rate.

"My whole dream was to be a Navy Diver," said Bohorquez. "But then they came to me and said 'it's time to pick a rate.' My first option up was Logistics Specialist and I was happy to choose it, but my overall goal stayed the same."

Even with her rate chosen she still worked towards diving. The package took her a while, but she continued to meet every requirement. She trained at the dive locker on Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, received a letter of recommendation from the master divers and was physically ready to take the PST. All she had to do was retake her ASVAB to be eligible.

"I missed it by one point," said Bohorquez. "There was no waiver for that. It made me want to give up, but every time it came to that point I felt that I at least have to try."

Bohorquez is still striding towards her dream despite the many hurdles she has already cleared. She recently submitted a package to be a Logistics Specialist at a U.S. Navy SEAL command and, if accepted, she will have the opportunity to attend jump schools and further training that would put her closer to her goal.

A Colombian tourist on a working visa came to the U.S. to be a special warfare operator and was turned away due to her birthplace and lack of American citizenship. She returned with her American citizenship eight years later. An undesignated seaman wanted to be a SAR swimmer and had to work for her shot. She responded by pulling the biggest classmate through the pool, and dominating the course with unparalleled energy and motivation. A SAR

swimmer wanted to be a U.S. Navy diver, but a test score stood in her way. She answered by applying to deploy with the U.S. Navy SEALs.

“I have to live my dream of being spec-ops,” said Bohorquez. “I’ve never been someone who can sit back or fall down. When I joined the Navy, I came and said, ‘I’m here for 20 years.’ Then something happens that breaks me down. But I don’t want to give up on my dream.”

Ronald Reagan, the flagship of Carrier Strike Group 5, along with the embarked airwing, provides a combat-ready force that protects and defends the collective maritime interests of its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

###