

Bail Out When You Have to Go

The purpose of these notes is to suggest a Check List that pilots may consult to assist in their planning in case of need. Clearly this List is intended to be used from time to time to help in being prepared in the unlikely event of deciding to bailout. It is far too late once the need to jump exists.

By way of background there are two incidents that have significantly influenced the content of this List. The first was a midair collision that occurred many years ago involving two gliders. I saw the falling wreckage from the ground and later visited the impact site. One pilot remained with his out of control glider and crashed. Rescuers found him in the cockpit with parachute harness undone and seat harness fastened !

The second incident occurred when I was flying straight and level at about 3000 ft. Another glider rammed me from behind, totally disabling the glider and requiring me to bailout. This was successfully achieved with only minor injuries resulting.

I have a very clear recollection of the circumstances surrounding my bailout yet I know from other evidence that some things happened that I have no recollection. My point being that in such an emergency some actions are apparently instinctive or pre-learnt, and therefore there is an opportunity to improve our chances by planning.

Check List

Be familiar with your parachute, particularly the actuating handle. This is normally a "D ring". Where is it ? How do you grab it and with which hand ? In which direction should it be pulled? Left handed pilots take particular note. Practice.

- Sit in your cockpit as prepared for flight. Understand the canopy release mechanism. Can you reach it?
- What obstacles are there to impede you leaving? Check camera mounts, microphones, water tubes, cables etc. Permanently relocate as many as possible. The instrument cluster itself maybe a problem, and you will need to consider how you will get out. Remember your glider may be out of control and this probably will make it more difficult to bailout in any case.
- Before each flight; pre-flight the parachute, check ripcord safeties and "D ring" stowage. Know how to fit the parachute correctly and do so.

- Whenever you land your glider climb out of the cockpit with your parachute on. This requires you to release your seat harness **only**, and take your chute with you. A good habit.
- Is your parachute in good condition ? Regular packing and care could be a lifesaver.

Some additional tips that may be of interest

Be aware that most of our parachutes are emergency chutes, that is a canopy diameter of about 26ft. This reduces the bulk in the cockpit, but does mean the descent rate is a little high. They are designed to save life and some injury on impact is possible.

Should I try to make a radio call if I have to bailout? No, forget it unless your glider is sufficiently under control to give sufficient time. To get a reliable position broadcast if out of control will take too long. Rely on the emergency services. If you are flying remote to emergency services then you should be carrying an emergency position/location transmit device.

On landing treat your situation as if it was an outlanding.

Finally it should be noted that there are a small but worrying number of fatal accidents where a glider crashes for no identifiable reason. I am making no assumptions about that, but we do know it can take a fit/uninjured pilot many thousands of feet altitude to get out of a disabled glider into a deployed parachute.

If a serious problem develops make your decision early.

Daryl Connell