

Survival is not an Accident

THESE ARE WORDS TO LIVE BY. WHEN ASKED TO WRITE a survival article I think back on all the columns I've written about this subject. I look at the photos on the wall of my shop as I enter each morning showing people standing by an unrecognizable heap that was once their airplane. At my seminars, I joke when I show the photos and explain that the pile of wreckage was not badly damaged. If they can just find the gas cap and screw a new airplane to it, it would be just like new. That always gets a chuckle or two, but the near-death experience these pilots have had often has something in common, and I'm not talking about luck. They may have been lucky to have survived the mid-air collision with enough altitude and time to bail out. Luck also may have played a part in their being able to egress their disabled aircraft. After the initial shock wears off, you realize your life depends on making some very quick decisions, and that is not luck. Are you pre-

pared to survive? Do you have a game plan?

The key to survival of any kind is anticipating the worst possible scenario beforehand and being prepared for it. Since I'm talking about aircraft survival, I don't need to discuss having a smoke alarm in your home. After all that has been drummed in our heads over and over. The evening news talks about another tragedy that could have been averted had the home been equipped with working and well-maintained smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. The same holds true for your parachute and any survival equipment you wear or carry on you. Just having it along for the ride is not enough. You must be familiar with your parachute and the contents of your survival gear. You must keep them in working condition, especially if batteries are involved. Have a time when you change them. Like at each annual. This is also a good time to review the contents of your kit. Have your rigger go over your

Learn it, link it, and live it

BY ALLEN SILVER

parachute with you. Many of you don't even know if your parachute is steerable let alone know what color the steering handles are. Over the years I've had more than a few pilots pick up their parachutes by the rip cord thinking it was the carrying handle, only to realize it was the rip cord. If you would like a quick review on parachute survival, you can go to www.EAA.org/webinar and watch my bailout seminar. It goes down rather well with a glass of wine or a cup of coffee to keep you awake.

At each seminar I give, I ask my audience how many carry survival equipment with them. Quite a few hands go up. Then I ask how many have it stored in their aircraft? Very few hands go down. On the average, about 80 to 90 percent of those who carry survival equipment have it safely stowed away in their aircraft.

Let me be the first to tell you that is not survival gear. It's called camping gear. If you want to call it survival gear, it must be carried on you or your parachute. You just survived a bailout, and your plane went over the next ridge before impacting the ground. If it didn't explode, it dug a crater that destroyed your camping gear. Either way it does you no good. Oh, did I mention you have a badly sprained ankle or, worse, a broken leg and are not getting around too good? You'd really like to be found. It's getting late in the day and you're not relishing the idea of spending a night in the woods. What were those strange sounds you just heard in the bushes?

About now you think it would be nice if you had some way of signaling for help. Signaling for help could have started by you filing a flight plan, letting



ISTOCK



Photo 1



Photo 2

someone know when you will be returning or arriving so they can call out the posse, if necessary. Remember, you have to carry your survival equipment with you either attached to your parachute harness in a safe location or on you personally. Never attach anything to your parachute harness that will interfere with the opening of your parachute. If you have any doubts about where you

can put these items, contact your rigger or take a picture and e-mail it to your rigger or me with your idea.

Now, let's take a look at Photo 1. Is this overkill? Is this Rambo? Or, is this person prepared? They've attached a light blue pouch with a handheld radio to the upper right side of their parachute. Please note this is not attached on top of the shoulder where it will interfere with the opening of the parachute.

If you need a better explanation of this, I suggest you go to the home page of my website and click on "Ask Allen." Then scroll down to my August 2009 column and refresh yourself on where *not* to attach your PLB, Spot, survival kit, or kitchen sink. Attaching any item in the wrong area could be disastrous. Let's return to Photo 1. Below the radio pouch is my Mini SMAK Pak, and this pilot also attached another larger SMAK Pak just above the rip-cord pocket to hold a Spot unit. Make sure you don't cover the rip-cord handle. Now let's take a look at a parachute that came into my shop recently for servicing. The



Photo 4. Mini SMAK Pak.



Photo 3

pilot attached his survival kit (see Photo 2) to the leg strap with a piece of parachute cord. Now go to Photo 3 and I'll explain what's wrong. Never attach anything to the snaps. It could interfere with unsnapping them. This survival kit, whipping around in the wind, could easily snag on something during egress. Don't worry, it won't be there for long. The cord is attached through the zipper, near the pouch. The metal is very thin here, and I'm pretty confident it'll break at that point, and there go your chances of being found quickly.

What should I carry *on* me? It depends on whether you want to be found quickly or you want to camp out for awhile. Most of my Air Force career was working with survival equipment (I also have about 3,200 jumps), and I feel the most important items should be devices that help to quickly locate you. This is why, several years ago, I came up with my Mini SMAK Pak. I also have larger versions. If you're wondering what SMAK Pak stands for, check out my website.

All of my kits have one thing in common (see Photo 4). On the outside of every container is a hook knife attached with about a four foot lanyard. In case you drop the hook knife, you can reel it back in and try again. What do you do with the hook knife? It has a cutting edge hidden away on the inside of the knife. I call this pilot-proof, unless you hang it on your ear. The knife serves two purposes. Let's say you successfully bailed out and have just landed, only to realize you're being

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... I had to dead stick my Pitts in and an old timer said "Nice save. Someone taught you well." Yes they did! Thanks, Budd. -Craig H.

My insurance company covered me, a low-time, low-tailwheel-time pilot in a single-hole Pitts largely because I went to Budd for my training. -Tom P.

... the engine failed at low altitude and the accident investigators said that my fundamentals saved me. Thanks my friend. -Maynard H.

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Photo 5

ing the gloves is not a good idea? The hook knife that's attached to my kit is modeled after the military version carried by pilots in their flight suits, also on a lanyard (Photo 4). On the inside of all sizes of my SMAK Pak is a signal mirror, fire starter, and whistle. Pilots often use my larger kits, like the one above the rip-cord pocket, to carry their ELTs, Spot, or other electronic devices, especially on cross-country flights. The larger kit is especially popular with glider pilots, who are often flying in some very desolate countryside. I probably don't need to explain the signal mirror. We've all seen movies where they were used. The instructions should be clearly printed on the back of the mirror. The whistle carries much further than your voice and will help when someone is trying to locate you, especially at night. The fire starter is great for starting a small smoky fire. This works great if you're hidden amongst the trees and cannot be seen. Don't start a raging inferno, just a small fire. As Smokey Bear says, "Only you can prevent forest fires."

Once you have it going, toss on some green vegetation and the smoke will go up through the trees signaling where you're located. Either that or it'll signal the aerial bomber where to drop fire retardant.

dragged along the ground by high winds. This is a life-threatening situation. If you can't get out of your harness in a hurry, especially the aerobatic harness, the hook knife can be a lifesaver. Take it out and hook one of the risers (this is where the lines are attached) and instantly one-fourth of your parachute is cut free and your parachute collapses.

Or, you may not have gotten off the ground, are upside down, and putting a lot of pressure on your seat belt. It's now very difficult or impossible to release. Take out your hook knife and cut through your seat belt. So, what if you carry a knife in your pocket? Try to get it out while hanging upside down. Or, try getting it out while being dragged along the ground by your parachute in high winds. Even if you can get it out, there is a better than even chance you'll drop it or can't get it open because you're wearing your Nomex flight suit and gloves. Have you ever tried opening a knife with gloves on? Did I mention your aircraft is on fire and remov-

One last item for survival is your parachute (see Photo 5). It should be a color that is easy to see from the air. All the parachutes I order are manufactured orange and white for high visibility. Other bright colors like red and white work well also. Spread it out on the ground so an aircraft can spot you easier. Get out your signal mirror and practice a bit. Start a signal fire, if necessary. Your parachute can be made into a shelter. You can also wrap up in it for warmth. Now take out your cellphone. You did remember to carry it with you, right? Granted, it probably won't work out in the boondocks, but if it does, call for help. I actually think you should call your local pizza parlor first. You know, the one that promises to deliver in 30 minutes or less with your favorite pizza and beer.

Remember, you can always e-mail or call me with your questions and concerns by going to my website, www.SilverParachutes.com. All my contact information is there.

Remember, learn it, link it, and live it.

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