



Quiet Alone Time

Lifesaving practices

I HOPE EVERYONE IS HAVING A GREAT FLYING SEASON. Those of you who have been faithfully reading my column know that my columns consistently talk about preventive measures, and not just how to pull the ripcord of your parachute. I hope bailing out of your aircraft is not an option you'll ever have to experience.

I attend many flying events each year and often hear some great suggestions that will help you remain inside your aircraft when it's flying. At the last International Council of Air Shows (ICAS) convention, I heard several great presentations. I also receive safety bulletins written by ICAS members who have your safety in mind. These typically are written by people who have been there and done that. Their advice is worth flying by.

One suggestion was to write out and give yourself an honest and critical assessment of your flying. You'll become more aware and it'll be easier to identify potential hazards. For example, maybe you're not spending enough time on emergency procedures or pre-flying *yourself* and *your* aircraft before you fly off into the wild blue yonder. In the air show industry they've been touting "The Sacred 60 Minutes" before a performance is flown. You may not be performing in front of a crowd, but you're still performing. You need quiet and uninterrupted time to yourself to gather your thoughts and run through your mind what you'll be doing. An example of this is walking through your routine on the ground one last time. This is the sacred time when you check out your aircraft undisturbed and prepare yourself mentally for the task at hand—which, in my opinion, is to fly safely and to land inside your aircraft and not under your parachute because you forgot one small detail. Are you prepared to do this, or will you become the next headline on the six o'clock news?

When I pack your parachute I make sure I'm not interrupted, but when I am I have a backup plan. I literally back up a few steps and double check myself. I also, like surgeons, count my tools at the beginning and end of each repack to make sure I haven't left

something in your parachute. My UPS driver got used to me running a quick inventory of my tools before he picked up that day's boxes and often asked me, "Did you count your tools?"

On a serious note I recently lost my very close flying partner to an air show accident. It appears that the emergency response time could have been better, but that is not for me to decide. As I stated before, you may not be flying in front of thousands of people, but you still need to take some very basic steps to help ensure your safety. You may not have a fire truck or ambulance standing by, but you should have fire extinguishers at the ready. Consider placing them in a vehicle like a pickup truck that can respond within seconds in case you have a fire. Position the vehicle close by and ready to go with the keys in it. I would place it near where you refuel and have a route planned out to get to the aerobatic box quickly, if the need arises.

If you have first responders on or near your field, invite them to learn more about your aircraft and how to quickly assist you in case of an emergency. They'll appreciate it and if something does occur they'll be better prepared. You could invite them to park a fire truck on the ramp, especially if you provide them with shade, water and food. It's a win-win situation for both of you.

You could show them how you plan on egressing your aircraft on the ground in case of a fire. They'll be very interested in the location of the emergency release(s) for your aircraft canopy. Will they need special tools to unfasten the cowling? One thing they'll want to know is where your battery is located; they may need to disconnect it. Also, show the location of your master switch. While you're at it, show them your parachute and how you put it on and take it off. Keep in mind they have sharp knives and love to cut things off of people. They may not realize that it could be easier to unsnap or unthread your chest and leg straps. I know a little about aircraft/liquid firefighting. I was on an Air Force crash/

rescue crew for over 15 years.

In my bailout seminars, I recognize and talk about stress and some of the things you can do to help manage it. It will not go away but you can learn to live and fly with it. Psychologists claim that only 10 percent of our decisions are based on fact and the other 90 percent are based on emotions. Let's make sure your decisions are sound and based on fact. Stress can and does make for poor decisions, delayed decisions and many other bad judgment calls. Make sure you're properly rested and pay particular attention to being hydrated.

Just like the contest you're about to fly, hopefully you've practiced. Practicing will help you build excess workload capacity. By practicing you'll be able to think and work better under stress. You'll remain disciplined and focused much better. By practicing you Learn It – Link It – Live It. That's why I emphasize Practice, Practice and more Practice at my seminars. You want things to be committed to muscle memory. If things go bad, you already know what the first two words out of your mouth will be. Then your mind goes into high gear and thinks about what to do next and how to do it. Finally, as time and altitude fly by, you have a plan of action. By practicing your routine over and over before your flight, your reaction time will be greatly reduced; it's now stored as muscle memory. Likewise, practicing your bailout procedures before and after each flight will save you time. You'll still say those first two words, but after that you'll go right to doing it because you've pre-programmed your brain to react quickly by practicing. None of this will happen unless you are mentally prepared to reduce your stress as I have talked about above.

A couple of questions often asked of me are how much time is needed for a parachute to open, and how low can you be when you bail out? First, you need to understand your parachute must be *fully open and going as slow as it ever will go in three seconds or less to be certified.* What will change within those three seconds is the distance it takes your parachute to open based on the attitude and speed of your aircraft when you bailed out. If you and your aircraft are screaming straight at the ground when you pull your ripcord, your loss of altitude will be much greater than if you bailed out straight and level. To help you understand this I have at the bottom of my home page a link to the "Freefall Deceleration Chart" you can print out. This chart helps explain how quickly you slow down. Basically, within two seconds, regardless of your airspeed, you'll be slowed to a safe opening speed for your parachute to work properly.

In order for all this to come together you must be mentally prepared to reduce as much stress as you can. Remember "Don't Worry, Be happy," practice and drink your water.

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