

From the Downwind Rigging Loft
21 April 2006
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Being honest with ourselves

Correct me if I am wrong, but there has always been a tendency on the part of skydivers to find blame elsewhere when they screw up. I recently heard of a local jumper who was seriously injured in a landing accident due to a “downdraft”. Personally, I’m willing to bet most of us don’t really know what a true “downdraft” is. However, immediately after watching or hearing about somebody trenching in I hear all kinds of excuses about their canopy collapsing, somebody cutting them off, the fabled “downdraft” etc etc etc. I can personally attest to the fact that every time something bad happened to me, at least under canopy, it’s because I screwed up. However, I have tried to learn from the mistakes that I have survived.

The gist of my preaching is that skydiving is the ultimate expression of freedom. With that freedom comes a tremendous amount of personal responsibility, like it or not, and part of that is to be honest with ourselves about our failures and to learn from them.

Trend in incident reports.

After perusing through the April Parachutist incident reports, and a quick review of Jim Crouches fatality review in the March issue, it seems to me there is a growing trend in the fatalities that bothers me. More and more I read about people going in because of dislodged toggles or hard openings or some other ridiculously preventable reason. Up until a few years ago it was the dreaded “low hook turn”, mixed in with the occasional low cutaway etc etc etc. The following are just my opinions about a few of these subjects.

Toggles. – When bringing the slider below the toggles, dislodging one is very easy. I use my first two fingers of each hand above the slider grommets and my thumb placed on the toggle with upward pressure to bring the slider down. This is done while watching my traffic. If a toggle is knocked loose, I am ready to respond with rear riser input to stop the turn. Toggles can also be knocked out on opening by the slider coming down hard or asymmetric tension on the steering line. This can be detected while watching the opening of the canopy and needs to be responded to quickly.

A recent trend in fatalities due to toggle problems (at least two last year and one already this year) baffle me because they are so easy to respond to.

Hard openings – All canopy manufacturers have recommendations as to how to best pack their parachute. In my opinion, **IF YOU DON'T PACK FOR YOURSELF, YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO BITCH.** Canopies now are very specialized and the average packer cannot be expected to pack every parachute perfectly every time. Learn the characteristics of your parachute and pack for your DAMN self.

Last year there was a fatality that may have been caused by a hard opening due to a collapsed slider. While it is hard to imagine someone packing their parachute with a collapsed slider, I have actually seen it happen. Additionally, I have seen an instance when the slider is accidentally collapsed during opening due to the upper steering cascade line snagging a slider kill line and causing the slider to collapse very prematurely. This resulted in a very explosive opening causing damage to the slider and injury to the jumper. This can be avoided during packing by making sure the kill line is pulled taught within its channel thus pulling the tab as far into the channel as possible and reducing its exposure to lines that can snag it.

Two Out – The most recent Parachutist had an incident involving a dual deployment. From the report it appears the reserve was deployed due to a Cypres activation during a low main deployment. Remember, the Cypres can activate higher than the prescribed 750 ft. altitude if pulled into an upright position during a slow main opening. The Cypres accounts for the burble on our backs during deployment. When pulled upright, the burble is broken, thus causing a higher activation altitude, perhaps 1000 ft, while still operating within its design parameters. This person may have experienced a low altitude downplane resulting in the fatality. Familiarity with two canopy out procedure and prescribed by the PIA Dual Square Report may have made a difference.

Anyway, these are just a few of my opinions. If anyone disagrees or if I have my facts wrong, please let me know so we can have informed discussion about stuff that can kill us.

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