

Use of Parachutes – Sid Taken from the Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club Web site.

http://www.bggc.co.uk/members/severn_skies/spring_2002.htm#Parachutes

Sadly there have been a number of mid-air structural failures and collisions over the past few years, with six such incidents occurring to Club members in the past ten, fortunately not all resulted in injury or the need to bale out. However these statistics highlight the strong possibility that it could happen to one of us tomorrow!

But how many of us actually know what to do should it happen? Some years ago I did a few actual jumps at a skydiving centre, but in reality I would not consider this to be crucial as the accident statistics show that in almost all cases, the essential factor is to evacuate the glider with sufficient height for the chute to open. Very few pilots who achieve this suffer major injury from the final landing.

The critical height for survival is a ripcord pull in excess of 500ft, but before then you must be out of the glider. Since most collisions occur below 2500ft and the glider at that point could easily be descending at a rate well in excess of 50 knots, there is likely to be only a few seconds in which to make a successful evacuation. The first action is to make the decision to abandon the glider - remember that it is much better to jump right away than wait until further failure occurs when you are too low. If there is significant visible damage to the wings or difficulty in control, then jump immediately!

The next thing is to jettison the canopy (remember to tell your P2 if necessary!) and undo your seat harness. There have been many occasions where pilots have been killed because they did not know how to do this in a hurry! Therefore it is essential that you familiarise yourself (and your P2) with the jettison procedure for the glider you are flying and even practice it on the ground - but make sure someone is on hand to save the canopy!

The final action is to locate the 'D' ring with the appropriate hand (usually, but not always the right), get out of the cockpit and pull hard! In practice, simply standing up and pulling the ring should ensure the parachute would extract you from the cockpit. But under high 'G' forces diving over the side may be a better option. It is important to ignore all the Hollywood films about counting '1000, 2000, 3000' - Just pull the ring immediately you are clear of the cockpit and the rest should be automatic!

The landing will probably occur too soon for any steering of the parachute to be effective and most emergency chutes are almost impossible to steer anyway. For the actual landing whatever the type of terrain, keep feet and knees together, knees slightly bent and your elbows and chin tucked in. It is also helpful to turn your legs and body sideways on to any noticeable drift, rather than land face first or backwards. If you end up suspended from trees or other objects it is far better having survived thus far to wait for help rather than risk a fall, but if you do decide to unclip your harness, remember to undo the chest strap first or you could strangle yourself! If you are taking someone up for their first flight, remember it is important to brief them on the essential points of the above without confusing or frightening them. (I usually conclude by pointing out that the risks are tiny, but we always wear parachutes since plummeting to earth holding a cushion looks really silly!)

There is of course one way of avoiding all this and that is to KEEP A GOOD LOOKOUT!

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