



Ask Allen

A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes ... and seat belts

By Allen Silver

Q : The elastic keepers on my parachute's chest and leg straps are missing. Are they important?

A : Those elastic keepers may seem insignificant, but they play an important role in a successful exit. If you have to bail out, your day is already not going well, and not having the elastic keepers could make it worse.

Imagine you've just had an emergency and need to leave the airplane. You remembered to jettison your aircraft's canopy or door first. You also remembered that the next step is to unfasten your seat belts. So far you're doing great! You claw your way out of your disabled aircraft, and just as you go over the side, you come to a sudden stop and are pinned against the side of the ship. That free end of your leg strap was flailing around and snagged on the cockpit sill as you climbed out. There you are hanging by a leg strap because you or your parachute rigger did not replace those worn or missing elastic keepers.

They serve an important role in keeping the loose ends of webbing tucked neatly away so the possibility of becoming entangled with an out-of-control aircraft is unlikely to occur. Insist that your parachute rigger do a complete and thorough job when servicing your parachute. Most parachute riggers will keep a supply of elastic keepers, and many riggers even manufacture their own to keep on hand.

Servicing your parachute means more than just repacking it. If, while preflighting your parachute, you

find an elastic keeper is missing, a couple of rubber bands will work just fine until you can get a replacement keeper. Do not use tape. Although it may seem like a clever fix, the adhesive on tape will weaken and deteriorate nylon.

Q : Is it true I need a large military style parachute like a 28-foot C-9 canopy if I fly a fast aircraft like a warbird?

A : Under some conditions that may be a practical option. For instance, if you weigh 220-plus pounds and are flying at high field or density altitude elevations, or if you have an ejection seat. However, there are many parachutes out there that are smaller and lighter but will still support your weight just fine and have a slow rate of descent.

It pays to shop around and ask questions when purchasing a new or replacement parachute. When you are armed with information, you will make a better decision. Remember that bigger is not always better. During an emergency, you may be experiencing high *g*-loads. Your big, bulky, 25- to 30-pound military parachute may now weigh well more than 100 pounds and will make it difficult to get out of your tumbling, out-of-control aircraft.

Also, if you do not have an ejection seat, it does not make much sense to have a parachute rated at 250 knots. I have done high-speed exits from sky-diving aircraft, and I believe that much above 180 mph you will find it difficult, if not impossible, to get out of any aircraft. Remember, the rating of a parachute is deployment

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speed, not bailout speed. Assuming you do manage to get clear of your aircraft and survive a 200-knot bailout with all of your body parts still attached, you will slow down to a safe opening speed within a matter of a few seconds. Typically you'll slow 20-30 knots within the first second. In the time it takes you to look, find, reach for, and pull your ripcord, you will more than likely be within the speed limits of your parachute. So even if you fly a high-speed aircraft, a parachute with a lower speed and weight rating may be just fine for you.

Planning for an emergency begins with the proper equipment and an escape plan. Make decisions early! Have fun flying and keep your questions coming. ☺

Allen Silver is the owner of Silver Parachute Sales and is always available to answer your questions about parachutes. Send your questions to Allen@SilverParachutes.com.