



Minimizing the bone-crushing landing

THE SUMMER FLYING SEASON IN some parts of the world is wrapping up, but there is still the possibility that one day you may have to see what your parachute looks like for real.

John, a member of an IAC chapter in Canada, e-mailed me about safely landing by parachute after a bailout. I hadn't given it much thought before, because after all, once you bail out, your landing is inevitable whether your parachute is open or not. But wouldn't it be nice if you could minimize the possibility of getting injured on landing?

I touch on this in my seminars, but maybe it's time I expound upon it a little more. Everyone, it seems, has seen World War II movies where the airborne troops are put through what seems like endless PLF (parachute landing fall) training. The instructor is yelling at them to get it right or screaming, "Give me 20 push-ups!" for doing it wrong. It's riveted into their minds that done incorrectly, a parachute landing will break every bone in their bodies.

Times have changed, and not everyone wants to go through airborne training. Still the thought may go through your mind as you drift down to terra firma. Some portions of the earth are more "firma" than others, so pay attention.

There is some good news. Modern-day parachutes are much smaller/lighter, steerable, and most importantly, they typically come down slower than the early Leonardo da Vinci models. I'm not saying you won't get hurt on landing, but the alternative of staying with your aircraft is not a viable option.

I have no idea where you're going to land. It could be in the trees, on a pile of rocks, or on a nice soft sandy beach with someone waiting to hand you a nice, cool piña colada, but you will land somewhere. The wind may not be blowing at all, or it could be howling at more than 20 mph.

Still, I hope I can help minimize the risk of a hard, bone-crushing landing. If you follow a few simple rules I teach my customers in my shop and at my seminars, you should be able to make your landing a little easier on your body. I'll mention this in more detail later, but *never lock your knees*.

. . . with a red cape wrapped around your shoulders thinking you were Superman.

Let me begin by asking you what's the highest thing you've jumped off? You know, like out of a tree or from the house or barn roof with a red cape wrapped around your shoulders thinking you were Superman. Many of us have done this as children, and assuming you landed on your feet, you probably used your legs like shock absorbers. You kept some tension in them, but allowed them to bend under the pressure of your landing to help absorb some, if not all, of the landing shock. If you were lucky you didn't twist an ankle or worse, and you survived to do it again, before your mother caught you.

What I'm getting at is we've all jumped off something about four to five feet above the ground. This is about what it would feel like landing under your parachute for the majority of you. Of course I haven't taken into consideration density altitude, your weight, and a host of other variables. I'm speaking in general terms here. Four to five feet is something we're all familiar with and can relate to. I just want you to change a couple of things.

I have several thousand jumps, and I know that hanging in your harness under your parachute for most of you

will be a new experience. It's also very comfortable to hang in your harness with your legs out in front of you at about a 45-degree angle.

Let me remind you that you're only going to have one chance to get this right. Before you land you **MUST** get your legs underneath you. Trust me, you don't want to land with your legs out in front of you. You would land heels first, followed quickly by a back-breaking jar to your tailbone. This could easily cause severe injury to your back. You would experience the same bone-jarring feeling if you were sitting in a chair and someone suddenly pulled it out from under you. I think you get the picture.

Next, you must **NEVER** lock your knees. If you were to stand up right now and jump up and down with your knees locked you could very easily hurt your back or shake a filling loose, and that's by only jumping a few inches off the ground.

Keeping your legs tight together and very slightly bent will set you up for the best landing position you can expect. Another advantage of keeping your knees tight together is it helps keep them from shaking badly from fear.

All I'm telling you to do is to slightly modify what you already know about jumping off a ledge. There is nothing magic about this. You don't have to yell "Airborne!" or "Geronimo!" Just try to absorb most, if not all, of the landing with the balls of your feet. I'm not saying you won't sprain (or break) an ankle or leg, but trying to absorb the majority of the landing on the balls of your feet may help prevent head injuries when you fall over in your attempt to do a PLF. Having a clear head after you land is important to your survival.

Speaking of a clear head, keep those questions coming. Thank you, John, for a good question.

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