



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED



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### PARACHUTE JUMP EXITS

#### Proper Practice Prevents Parachute Problems

There are few military events as hazardous as parachute operations. Thanks to rigorous and in-depth training, the parachute community has experienced comparatively few mishaps. When mishaps do occur, however, they can be catastrophic. Proper planning, training, and aircraft familiarization are essential to every parachute event. This lessons learned will briefly analyze a mishap that, if not for an Automatic Actuation Device (AAD) opening a jumper's parachute, would have resulted in one of these catastrophic incidents.



A Sailor participated in a civilian-run Military Free Fall (MFF) course that provides training on parachute canopy control. One of the events performed in this course is a deliberately unstable exit. While executing this type of departure in an SC7 Skyvan, the Sailor failed to clear the aircraft, struck the back of his helmet on the aircraft ramp, and lost consciousness. As a result, he was unstable to activate his parachute. Fortunately, once he reached a certain altitude, his AAD activated his reserve parachute, saving his life. He didn't walk away unscathed, however. He had three days in the hospital, two months of lost work, and three months of limited duty.

Before this incident, there was a breakdown in proper training and preparation on the ground. Performing a deliberately unstable exit adds another risk factor to an already high-risk event. For this reason, even more deliberate planning, aircraft familiarization, and practice of exit techniques must be done before taking off. These actions would have better enabled the parachutist in this incident to exit the aircraft safely.

#### Lessons Learned / Key Takeaways

This incident highlights the importance of preparation before conducting any parachute operation. It is incumbent on leadership to ensure all parachutists are fully prepared to conduct the jump safely.

**1. Aircraft Familiarization is always necessary.** — Jumpmasters and airborne commanders should never assume jumpers are familiar with how to exit different aircraft. Aircraft familiarization will ensure all personnel are on the right page, especially when conducting out of the ordinary maneuvers.

**2. Rehearsals are Key** — Rehearsals on the ground should be conducted in conjunction with aircraft familiarization and in the same manner and order as the actual jump. Ground rehearsals will ensure all members physically practice leaving the aircraft. In some cases, a jumper may not be able to fully simulate an unstable exit on the ground, but "dirt dives" or walk-throughs of the exits can be conducted with mock-ups to prepare jumpers as much as possible.

Additional Note: The unstable exit maneuvers taught as part of this civilian-run course do not have operational benefit, and should not be used in a military setting. Leadership should ensure their parachutists understand the difference between non-standard skydiving exits and MFF exits used in military training and missions.

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