

CHI06FA210
Sullivan, Iowa

ATTACHMENT 1
Interview with Jim Cowen



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY
WASHINGTON, DC 20594

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Telephone Interview with Mr. Jim Cowen

This interview was conducted to better understand the instructions provided to parachutists concerning seating, restraints, tandem operations and helmets.

Mr. Jim Cowen stated that all parachutists must be seat belted before the aircraft moves and that helmets must be on the head or buckled with the restraint. He indicated that helmets, especially those with cameras, may cause neck injuries if worn during a crash so many parachutists prefer to have them buckled with the restraint. He also indicated that there was an accident in 1992 where an unrestrained helmet camera killed someone during a take-off event.

Mr. Cowen indicated that most jump planes only provide floor seating and that parachutists are instructed to pass the restraint through the vertical harness (main lift webbing) or the leg harness (leg webbing). He further stated that many parachutists prefer to pass the restraint through the leg harness because when the restraint is passed through the vertical harness, it passes over an emergency release, which concerns some parachutists. In addition, Mr. Cowen discussed the foam straddle bench indicating that it provides protection from vertical accelerations, unlike the floor seating option, and that it is accepted by many FSDOs because it is not directly attached to the aircraft and may provide floatation, as well. The bench seat also facilitates tandem operations, enabling the tandem parachutes to fasten together more easily. The tandem operations are a reason for installing the bench seat.

There is no specific instruction for where parachutists sit in the aircraft. Generally, they sit in a format so that the first parachutists into the plane are the last to jump from the plane. Tandem parachutists jump from the highest altitudes (to better handle emergencies and because tandem parachutes open more slowly) and therefore, sit in the front of the aircraft.

Tandem students stay seat belted until they harness to the instructor, which usually occurs 2-5 minutes prior to exiting the aircraft. Mr. Cowen stated that the tandem

jumpers never harness together on the ground. Also, he stated that the licensed jumpers stay seat belted until 1000 feet off the ground but tandem instructors stay belted until 2000 feet off the ground. There is no specific instruction provided to parachutists on which restraint to use or on how tightly to fasten the restraint.

Mr. Cowen stated that helmets are worn by parachutists to provide head protection from bad landings, head impacts upon exiting from the aircraft or from head impacts from being kicked by another parachutist. Helmets may also be worn to provide a platform for cameras but these camera helmets are also believed to provide some head protection. The female student solo-parachutist was believed to be wearing a classis Protec helmet. The two helmet cameras were believed to be Bonehead Flattop Pro helmets from JF Christopher in Perris, CA. Mr. Cowen owns and uses a Bonehead Flattop Pro helmet that costs approximately \$450.