One Day, 14 Years Ago, It Wasnâ€™t So Much Fun Skydiving

Description

Uncle Jimbo did a great â€œkiss and tellâ€• on his first civilian skydive, mentored by one of his SF brethren.

Part of me wants to laugh a little, as it was one of those stare over the edge and laugh at death stories, with a bit of the dark humor â€œweâ€• used, but not around students.

The other part of me was drawn back to, Iâ€™m pretty sure, January 1996 (donâ€™t have the logbook within easy reach) and the drop zone at Marana, AZ.Ã, After 26 years of jumping, at that point, I witnessed the first jumping death, and the last one to date, in my 28 years of active jumping.

Iâ€™ll just cut and paste the comment I left on Jimboâ€™s post @ Black Five here:

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> Uncle Jimbo;
>
> There but by the grace of God went you. In 28 years of skydiving, the only death I witnessed was at Marana, AZ. I looked up from packing to see a canopy fully inflated, hanging in the air with no jumper attachedâ€¦then my eyes caught him in a stable, face to earth position, which he kept to contact about 150 yds out in the desert.
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> Who was he? A jumper with the Ft Carson Group. Date Jan (maybe Feb) 1996. They had been doing HALOs all week, and that Saturday was the end. The other guys were packing and loading their gear. I think it was the NCOIC and he went for a â€œsport jump.â€•
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> The DZ owner, having had his first death a few months before, was pissed for more than one reason. He was hollering at the manâ€™s friend who perished, the SGT who took him up for a dive much like you described. The retort was â€œWhat more can you say, I just killed my best friend.â€• Haunting words. Iâ€™m sure his buddy lives with them to this day.
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> A difference from your jump. The fatality was a HALO jumper with about 50 jumpsâ€¦all on military gear.
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> Breaking the rules? Not a fan, and Iâ€™m not current now, but Iâ€™m proud of getting hundreds of people up and back down safely, and, with minor exception, big smiles at the end of the jump as a Static Line and AFF Instructor.
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> The â€œjumpâ€• broke 5 major Basic Safety Regulations (BSRs â€“ the pretty much non-negotiables in the USPA Skydiverâ€™s Manual). Meditate on that: FIVE. Guess what? For 4 of the 5, if any one of those hadnâ€™t been broken, heâ€™d had most likely loaded up on a double charge of adrenaline, but heâ€™d have been among the ones drinking his case

of beer for his first â€œcivilianâ€• jump a few hours later.

1) AFF Level 1: TWO jumpmasters (One present) Based on the altitude his chute was open with out him, it meant his friend let go of him, also. The JMs are there to (we donâ€™t tell you we will) to pull your ripcord at the right time, if you havenâ€™t. The one not pulling, hangs on at the initial deploymentâ€¦.to react if something ainâ€™t right.
2) Students shall be equipped with a Automatic Activating Device (AAD) (none on experienced jumper rig he was wearingâ€¦for the first time â€“ with that, he would have had a reserve out about 1000-1200â€²)
3) Student rigs will be equipped with a Reserve Static Line (RSL) (none â€“ even with his screw up (discussed later), heâ€™d have had his secondary chute in the air and survived)
4) AFF Level 1 student will deploy by 4000â€² AGL (His main must have been about 1500â€² open (higher would have given him time to consider deploying his reserve, one he got the clue the main had cut away (more on that later). At 6-7 sec per 1000â€² at terminal, heâ€™d have had about 10 seconds to recoverâ€¦and thatâ€™s a lot of time).
5) At the time: Ripcord (not throwout) activated main canopy. Not an issue, just more disregard for the rules.

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Here we are, 14 years later, and itâ€™s crystal clear to me, the events of that day. Why? A family and the Army lost a trained operator and the skydiving community had another death on the books.

What happened? On a HALO rig, the main deployment ripcord is on the upper right main lift web. Itâ€™s the 50 jumps of repetition that drilled that into his head. On a civilian rig, the handle on the upper right is the main riser cutaway handle (for use when the main, on trying to open, malfunctions). Training, itâ€™s a powerful thing, and sometimes un-training needs to be verified first for fun, and not disaster.

At time to pull, his military HALO pull sequence, didnâ€™t open anything, it actually set the main risers up to be detached as soon as there was any pressure on them (3 ring release). He had a Homer Simpson moment, then reached to his right thigh area and deployed his throw out pilot chute. It did, and he was now lower. It deployed fine, but the 3 rings were undone. He kept going, the chute, which I first saw, was fully deployed there, alone. Had had about 5-6 seconds to the not so AGL impact point. Not really enough time to recalculate, and improvise, overcome and adapt.

Civilian skydiving is very lightly regulated by the FAA, because the PCA, and now the USPA proved worthy of doing it right all these years, without massive oversight.

Donâ€™t want to be peeing on your parade, but you were lucky. In this case, it wasnâ€™t so much fun for the men involved, and their family and the unit affected with a â€œtrainingâ€• loss.

Rules, the ones written in blood, are my kind of rules to stick with. Like Mom said: â€œIt all sounds like fun until someone gets an eye poked out.â€•

Not a good day, butâ€¦in my world, a testament to having jumped 26 years before I saw something that ended it all for someone doing what I loved to do.Ã, It really is safe to skydive.Ã, The sport is very well

advanced, and there are lines to cross in safety, but, thankfully, most donâ€™t and more thankfully, many who do are around to tell us about it.Ã, Some are not, but itâ€™s still a small number, when you consider your chances of dying skydiving are pretty minuscule. Itâ€™s about wisely managing risk.Ã, To those not familiar with the sport, it all looks dangerous from the outside.Ã, To those who have made more than just their â€œBucket Listâ€• tandem jump (itâ€™s a pony ride, fer gawdâ€™s sake!), you know there is plenty of thought about keeping us alive, so we can do it again, put into the process.

Uncle Jimbo was a good sport about it, and also admitted he did by his case of beer (for any first you admit to, or are known to have â€œcommittedâ€• in the sport), and he gets he was lucky.

So, bottom line:Ã, Letâ€™s be careful out there.

Category

1. Army
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Tags

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