FOUNDATIONS OF FLIGHT | BIG-WAY APPROACHES (BELLY FORMATIONS)

Brought to you by AXIS Flight School Instructor Brianne Thompson at Skydive Arizona in Eloy.

Purpose

- To properly approach a formation of any size from a dive
- To learn the appropriate sight pictures in a large formation
- To understand proper docking on a large formation

Prerequisites

- Have successfully participated in progressively larger formation skydives
- Can successfully launch a diving exit

Learn approach skills gradually—jump with smaller formations and slowly build toward larger ones—as you would when learning any new skydiving skill.

Execution

This article assumes exits from a Twin Otter. The initial exit from other types of aircraft will differ.

The jumpers' setup in the plane plays a large part in the success of the launch. The goal is to have the floaters (those on the outside of the plane) and the divers (those on the inside) exit as closely to each other as possible so very little time will pass between when the floaters exit and when the last diver is out. Therefore, divers must line up very closely with their backs straight and press the fronts of their bodies against the backs of the people in front of them (almost "scrunched"). Be mindful of gear and don't shove, but get close. Remember that the terms "floaters" and "divers" refer only to position on exit, not what the jumpers will do once in freefall.

Once the floaters have exited, everyone else should shuffle quickly toward the door simultaneously (like the cars of a train, not like cars in traffic) by taking quick, short steps. The divers should make solid presentations to the relative wind and start to dive only once they've cleared the door. The time that elapses between the neutral exit and dive will shorten as the jumpers gain experience. (See "Foundations of Flight—Diving Exits," May 2012 *Parachutist*.)

To get to your slot quickly, you need to know where you're going. Regardless of the size of the formation, each jumper will fly to a specific quadrant. (Imagine the formation as a pie split into four pieces). After exiting, the divers should find the base, locate their quadrants and quickly begin their dives. The first divers will not have to dive as aggressively as the last divers, who will be farther from the formation when they exit, but everyone must look out for one another to avoid collisions.

Once the jumpers have spotted their slots, they begin lining up on a radial (the line from the slot to the center of the base) and stay on that line for the whole approach. The jumpers approach the base in tiers, as though they were approaching the field in a stadium. Each jumper lines up behind and above the jumper docking immediately prior and will gradually move forward and down (a stair-step approach). Using the stadium method, divers are less likely to go low when the formation begins to build and falls more slowly. By maintaining altitude, the jumpers will not dive past the formation; it will gradually come to them.

During their stair-step approaches, the jumpers also want to cross-reference through the base, across the entire formation, to their cross-partners (aka clones) to maintain their levels and proximity to the formation. A cross-partner should be the mirror image of his clone during the approach. However, a jumper also needs to stay in position in his radial, since arriving early in someone else's slot will "shut the door" on that jumper and ruin a slot-specific formation.

When docking, the priorities, in order, are: level, slot, dock. Once docked, the outside flyers want to be just a few inches lower than the people they are docked on. The entire formation should have a very subtle upside-down bowl shape with the outermost jumpers a few inches *lower* than the base. This helps the formation maintain integrity and strength. Once docked, each flyer must take the personal responsibility to fly strong and maintain stability. The job isn't finished yet! All big-ways have movement, and the individuals in the formation must try to stay steady. (See "Foundations of Flight—Taking Grips," October 2012 *Parachutist*.) Jumpers should keep referencing their clones, even after docking.

Helpful Hints

Even if everyone is in the correct slot, not all formations are ready to be docked upon. The formation must be solid, not moving and steady. Jumpers can help keep the formation stable by remembering "level, slot, dock."

To view the instructional video, use the QR code to the left or visit the Foundations of Flight page at parachutistonline.com.