



photo by Ed Franks

Maj. James Nazar and Maj. Denise O'Brien execute a tandem jump.

Planes ... Who needs them to fly?

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People often ask the question, "Why would anyone jump out of a perfectly good airplane?"

The question for Maj. James Nazar should be "Why would anyone jump out of a perfectly good airplane 2,500 times?"

"I made my first jump September 13, 1980," said Nazar, chief of Operations Support for the 690th Information Operations Squadron. "After that first one, I was hooked."

Nazar, then a college freshman in Cleveland, Ohio, and a group of dorm mates began a jump course that morning and by the day's end they had completed their first static line jump.

"That was virtually the only way to learn, back then," explained Nazar.

According to Nazar, students would progress from static line jumps to jumps with delays up to 45 seconds between exiting the aircraft and pulling the ripcord.

"It would take up to 18 jumps to be considered qualified."

Today, Nazar, a skydiving instructor, can qualify a student in eight to ten jumps.

"We like to start students out with a tandem jump, so they can see if they like it," explained Nazar.

"If they come back, they attend the first jump course, make seven supervised jumps and then two solo jumps."

During supervised jumps, students are responsible for pulling their own ripcord. Up to two instructors accompany the student on the jump for safety reasons.

"We are usually flying right with them," said Nazar. "We're within arms reach. There've been times I've had to pull ripcords for students."

If students don't pull the ripcord when they should, the instructor will first signal them.

If there is no response, the instructor will "fly in" and pull the cord for the student.

On the ground, Nazar will dis-

cuss the jump with the student to determine why they didn't pull the cord.

"Usually, they'll have to repeat the jump," said Nazar.

"After a jump like that, they're upset with themselves," said Nazar.

At that point, an instructor will discuss the student's options.

"I'll try to encourage some students and explain that you can learn from a bad jump," explained Nazar. "But skydiving isn't for everyone. You want to encourage those people to take up another sport."

"Skydiving is a sport based on risk management," explained Nazar. "You have to know what you're capable of and make a 'go-no go' decision each time you jump."

"We all do risk management every day, though. If your driving skill is low, you'll probably avoid heavy traffic. Before you jump, you have to bring the risk to an acceptable level."

According to Nazar, reducing the

risk depends heavily on "training, training, training."

"If you have a malfunction like a streamer, where your chute doesn't fully open, your brain goes into automatic. You don't think, you react. That's where training kicks in," he explained.

"You have to jettison your main chute and deploy your reserve. You think about it later."

Other malfunctions may give skydivers more time to weigh their options.

"If you have a malfunction like broken steering controls you have to decide whether to stay with the main chute or go to the reserve," said Nazar. "If you can control the main chute, it's usually best to land it. It's already open and working, you can't be absolutely sure about the reserve."

Because the reserve chute is so important to a skydiver, however, it must be inspected and packed by an FAA certified rigger, and be repacked every 120 days.

"I became a rigger so that I could be absolutely confident that my

student's equipment was packed correctly," said Nazar. "I take a lot of satisfaction when a reserve chute I've packed saves a life. I've had 12 saves, three on myself."

Throughout training, Nazar strives to teach students two vital concepts, altitude awareness and body control.

"You have to be aware of your altitude and also your body position. With the wind rushing up at them at 120 mph, students aren't always aware of their bodies," said Nazar.

"Often, dancers make the best students because they're aware of their bodies. Basically, it's a matter of relaxing and feeling the air rather than fighting it," Nazar added.

Body control is especially important in formation jumping. Nazar, who was part of a 57-person formation jump last August, pointed out that these jumps must be choreographed on the ground in "dirt dives," which can look similar to a square dance.

"Everyone has to know when they'll leave the aircraft, where they'll



photo by Ed Franks

Nazar and O'Brien execute a tandem jump.



photo by Steve Sandstrom

Nazar, bottom, participates in a formation jump over Xenia, Ohio.

be in the formation and when they'll leave the formation," said Nazar. "The jumpers can't be too close together when they deploy their chutes."

According to Nazar, camaraderie is a great benefit of skydiving. "You meet a large cross section of people, from ditch diggers to doctors."

The greatest benefit for him though, is the chance to fly. "When you jump, you are really flying - you're falling like a rock - but you're flying, too."

After seventeen years of skydiving, Nazar's career is just beginning rather than coming to an end.

"My mother still asks me when I'm going to grow out of this," said Nazar. "But there are active jumpers who are in their seventies, and tandem jumpers in their eighties."

Maybe one day someone will ask Nazar the question, "Why would someone jump out of a perfectly good airplane 7,500 times?" ■