

## So, there I was. (Part 10.7)

Anyway, there I was. The crux of it was, that I wished I wasn't.

Bad things whilst flying are usually things that happen to other pilots. Pilots who fly close to the edge or pilots who fly floppy bags of nylon that have no business forming solid wing shaped-things above their heads. Everybody must have had a scarey landing or two, and a few of us will have had bad take-offs, but bad experiences during the bit in-between are rare. So far I've had two. Now I'm not talking about hitting the keel during turbulence or being spat out of thermals sideways. What I'm talking about is stuff that makes you consider the meaning of life for a few seconds. I wrote about my first such experience last year, when I described how I was sucked 2000'+ into cloud in Spain. The second experience happened in Canada during the 93 Nationals.

So, there I was again. About 2500' above take-off, climbing with 15 or more gliders in a huge multi-cored thermal about 250 yards across. The lift was averaging about 5-8 up, the sun was shining and the day looked to be a good one. Eventually I found my own core, and gained 500' or so on the majority of the gaggle, as we all fought to climb high enough to make the jump to the next trigger point. There were two other pilots at the same height as me and we seemed to be all set for cloud-base. Then I lost my core. I didn't fall dramatically out of it. It just faded as I made my down-wind leg. No worries I thought, just straighten up and head back in to wind and I should hit it again. I guess I must have had less than 10 seconds of level flight before it happened.

During 500 hours of flying hang-gliders the one thing that has remained constant is that there has always been some sort of pitch pressure that could be felt through the base-bar. That pressure was suddenly and dramatically removed as the nose of the glider dove down in front of me. It felt terrible, I can't describe how bad I felt in that split second. I could now see the nose beneath me in a place where I had never seen it before. I reacted. I pulled the base-bar in as far as it would go, well past my knees and waited.

Why did I pull the bar in when the glider was obviously heading in a downward direction (ie. falling out of the sky!). All this was going to do was increase its rate of decent, surely? Maybe if I was upside-down pulling in the bar in would keep me there? Thankfully this scenario had been discussed only a few weeks before and my saviour had explained the correct thing to do in this situation. Somebody had suggested, that if you think you are going up-side down the thing to do would be to push-out to force the nose down, just like pushing-out forces the nose up when you are the right way up. But consider this, my nose was now pointing away from my previous direction of travel. I was virtually flying backwards, I was stalled. Pushing out would most likely keep me upside down, I'd fall into the sail and break the glider. I had to get the glider out of the stall and flying again so the luff lines could do their stuff and return me to level flight. I had to move my body forward as far as possible to get some air over the wings

in the right direction. I had to pull in.

I don't know how long I had the bar stuffed in. It was weird to feel no pressure and then suddenly loads off it as I found myself in steep dive with the nose in a place that was instantly more comforting. I eased out of the dive hoping I'd miss my thermalling companions, and was safe.

Afterwards one of them told me that out of the corner of his eye he'd seen me streak passed him in a vertical dive.

I was shaken up. I wasn't in the Owens valley, that sort of thing shouldn't have happened. Well it obviously does, and since then I have heard from others that similar things have happened in France, Switzerland, Spain etc. so watch out. Two other pilots had the very same experience on the same day, yet others hadn't even found it rough.

As to my saviour. Strangely it was the same person who's advice about spiral diving got me out of that cloud in Spain. Maybe it is some kind of omen. Next time we meet I think I'll ask him how he managed to land safely after flying over 300 miles.

ps. Don't take what I say as gospel, but it worked for me.