

JAMMED CONTROLS

‘THE SLOW ROLL TO DISASTER’

I pushed the control stick forward to build up the airspeed needed to complete the slow roll properly according to Duane Cole’s *Roll Around a Point* book. I was flying at 4,500 feet above the ground in the 1965 Champion Citabria with its 100 hp Continental engine and had done this a number of times before under instruction and solo. This time I was all by my lonesome strictly for practice.

Things went well in the beginning. I began the slow roll maneuver lowering the nose from level flight to increase the airspeed to 120 miles per hour and then the pull up to begin the roll. With the nose still below the horizon and picking up airspeed, I pulled back on the control stick beginning the climb back through level flight increasing the pitch while coordinating the rudder and ailerons for the inverted slow roll to the left. As the nose came up through the horizon with higher airspeed than cruise, the roll to the left began. Hanging by the belts was brief while inverted over the top of the roll and the completion with recovery to straight and level at hand, it happened—but I was not sure what!

I needed excess airspeed to begin the maneuver and hold the aircraft from falling out of the maneuver with only the 100 horsepower I had available. At the top of the roll with the aircraft inverted and the controls momentarily neutralized, and forward pressure on the stick to keep the nose from falling out of the maneuver, I continued the rolling motion with increased left pressure on the rudder and ailerons during the last half of the roll. Upside down at the mid-point of the roll, I neutralized the ailerons and rudder then began the return to the upright position to complete the slow roll on heading and the original altitude. When I began the reversal of the controls to regain normal flight to right side up and level flight at my starting altitude, a problem sprang up from nowhere. The control stick was jammed hard to the left! I had a problem.

Right rudder for recovery went smoothly but now the Champ was in steep slip left wing down, full power, full right rudder and full left aileron. I was dangerously close to flipping into a spin if I couldn’t figure this out before I retarded the throttle—and I was descending.

The aircraft was not coming out of the inverted slow roll when I tried to reverse the ailerons and rudder back to the normal position for level flight ... the control stick was jammed hard left ... the rudder responded as ordered, but the ailerons held fast to the roll input which caused the Champ to get very close to a spin ... but with the nose slightly down the Champ was near a stall and a spin for sure. Still with full left aileron and right rudder I was barely holding off a spin with a higher airspeed but descending. What was happening?

I immediately looked at the emergency door release handle thinking I would be making my 121st parachute jump but then the thought raced through my mind, “...the flying club, the FAA and the NTSB are all going to ask me what happened and what am I going to tell them”? I

didn't have that answer. I was now descending from 4000 feet in practice area between two mountain ranges headed for the valley below.

I can't make an emergency parachute jump without knowing what's wrong and why the aileron was jammed full left. Everyone would want to know why and what the hell happened ... and right then, I didn't know.

I looked over my left shoulder since the aileron was stuck hard left and saw out of the corner of my eye that the second parachute in the empty rear seat had worked itself out from under the seatbelt during the slow roll at the top of the maneuver and was now hanging in front of the rear seat jamming the rear seat stick hard left! Problem diagnosed. The aircraft was rapidly losing altitude sliding left with reversed controls causing a condition that will soon flip the Champ into a spin when I slowed the airspeed. I had to get this thing sorted out.

I reached over my seatback and grabbed the dangling second parachute holding the fully extended control stick hard left, and pulled—nothing ... it was stuck fast! Was it time to pull the pins on the emergence release to let the door blow off into the wind leaving me with an escape route? No! I had to make a second effort since my altitude was just now descending below 3,800 feet, maybe 3,500, with mountains north and south of me in the practice area. I still had time to avoid an explanation to the flight club and the insurance company, so I redoubled my effort leaning as far back as possible with my seatbelt and shoulder harness still holding me tight, stretched further and gripped the derelict parachute a few inches lower and jerked hard with everything I had trying to avoid the options.

The second effort to pull the jammed parachute culprit free worked as I lifted the chute back onto the back seat releasing its hold on the control stick. Immediately the ailerons and rudder returned the Champ to normal coordinated flight and control was regained. I was back in straight and level flight. Whew! I lost about 2000 feet, maybe less, in maybe 20 or so seconds and I managed a hearty exhale as the Champ complied with my wishes of being once again in straight and level flight. The rear parachute was now on top of the seat belt in the rear seat out of harm's way for the moment. Further aerobatic flight was canceled until the parachute could be secured.

With the controls error corrected and level flight achieved, it was a big sigh of relief ... think I'll call it a day. Need to get on the ground and tidy up the rear seat configuration, and remember to leave the extra parachute out of the airplane when practicing alone, but no more aerobatic flight today.

Another sigh of relief and exhale with a slight smile thinking I wouldn't have to explain anything to anybody, and brought the airplane back in one piece—no explanations to the club members, the insurance company, the NTSB or the FAA!