

Sharing the Sky with Skydivers

Flying into or around airports where there are skydivers can be done very little stress. The following will give a brief overview of skydiving operations and discuss how airplanes and skydivers can coexist safely.

Where the heck are they? The area where skydivers land is known as a Drop Zone (DZ). Many established DZs are noted on sectionals with a parachute symbol. Skydiving may also be noted in the Airport/Facility Directory. A new or temporary DZ should have a NOTAM, which you will get during your preflight briefing. Skydiving pilots are required to talk with ATC. Typically pilots will announce over the CTAF or Unicom one or two minutes before the jumpers leave the aircraft. The pilot will also communicate his or her intention with ATC on the initial climb to altitude and one or two minutes before the jump. Requesting flight following from ATC is almost always a good idea and ATC will typically inform you if your path takes you near skydiving operations.

What are they doing? Skydiving typically is conducted anywhere between 3,000 and 14,000 feet AGL. It is occasionally conducted at lower or high altitudes. Skydivers typically leave the airplane upwind of the DZ. Skydivers typically start their landing patterns with a downwind at about 1,000 feet AGL followed by base and final (just like airplanes do). The difference is in the distance. Skydivers' patterns generally remain close in, over the center of the airport. Downwind is usually parallel to the landing area about 500 feet away. Airplanes typically fly their traffic patterns at about 1,000 AGL with downwind a half a mile or more away from the runway. So if skydivers and airplanes fly their typical patterns, there should not be a conflict. What can cause a conflict is airplanes crossing over any part of the airport, midfield or otherwise. It is recommended that aircraft descend to traffic pattern altitude 2 miles from the airport and do not cross over the airport..

Recommendations:

1. Get flight following. This is almost always a good idea for any flight.
2. Talk to local ATC. The skydiving aircraft will be communicating with the local ATC and notify ATC one to two minutes before skydivers are released.
3. Listen to UNICOM or CTAF. The skydiving aircraft will typically announce one to two minutes before skydivers are released and then again when they leave the aircraft.
4. Get a briefing from Flight Service and check NOTAMS.
5. Review the applicable Sectional and look for the parachute symbol along your flight path and destination.
6. Check the airport facility directory for your destination.
7. Descend to traffic pattern altitude one to two miles from the airport.
8. Most importantly, please **DO NOT** cross over the airport, midfield or otherwise when skydiving operations are ongoing.

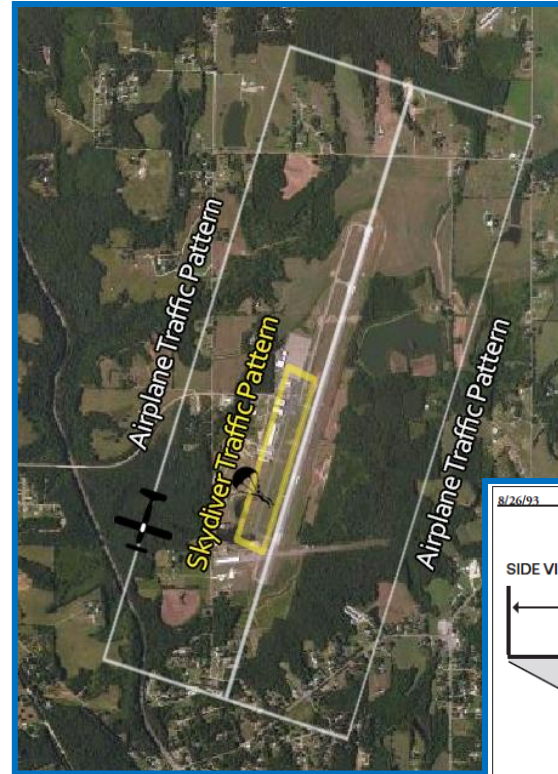


Figure 1: Shows the airplane (white) and skydiver (yellow) landing traffic patterns at Cullman Airport (KCMD).

Figure 2: An excerpt from Advisory Circular 90-66A showing typical location of skydivers relative to the runway and airplane traffic pattern.

