

1941: COTTON SUPERSEDED BY SILK IS REPLACED BY NYLON PARACHUTES

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by Pat Works

Cotton Superseded by Silk is Replaced by Nylon Parachutes



Pioneer Parachute Company – On June 6, 1942, 24-year-old Adeline Gray made the first live jump using a nylon

The mother of invention. Materials play a big part in modern day chutes. The first advance in materials came on Dec. 7, 1941, says Dan Poynter, author of *The Skydiver's Handbook*. Up until then, parachutes were made from silk. But when the Japanese cut off the silk supply at the start of War World II, Allied countries scrambled to find alternative materials. Nylon came up the winner. "And nylon was even better than silk," says Poynter. "Silk has many natural enemies, such as mildew. But nylon only has two...ultraviolet light (sun) and acid."

Cotton had been superseded by silk cloth as a higher-strength, lower-weight parachute fabric. Oriental high-volume sources of the silkworm product were cut off during WWII. Fortunately, nylon, a newly invented synthetic substitute produced by the DuPont Co was available, as exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair. Nylon parachutes were been tested with dead weights, but the military needed a live trial to confirm personnel use. Gray, a parachute rigger at the Pioneer Parachute Company volunteered. She jumped from an aircraft flying from Brainard Field, Hartford, Conn. convincing an audience of 50 critical army and navy observers.

1942 Adeline

Gray – The first person to jump with a nylon parachute.

Formerly, all parachutes were made of silk. Nylon parachutes: The first were manufactured by the Pioneer Parachute Co. of Manchester, Conn. The first descent with a nylon canopy

was made by parachute rigger Adeline Gray over Brainard Field, Hartford, Conn., on 6 June 1942.

The United States' supply of silk was in jeopardy as the country fought against the Axis powers. The Allies desperately needed a reliable supply of safe parachutes for the military. The lives of many airmen would depend on the success of the effort.

On June 6, 1942, 24-year-old Adeline Gray made the first live jump using a nylon parachute at Brainard Field in Hartford. The Pioneer Parachute Company of Manchester, conducted the test before about 50 military officials, proving the safety of their new nylon chute material and design.

At the time of her jump, she was the only woman licensed parachute jumper in Connecticut. She worked at Pioneer Parachute as a rigger, and eventually became head of the department. She also was known for her many parachute jumps at air shows across the country.

After her famous jump, she became an advertising icon for Camel Cigarettes. The advertisements in LIFE magazine featured pictures of her historical live test of the parachute, and encouraged readers to test Camel cigarettes.



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