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By Pat_Works April 29, 2015

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By Pat Works

1942 Adeline Gray: The first person to jump with a nylon parachute

On June 6, 1942, 24-year-old Adeline Gray made the first live jump using a nylon parachute as a Senior Rigger for Floyd Smith's Pioneer Parachute Company.

Adeline Gray makes the first live jump using a nylon parachute.

The first Nylon parachutes were manufactured by the Pioneer Parachute Co. of Manchester, Conn. The first descent with a nylon canopy was made by their parachute rigger, Adeline Gray, over Brainard Field, Hartford, Conn., on 6 June 1942. Floyd Smith's Pioneer Parachute Company carried out the proof-test before 50 military officials, confirming the safety of their new nylon chute material and design. Smith was principal designer of the first freefall-capable parachute he developed for the U.S. Air Services at McCook Airfield in 1919.

At the time of her jump, Ms. Gray was the only female licensed parachute jumper in Connecticut. She worked at Pioneer Parachute as a senior rigger, and ultimately became head of their rigging department. She was known for her parachute jumps at air shows across the country. After her famous jump, Ms. Gray 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.

With U.S. Military approvals and the attendant revision of the Federal Production Specification type certificate and technical standard order TSO C-23, all parachute manufacturers began using nylon fabric. Nylon became the popular choice, as it has excellent wind resistance, good elasticity, mildew resistance, and is comparatively cheaper. The material is also lightweight and dries quickly. It is resistant to abrasion and chemicals. These parachutes were made of either nylon twill or ripstop nylon. Ripstop Nylon fabric for parachutes is woven in a specialized manner with extra thick threads to create a pattern of small squares. When tears occur in the canopy, this structure squares prevent the tears from becoming bigger & stops small rips from spreading.

Ripstop

Footnote:

FYI, in 1961, my 24' round reserve parachute canopy was nylon twill. My 28' round main canopy was 1.1 oz. ripstop. Pioneer also produced a 1.6 oz. ripstop sport canopy with a slower descent rate.

Pat Works

Madden Travis 'Pat' Works, Skydiving Museum Curator's Team Lead

Category: HISTORY After Balloons & Planes

Pat Works Celebrates 50 Years of Skydiving

Parachute Canopy Materials Evolve

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