



First live test of nylon 'chute

by GARY_SATANOVSKY

As befits a man who conceived the first flying helicopter, Leonardo Da Vinci sketched out some of the first parachutes to slow the fall from the air. His invention was improved upon soon after, in another famous sketch *Homo Volans* (Flying Man) by a fellow Venetian, inventor Fausto Veranzio. At the time of both sketches, the best material for the job was silk, which was both too delicate and too expensive to be truly effective. The change to nylon proved to solve both of those problems.

On this day, June 6, in 1942, the only female parachute jumper in the U.S., Adeline Gray, made the first nylon parachute jump at Brainard Field in Hartford. The parachute maker, the Pioneer Parachute Company of Manchester, conducted the test before Army officials to prove the effectiveness of their new nylon chute design.

The Pioneer Parachute Company was not the only one capitalizing on Gray's jump. An ad for Camel cigarettes in the December 28, 1942 issue of *LIFE* magazine invoked her daring in the first "live test," as they called it, to encourage another live test — of their cigarette brand. "A perfect landing" for Gray was celebrated by lighting up a Camel, according to the ad, and there was the young woman herself, in a flight suit and goggles, rhapsodizing "...the brand for me is Camel. They're grand!"

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