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JUMP FOR IT!

Some Curiosities of the Parachute

EVERY Sunday at 12.45 p.m., Stations 2YA, 1ZB, 2ZB, 3ZB and 4ZB broadcast a talk for members and supporters of the Air Training Corps. Until recently, these talks were "lessons" for the cadets themselves, and were broadcast on Sunday mornings immediately before the Radio Magazine from the fighting forces overseas. But now, because of the wide general interest in the session, the hour has been changed to 12.45, and the lessons to general appeal talks.

The cadets, of course, still get formal instruction—some of them at weekly parades, some at secondary schools, and some by correspondence. But the special feature of this Sunday afternoon session is talks that will interest people of all ages if they are interested in Air Force training to begin with. To show how interesting these broadcasts can be, we summarise a talk given last Sunday.

IF you saw a man wearing a parachute, pull the ripcord while he was standing on the ground you'd probably think he was crazy. But what would you think if the parachute opened and carried him up into the air? Well, strange as it may seem, that happens dozens of times every day. The Russians in training their paratroops use an enormous wind machine which directs a current of air upwards to a considerable height. The trainees just walk out on to a grating over the machine, pull the ripcord, and up they go. After rising to about two hundred and fifty feet they drift out of the current and float back to earth.

And that reminds me of a curious thing that happened to one Russian parachutist. He was making a delayed-action jump—that is, he was letting himself fall a long way before opening his chute. He jumped out of the plane at 23,000 feet. He could see the ground, but it was a long way off . . . At 500 feet, with everything rushing up to meet him, he opened his parachute and started to look round for a suitable place to land. But then he noticed that instead of the land coming closer to him it was actually receding. He was going up instead of down—and he saw the men in the fields grow smaller and smaller and finally disappear from sight. He had opened his parachute in the middle of a strong up-draught and it carried him up thousands of feet before he got out of it. Twenty minutes later he came to earth after having drifted eight miles.

Out Again, In Again

And that's not by any means the strangest thing that's happened to a parachutist. For example, can you imagine the surprise a pilot would get if he baled out of a plane, and a few seconds later fell into it again? This really did happen, to Lieut. Staniland some years ago. A plane he was testing developed an uncontrollable spin and he had to bale out. After he jumped, the plane made another turn, coming underneath him again, and he fell right back into the cockpit. He had to jump out a second time and this time made a successful descent.

Another British pilot had an even more exciting experience when he was testing a new bomber. At eight thousand feet the plane caught fire, and he had to abandon it, particularly as he had several bombs aboard. After falling some



. . . start climbing up the parachute cords

distance he opened his parachute. Then he looked up and saw that the burning plane was chasing him down. With flames pouring out of it, it was coming down in a spiral immediately above him—and, believe me, that was a nasty spot to be in, because, even if the plane didn't actually hit him, there was the danger of the parachute catching fire. Fortunately, before the plane overtook him, so much of it was burnt away that it lost its spiral motion and fell vertically, missing him by several yards.

Of course, the pilot wouldn't always be helpless in a situation like that. If he had sufficient time he could steer himself out of danger, because by pulling down one side of the parachute it can be made to move sideways to some extent. When approaching the ground it is usual to watch for a suitable place to land, and then to steer the parachute toward the chosen spot, and it is surprising how accurately an experienced jumper can bring himself down on to the place he has picked out. This was demonstrated in a rather striking manner last year when an ex-R.A.F. instructor named George Hopkins jumped on to the top of the Devil's Tower in Wyoming. This is an almost vertical peak with a plateau at the top only eighty feet square. Hopkins had made a bet of £10 that he could land on the peak, and he did land without any trouble. But he hadn't thought about how he was going to get down again, and he found himself marooned. He couldn't climb down, and nobody else seemed able to climb up. All sorts of plans were made for his rescue . . . Eventually a party of expert rock-climbers managed to get to the top and bring him down.

The Air-Minded Monkey

Finally, here is a little story with a touch both of humour and pathos. Some ten years ago an airman trained a monkey to make parachute descents. At first the difficulty was to get the monkey to let himself land and not to start climbing up the parachute cords. Later, however, it developed quite a taste for the sport and whenever it was taken up in a plane seemed to look forward eagerly to the jump. Unfortunately it didn't have sufficient intelligence to connect the gentleness of its fall with the harness round its body. One day it was left in a hotel room in Madrid. It looked out of the window and saw the people in the street far below, just as from an aeroplane. Without hesitation, and with perfect confidence the monkey jumped from the window—but without its parachute.