

History of the Parachute

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Credit for the invention of the first practical parachute frequently goes to Sebastien Lenormand who demonstrated the parachute principle in 1783. However, parachutes had been imagined and sketched by Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) centuries earlier.

Faust Vrancic - Homo Volans

Other early inventors designed parachutes, including Croatian Faust Vrancic who constructed a device based on Da Vinci's drawing. Faust Vrancic jumped from a Venice tower in 1617 wearing a rigid-framed parachute. Faust Vrancic published *Machinae Novae*, in which he describes in text and picture fifty-six advanced technical constructions, including Vrancic's parachute called the Homo Volans.

Jean Pierre Blanchard - Animal Parachute

Jean Pierre Blanchard (1753-1809) a Frenchman was probably the first person to actually use a parachute for an emergency. In 1785, he dropped a dog in a basket, to which a parachute was attached, from a balloon high in the air.

First Soft Parachute

In 1793, Blanchard claims to have escaped from an exploded hot air balloon with a parachute. However, this was an unwitnessed event. Blanchard, it should be noted, did develop the first foldable parachute made from silk, up until that point all parachutes were made with rigid frames.

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Andrew Garnerin - First Recorded Parachute Jump



In 1797 (October 22), Andrew Garnerin was the first person recorded to jump with a parachute without a rigid frame. Garnerin jumped from hot air balloons as high as 8,000 feet in the air. Garnerin also designed the first air vent in a parachute intended to reduce oscillations.

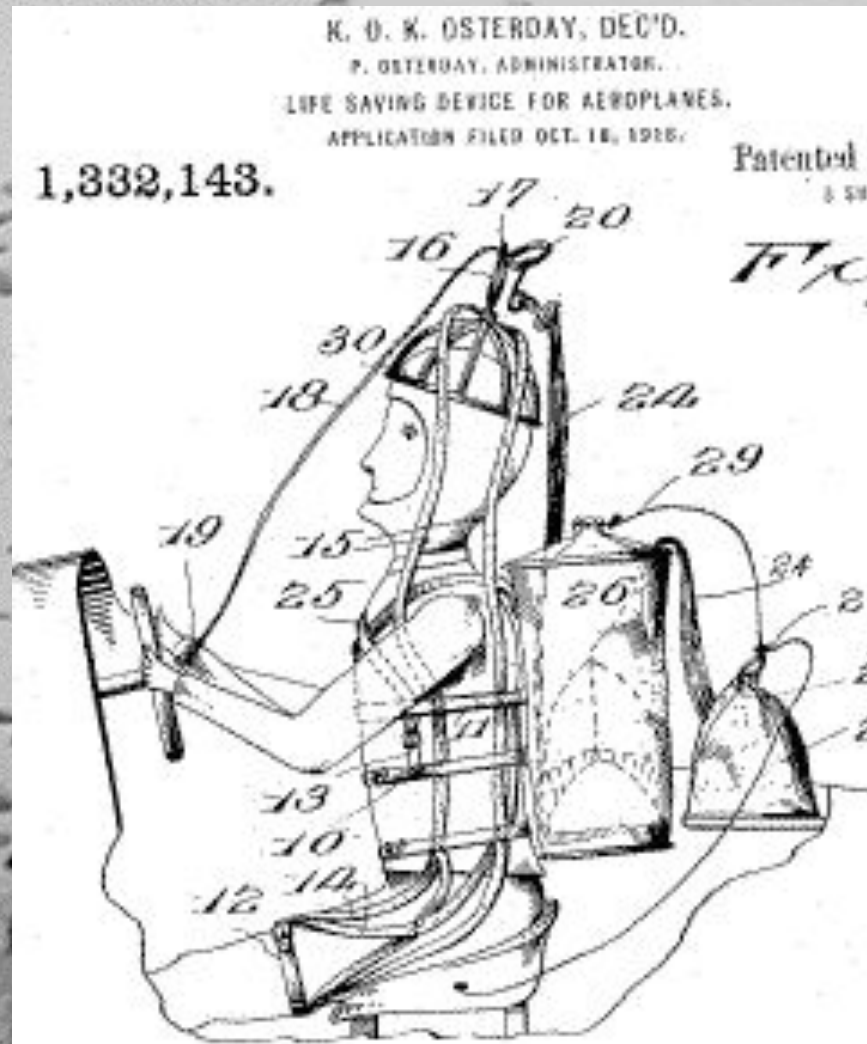
Andrew Garnerin's Parachute

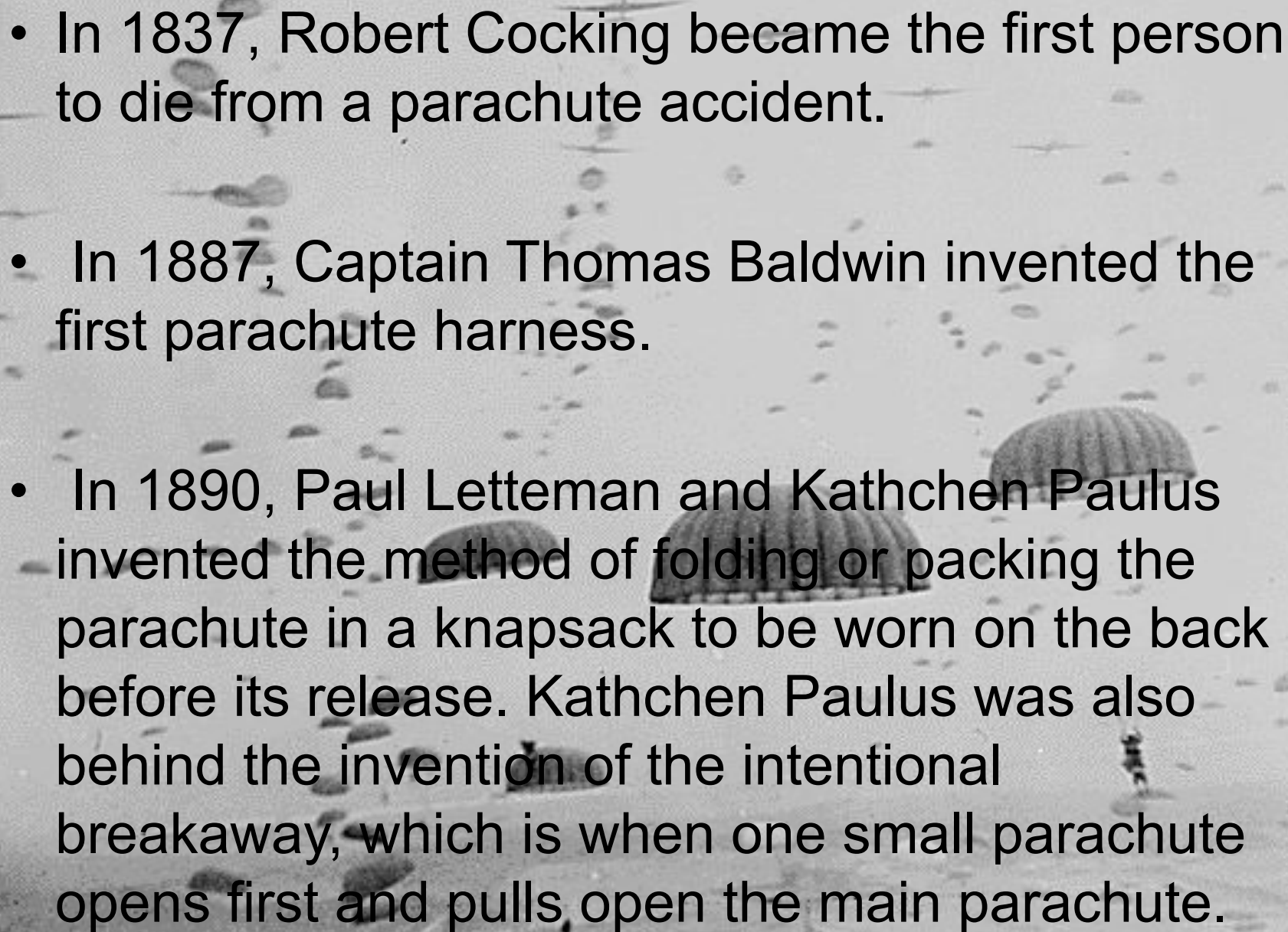


When opened, the Andrew Garnerin parachute resembled a huge umbrella about thirty feet in diameter. It was made of canvas and was attached to a hydrogen balloon.

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Parachute Trivia - First Death, Harness, Knapsack, Breakaway



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- In 1837, Robert Cocking became the first person to die from a parachute accident.
 - In 1887, Captain Thomas Baldwin invented the first parachute harness.
 - In 1890, Paul Letteman and Kathchen Paulus invented the method of folding or packing the parachute in a knapsack to be worn on the back before its release. Kathchen Paulus was also behind the invention of the intentional breakaway, which is when one small parachute opens first and pulls open the main parachute.

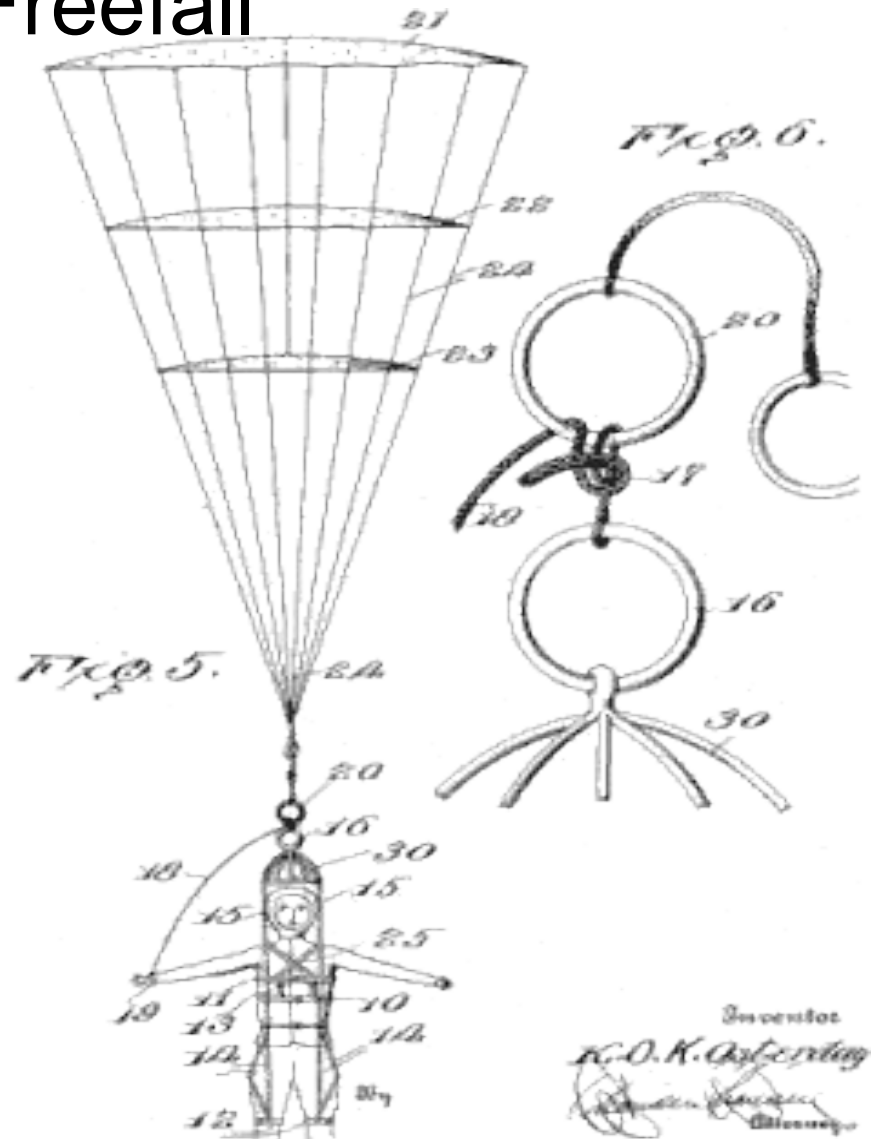
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Parachute Trivia - Jumping From An Airplane,

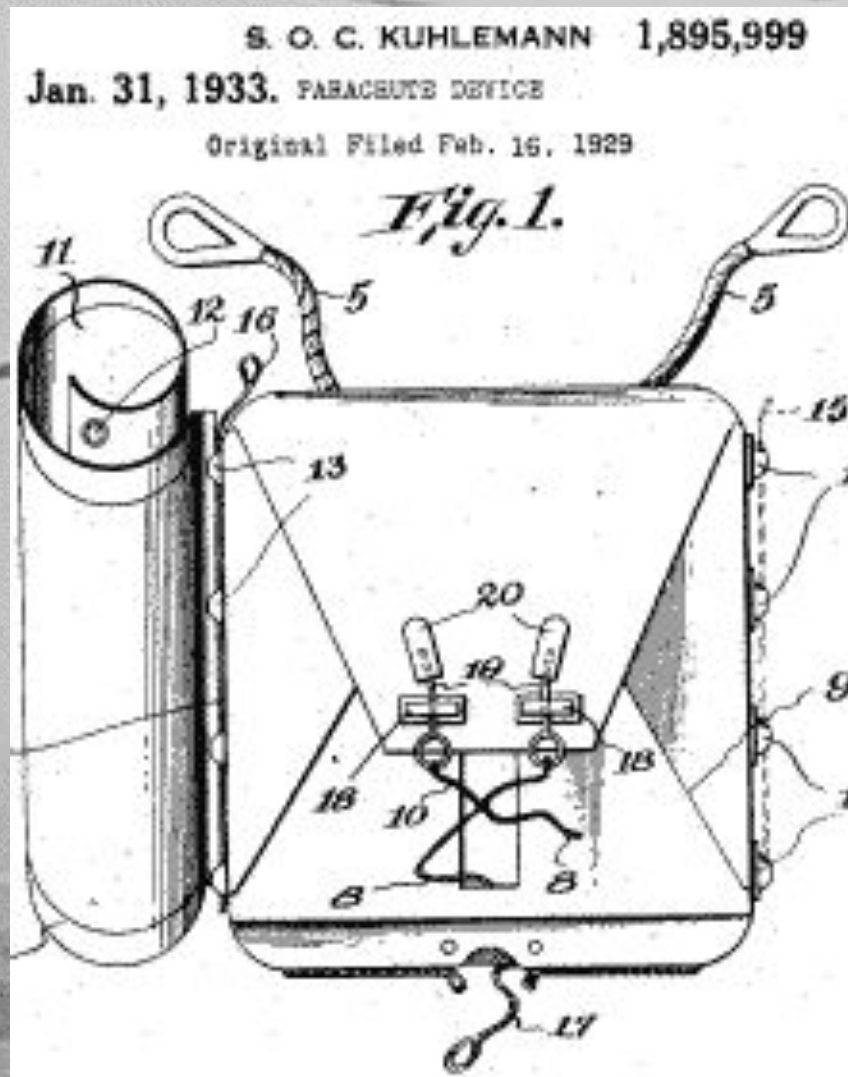
Two parachutters First Freefall

claim to be the first person to jump from an airplane, both Grant Morton and Captain Albert Berry parachuted from an airplane in 1911.

In 1914, Georgia "Tiny" Broadwick made the first freefall jump.



First Parachute Training Tower



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- Polish-American Stanley Switlik founded the "Canvas-Leather Speciality Company" on October 9, 1920. The company first manufactured items such as leather hampers, golf bags, coal bags, pork roll casings, and postal mail bags. However, Switlik soon switched to making pilot and gunner belts, designing flight clothing, and experimenting with parachutes. The company was soon renamed the Switlik Parachute & Equipment Company.

- According to the Switlik Parachute Company: "In 1934, Stanley Switlik and George Palmer Putnam, Amelia Earhart's husband, formed a joint venture and built a 115 foot tall tower on Stanley's farm in Ocean County. Designed to train airmen in parachute jumping, the first public jump from the tower was made by Ms. Earhart on June 2, 1935. Witnessed by a crowd of reporters and officials from the Army and Navy, she described the descent as "Loads of Fun!"

Parachute Jumping



Parachute jumping as a sport began in the 1960s when new "sport parachutes" were first designed. The parachute above drive slots for greater stability and horizontal speed.