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Masculinity and the Military Technology ***Complex: The Emergence of Sport*** **Parachuting**

A social history of sport parachuting is really a history of masculinities (dominant, emergent, and residual), confronted by and connected to ideas about science and modernity, the body as spectacle, war as adventure, and the invention and re-invention of social meanings about sport. Credit for making the first descent by parachute has been given to Chinese Emperor Shun (2258-2208 BCE), Leonardo Da Vinci is widely considered as the originator of the concept, and a sketch was produced by Fausto Veranzio in 1595. But, as Michael Salter noted in his 1979 Howell address, the first authenticated jump was not performed until 1797.

Parachuting emerged in the nineteenth century as one of the risk/spectacle events performed at carnivals and fairs-at the same time that balloonists rejected it as a safety device. It was argued that carrying a parachute was a display of weakness and an affront to one's masculinity, particularly in an activity through which the adventuresome spirit was braced by faith in technology. In the early twentieth century, pilots also rejected the parachute as a safety device, choosing instead to honorably "go down with the ship" (to use the naval metaphor), or plunging to the ground in their burning planes. A more positive view of parachuting emerged following some technical improvements and the military recruitment propaganda programs of World Wars I and II which tended to focus on notions of adventure and physical prowess in young men.

War has always thrust new and violent experiences upon men and women, and forced many to employ their bodies to fight and kill. Air battle, and in particular, paratrooping, systematically mobilized thousands of men's bodies in unfamiliar ways. These forms of warfare encouraged an uncritical sense of confidence in technology and a sense of masculine identity tied directly to bravery, adventure, and military duty at any costs-all in the face of the rather frightening activity of being launched out of a plane.

This paper explores the relationship between masculinity and technology as it was manifested in early spectacle parachuting, mass military parachuting, and through

the invention and re-invention of sport parachuting. We argue that the various perceptions of parachuting are tied to broader cultural notions of masculine bravado which shifted as did the dominant currents of support for science and technology. The emergence of sport parachuting should be framed within the historical context of the masculinizing processes of the military-technology complex. Further, the paper analyzes the residual impact that these and other forces have had on the gendering of sport parachuting in the post-Cold War period. It also offers some general comments on codes of masculinity within risk subcultures.