

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DISPERSING CLOUDS

So much has been said recently about dissipating clouds with electrified sand that some people have blithely begun talking about making rain and even neutralizing the charges in thunderstorms by the same means! When a "dry" cumulus cloud disappears on a summer's day what ended its existence? Those who enjoy lying on the grass and watching the clouds go by know that the life of an individual cumulus cloud is not long. Sometimes it is only a few minutes; in other cases it may last for an hour. In the normal course of events the disappearance of a cloud is attended by a fraying of the edges a general thinning and spreading before final evaporation. On a summer's day cumulus clouds are forming and dissipating most of the time. Thus the disappearance of a cloud at a time when people are expecting it to vanish may not necessarily be because the cloud has been sanded.

A few years ago a colonel in the Air Service on starting up for a brief spin said, "Watch me finish that little cumulus cloud." Up he went and shortly he disappeared in the cloud, but only for a moment. The cloud divided and immediately evaporated - the propellor had mixed it with drier outside air. So when an airplane flies into a cloud and squirts it with electrified sand, who can prove it was the sand that finished the cloud?

But let us grant what the experimenters claim, that they can dissipate an isolated cloud with electrified sand. Suppose new clouds keep forming faster than an airplane or two can make the rounds. Or what if a fog keeps rolling onto a landing field on a thousand foot front! The cost of sanding in adequate proportions to keep the air clear would mount to impossible figures. Nevertheless, small beginnings in an experimental way sometimes lead to large results, so we may continue to view the progress with interest even though we do not expect ever to hire airplanes to provide fair weather for wash day, or to neutralize the charges in an oncoming thunderstorm.

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