



Airborne Invasion

► PARATROOP tactics have been the means employed for seed dispersal by wild plants most successful in occupying London's bomb-blasted areas since the Nazi "hate" blitz early in the war. Airborne seeds have gone farthest and deployed most widely, Prof. E. J. Salisbury, University of London botanist, reported in an address before the Royal Institution of Great Britain.

By far the most abundant and most generally distributed of the "blitzweeds" is the big, lusty, red-flowered plant known in Britain as rosebay willowherb and in the United States and Canada as fireweed. Its thousands of seeds are carried on parachutes like thistledown, but rather more efficient. For one thing, the long hairs of the fireweed parachute open out widely in dry air, but when it becomes damp, in weather more suited for germination, they partly close, permitting an earthward glide.

Second honors were distributed among a number of species of the ragwort genus. The ragworts are botanical second cousins to the dandelion, and their seeds are carried more or less dandelion-fashion. This is less efficient than the fireweed's parachute; still, it suffices for quite general dispersal.

A number of other composite species, with parachute-borne seeds on the dandelion and thistle patterns, figure in the plant populations of bombed areas. Some of them are of American origin, notably the common fleabane, close cousin to the wild asters but less attractive to look at.

Some plants are able to travel by air even though not parachute-equipped, because their seeds or spores are so tiny and light that even faint breezes can carry them. Moss and fern spores are

most successful at this kind of drifting, because of their microscopic size. However, very small seeds are also able to float like dust-grains in the air for at least moderate distances.

A third kind of seed travel that may have figured in the establishment of vegetation on bombed areas is accidental carriage on the clothing or shoes of human beings. This is by far the least efficient way for plants to get about in the world, to judge by results on the London bomb-scars.

Prof. Salisbury made a study of the floating power of seeds by dropping them through still air and holding a stopwatch on them while they fell ten feet. Fireweed seed averaged 43.4 seconds for the drop, the ragworts between five and eight seconds, and fleabane seeds

15.4 seconds. He pointed out that upward currents of air, such as occur on warm days, often reach these velocities, and can thus account for a major part of weed-seed transportation.

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EMPLOYMENT

**Blind Typist Is Employed In X-Ray Department**

► A BLIND typist is employed in the X-ray department of one of the base hospitals of the Department of Health for Scotland, according to a report carried in the British Medical Journal. Her job is to transcribe the remarks of the radiologist as, in total darkness, he screens successive patients.

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