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Maj.Gen.Hoshiar Singh, Colonel of the Parachute Regiment with Dr. Bernard G. Hasenbein and his team of jumpers.

Paratroopers 'on air' for peace

DR. BERNARD G. Hasenbein and his friends love jumping. And such is the "height" of their passion for the sport, that they have travelled from the U.S. to Russia, from Indonesia to Poland and from Thailand to India — "just for a jump".

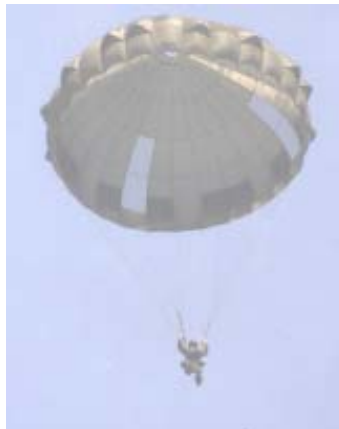
So what is so great about it? Nothing really except that Hasenbein's team is no young brigade that is out on its first assignment. Come to think of it, this team is probably one of those rare ones that statistics might place in the "old and experienced list", but become popular for the young energy that they seem to bubble with.

They have seen war from close quarters — the tension, pain and joy that comes with victory and defeat — but now they are out on a new mission. The 21-plus team of Dr. Bernard Hasenbein was in India not just to participate in the diamond jubilee celebration of the 50th Independent Parachute Brigade that was held at Agra last Friday, but to meet their counterparts from various parts of the world to spread the message of peace.

The director of U.S.- based

International Airborne Society which believes in the "world is our drop zone" motto, Dr. Hasenbein hopes that these small meetings of war veterans will not just bring them closer but also the concerned countries.

"Our aim is to travel all over the world and make contact with various paratroopers and exchange ideas and cultures," he says. In operation for over nine years now, the International Airborne Society has been frequently organising



A parachutist in action.

operations every year, trying to cover various countries.

All Dr. Hasenbein may remember of jumping from 21,000 feet may be that "the air felt quite cold", but what makes this visiting team more inspiring is, perhaps, the fact that all of its members are well beyond what one would call the suitable running age, leave alone jumping from the height of over 1,500 feet.

"Joe Hall, who is called 'Runway' by all of us lost both legs in a war, but such is his passion for parajumping that no matter what, he still spends enough time on it," says Dr. Hasenbein. Speaking on the importance of such interaction he says: "In the present context when there is a war going on in Afghanistan, it becomes all the more important to promote peace and international understanding. And although a lot of people could not come to India fearing problems, we came with the belief that if terrorists could dictate our travel plans, they had won half the battle, and we will not let them do that."

By Lakshmi Balakrishnan