

Nomex Needs Care, Too

Survival equipment

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When asked to contribute to this year's safety issue, many topics came to mind. Most of you know by now I work with parachutes. What many of you do not know is that while in the Air Force, I also worked with other types of survival equipment. What I would like to talk about in this issue is Nomex flying clothing and your helmet. You do wear them, don't you?

Nomex is a very unique material that *does not support combustion*. It's something that many of you wear and give little consideration or thought to. It's not just something you wear to change the oil in your aircraft so your clothes don't get dirty or to see how tight you can wear it to impress your fans. It's a lifesaving piece of equipment that requires some tender loving care.

Just as important as your flight suit is your helmet. *Always wear your helmet!* It's not just another piece of expensive equipment. Both your Nomex flight suit and helmet work in harmony to protect your hide from getting scorched and your head from getting severely injured should your aircraft stop suddenly, as in the case of an accident. Not wearing your helmet because it's uncomfortable is not a valid excuse. This can be fixed by making sure your helmet has been fitted properly to your head to prevent hot spots and discomfort. Leaving it in the trunk of your car is not a good choice.

A number of years ago I gave a seminar on the proper wearing of Nomex flight suits and helmets. Someone lis-

tened and decided to modify the way he wore his survival equipment. A few months later I was thrilled to receive a call from him stating that those changes saved him from serious burns and possible death.

Look carefully at Photos 1 and 2. These two photos show the actual flight suit and helmet worn by the pilot that survived the fiery crash of his P-47 (see Photo 3). It's amazing the condition of the flight suit compared to the helmet. It shows no visible signs of fire damage. Now take a closer look at the helmet (in Photo 2) and you'll see the fire damage. The paint was melting and running down the side of the helmet, but the pilot's turned-up collar protected his neck. Most importantly, the visor was down and it protected his eyes and face. This photo may not show clearly the damage to the visor, but it is glazed over from the intense heat. Imagine the injuries that he could have suffered if his visor had not been down and locked.

To achieve the maximum amount of protection you must understand that the proper wearing of both your Nomex flight suit and gloves is vital to your survival. Look carefully at Photo 4. Exposing any part of your body could have disastrous results in the event of an emergency. Many pilots roll up their sleeves and turn down their gloves, complaining on a summer day that



PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2

it's too hot wearing their flight suit as recommended. Being caught in a fire is hot also! A little discomfort is better than ending up in the burn ward of a hospital. Flight gloves are extra long for a reason. In Photo 5 you see my left arm has the glove on the outside of my flight suit. This is the way many people assume you wear them. In case of a fire, hot liquid could run down your sleeve and into your gloves. Again, *the gloves are designed extra long for a reason*. Now look at my right arm in the photo.



PHOTO 3

The glove should be worn *under* your flight suit. The extra length gives the maximum protection you might need when unlocking a hot metal handle or anything else your lower arm comes in contact with.

Bring your attention to Photo 6 where I'm pointing. It is very important that the collar of your flight suit be turned up to protect the back of your neck. If I didn't have my collar turned up, at least 3-4 inches of my neck would be exposed. Wearing it turned up better protects you from liquid running into your flight suit.

Now that you have finished flying, and the odors from your flight suit have been keeping your friends at a distance, some of you might actually decide that washing your flight suit is not a bad idea. You need to pay careful attention to the washing instructions the manufacturer recommends. If you're lucky enough to have some-

one else doing your laundry, make sure that person knows the special Nomex washing requirements. As previously mentioned Nomex doesn't support combustion, but washing it with a nice sweet-smelling fabric softener can coat the material, and it will burn. That's why you want to keep your flight suit away from anything that can adhere to it and burn. Most over-the-counter powder detergents will do the job just fine. Just don't get fancy. I suggest washing it in cold/warm water by itself. You can dry it by hanging it up or tumble it dry at a low heat and you're good to go flying again.

What about the gloves? Don't toss them into the washing machine with your flight suit. They don't do well in a washer. Put them on and wash your hands in the sink as you normally would. Rinse them while still on your hands, then carefully remove them trying not to stretch them out of shape. Lay them flat on a towel to absorb excess moisture, and they will dry just fine. Don't wring them out as this could stretch and damage the leather.

If you have any questions, please call or e-mail me. All my contact information is on my website at www.SilverParachutes.com. **IAC**



PHOTO 4



PHOTOS COURTESY ALLEN SILVER

PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6