



## A Great In-Vest-Ment

by Tom Johnson – SSF Trustee

As I get ready to climb into my sleek European sailplane for a flight, I dutifully take out my phone, wallet, and anything else I happen to be carrying. I stuff them into the side pockets, and I always wonder to myself what would happen to them if I had to exit the sailplane in flight. I know if I had to get out quickly, I would not be able to grab these items that may be very useful to me once I was on the ground. The stuff would be of no use to me. I knew there had to be a better way, but what?

Sometimes the answer is so obvious, you cannot see it.

I was at a contest recently, and a friend and mentor from my Navy flying days was there too. As he readied his ship for the day's activities, he placed a fishing vest into the cockpit. Being the smart-aleck I am, I asked what he hoped to catch. His reply stunned me. He wanted to catch rescuers in case he had to bail out or land out.

In our aircraft carrier flying days, we wore a survival vest attached to our torso harness. This vest had most everything we might need to survive should we have to eject and give the jet back to the taxpayers. We wore them as matter-of-factly as you possibly could. The survival vest was like a pair of socks, always there, never questioned, and essential for operations.

The better way had not only been there all along, but it was so obvious I should have done it a long time ago.

So, I got home and started to build my vest.

Thank goodness my children care about me. I mentioned the vest and the items, and the next thing I knew, packages started arriving at the door.

They got me a twelve-pocket optical yellow safety vest with reflective orange and silver stripes. It is very light weight, breathable, and comfortable. The pockets can be closed with the attached Velcro. They are big enough for a phone, wallet, energy bars, and a water bottle.

They bought me a combination whistle and compass.

They bought me a small foldable survival knife, space blanket, and signal mirror.

They got me a good flashlight like the one I use to pre-flight my plane at night. The fact that it can be seen from space only adds to its usefulness.

They got me a light-weight portable phone battery.

The whistle can get the attention of someone on the other side of the airport, and the compass works well enough.

The other stuff is standard.

Do not take the space blanket out of the wrapper unless you intend to use it. Putting it back into the wrapper is like folding a fitted sheet. Possible, but beyond my capability.





Make sure the knife is plenty sharp, and periodically check the mirror for cracks.

Check that your flashlight has fresh batteries and it is a good idea to carry a spare set. I recommend getting rechargeable batteries for the obvious reasons.

Now the most important thing to do. Get some thin parachute cord and tie every item to the vest. If you do not want to lose it during the bailout, tie it on the vest. Even items in the Velcro closed pockets can come out in a rough bailout.

Think about getting a small pouch with an eyelet to put your phone and wallet in, and one for your food as well. Then you can tie them to the vest as well.

Once you have your vest built, test fit it. Try it on and see if you can get to everything. Then put your parachute on over the vest and see how everything fits. You may have to move some things around. You will find wearing the vest under your parachute to not be an encumbrance.

Do these test fittings in the comfort of your living room. Do not let the first time you wear your vest be on the flight line prior to a flight.

The terrain we fly over can be inhospitable and difficult for rescue personnel to reach. We must be prepared to survive after a bailout or off-field landing in these areas. Be ready to spend the night.

Now when I stuff my nose-tackle body into my sleek sailplane, I have all the stuff I may need in the event of a bailout or off-filed landing attached to my body.

Now if I can only remember to leave my car keys for the retrieve.