

World War Two Activity Sheet 2: Explore a WWII airman's uniform

Archaeology is the study of how people have lived in the past. This activity is designed to encourage your pupils to focus on the people who flew WWII planes and to give them an understanding of the danger that airmen faced. Ask the class to label the following important parts of the uniform:

Flying helmet

Escape scarf

Knife

Map pocket

Gloves

First Aid kit

Talk as a class about some of the important features of the uniform.

Ask the class to answer the following questions (Teacher's Notes included):

Why does the airman have a knife buttoned into a pocket on his leg? What might it have been used for? Why is it secured with a button and held by a piece of string?

What is in the white packet? Why was it important to have one of these and why was it stored in a pocket? This example has not been opened and it was made during the WWII. It contains pills and an injection of morphine - do you think they are still safe to use?

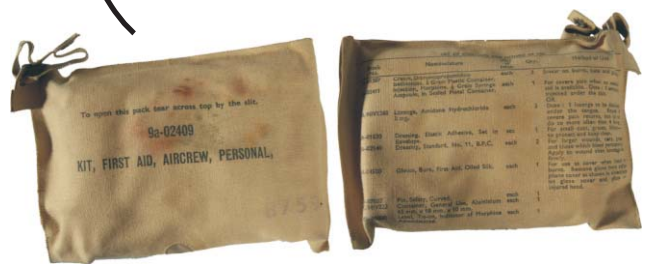
Study the gloves. What makes them different from normal gloves? Why do you think they were made in this way?

The pilot would have worn a leather and sheepskin flying jacket over his suit. Why do you think it was made of these materials?

What would the clear plastic pocket on his upper leg have been used for?

Study the silk scarf – what does the design on it show? Think about why it is decorated in this way. Why do you think airmen had these and wore them around their necks?

Look at the flying helmet. The mouthpiece has a microphone in it and the hat has headphones built in. A wire from the back of the hat plugs into the chair to connect them. Why do you think airmen needed headphones and a microphone?



Teacher's Notes

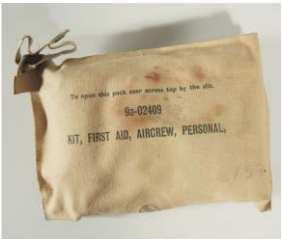
Knife -



The knife was intended to be used for cutting parachute strings (not stabbing someone, cutting up sandwiches etc.!) If an airman had to bail out of the plane they would either end up over the land or over the sea. On land there are many hazards that

may snag the 'chute and suspend the pilot and at sea the 'chute would quickly fill with water, dragging the airman under. The knife is safely secured with string and a stud to prevent it being misplaced, lost or removed from the suit. Even if our airman had been using it to cut sandwiches at the moment when the plane became endangered, it would still have been with him as he leapt out of the plane.

First Aid Kit -



The white packet contains a first aid kit and is always stored in the pocket of the flying suit. It contains a few dressings, a syringe of morphine and some medicines. The contents are likely to be dangerous having been made so long ago.

Gloves -



The gloves are like mittens, with the exception that the index finger, as well as the thumb, is separate. The airman needs his thumb and finger free to operate the controls of the plane.

However, the other fingers are covered like mittens for two reasons: partly as the material is so thick that it is easier to make and wear them like this and because mittens are warmer than gloves. It was very cold in WWII planes and the airman would have needed to keep his hands warm.

Jacket -

WWII planes were unpressurised and temperature drops as you go higher. Demonstrate this by asking the class if anyone has noticed this whilst, for example, standing on high ground, a hill etc. Modern jets are pressurised and heated which is why they are so warm. The jacket would have been made of sheepskin to keep the airman warm.

Map Pocket -



The pocket could be used to hold directions or a map. It would be positioned on the airman's thigh when he was seated making it easy for him to see and read the directions whilst flying.

Scarf -



The silk scarf shows a map – this one is of Burma. The airman had a map of the place he was flying over, not for directions whilst flying, but in case the plane came down. If he crashed on the land he would need to know where the enemy were, where ally troops were and where the nearest city, town or port is. The map would be worn around the neck for warmth and so would be readily available if he had an emergency and had to leave the plane, or the plane crashed.

Helmet -



The microphone allows the pilot to talk to other airmen on board and the headphones mean that he can hear what they are saying. The plane would have been very noisy and having the headphones built into the helmet makes it easier for him to hear and blocks out some of the background noise. The tube at the front of the mouth piece would provide the airman with oxygen.