



A space blanket bivy in action. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

Space blankets stand the test of time

I grew up in the Space Age. The world watched the Mercury, Gemini, and finally, the Apollo series rockets bring man to outer space, and finally, to the moon. The technology was beyond our wildest dreams, and we could barely comprehend the action of man actually setting foot on the moon.

We benefited from all this new technology with scores of discoveries, which led to inventions, and eventually to companies getting into our wallet with new products. One product that stands out in my mind was Tang.

Tang was a powdered orange-flavored mix, which, when you added water, gave you a glass of powdered orange drink. Each glass of the stuff contained an adults-daily recommended allowance of vitamin C, and probably a three-week supply of sugar. Us kids thought it was the greatest invention ever.

I couldn't have breakfast without my Tang. All the kids I knew drank Tang. I never knew of an adult who drank the stuff as it was probably toxic to grown-ups, but us kids sure drank it up.

Another great invention was the Space



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Pen. This style pen was actually developed to write in the zero gravity of outer space. That feature, a pressurized ink cartridge, allowed the pen to be able to write upside down here on old boring Earth. Researchers spent millions on the development of this pen. I guess they never heard of a pencil.

One invention of the Space Age that has really stood the test of time is the space blanket. I have written about them for years and always encouraged my readers to carry one in their survival pack as well as their first aid kits.

I would venture to say that most of you have been lugging around a space blanket for years. I wonder, just how many of you have actually ever used one? There have been several occasions where I have actually needed one and

I wanted to share some thoughts about them.

A scientist at the National Research Corporation discovered that a metalized film, called Mylar, used in satellites, could also keep people warm. The shiny aluminum-based sheets work by reflecting heat back to the human body.

The first ones were made by NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in 1964. The material comprises a sheet of thin plastic that is coated with a metallic reflecting agent that is usually gold or silver in color. The idea is that the blanket's air-tight foil reduces convection, reduces heat loss caused by evaporation of perspiration, and the reflective surface inhibits heat loss caused by thermal radiation.

In a hot environment, the blanket can be used to provide shade and reflect heat away from a person. You would not wrap up in the blanket under those circumstances but would set it up as a tarp and lay under or alongside it, in the shade.

The United States military uses a similar blanket, called a "casualty blanket." It uses a similar thermal reflective surface layer as the space blanket, backed

by an olive drab-colored, reinforcing, outer layer. It provides greater durability at the cost of greater bulk and weight. I might also point out that the Taliban uses blankets like these to hide their heat signature from NATO forces.

There are hundreds of uses for these blankets, besides wrapping up yourself in one. You can heat water by laying the blanket on the ground, in full sunlight, and placing a container of water in the middle. In no time, you will have warm water to wash up with. The blanket can also be used to catch rainwater in a pinch, by spreading it out, and anchoring the sides higher than the center.

In a pinch, you can cut a hole in the top and wear it as a poncho to keep rain off. The blanket can be used to line a box and create a solar oven. Stretching the blanket behind your fire will reflect the heat back to you, or inside your makeshift shelter.

Pieces of the blanket can be cut up and used as trail markers, showing rescue workers your direction of travel. A strip of the blanket can be used to act as an antenna for a radio, or in a pinch, might help your cell phone signal.

The blanket can be used to hold a splint in place for an injured leg or arm. Place two sticks alongside the injured limb and use strips of the blanket to tie the sticks in place. A similar strip can also be used as a sling.

One of the drawbacks of the space blanket is the size. Most of them are 52 inches wide and 84 inches long. Not exactly something a full-sized man, like myself, is going to curl up in by the fire. It is akin to taking a hot shower and trying to dry off with a hand towel. They come in sizes over 5 feet wide, and I suggest you get the larger ones.

The second drawback for them is the noise. They crinkle and crunch at every movement, sort of like trying to sleep in a box of Rice Krispies cereal. Remember, they are for emergencies, not ordinary fun camping trips.

For sleeping, I suggest the Bivy style space blanket, and I have recommended that in my columns many times before. The bivy is like a mini sleeping bag you can strip down and crawl into. I have tried them and the bivy works very well in a pinch, although you get the crunching sound

all night long from all directions.

The space blankets are cheap enough. I have found them for as little as a buck each. Since they weigh about 2 or 3 ounces, I carry several of them with me in my kits for various utility purposes. For sleeping I have a bivy bag, and it is like having a shelter anywhere I go in the woods.

I don't think my body can stand to drink the Tang anymore, if it is even still around. The survival bag has not only stood the test of time but has grown with the bivy bag and more durable blankets. Add some to your kit and one day you may be glad you did.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org



10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226