

UNION GROUND CLOTHS

Pattern and Instructions compiled by 1st Sgt. Koepp, Co. D 2nd US Sharpshooters

Regulations from 1865 Quartermaster Manual. Chapter Fifteen, page 253..

“Water proof blankets..The water proof blanket for infantry, to be 46 inches wide by 71 inches long, without the slit for the head; but having the grommet arrangement the same as for the poncho. A string of stout webbing, 12 inches long to tie them on, with extra grommets for it, instead of slit for poncho. The grommets in all cases, to be 1 inch from the centre of the grommet to the end of the blanket on one side and end, and 2 inches from the other side and end. The grommets must be stayed, and placed equi-distant, so as to match, and be made of brass.”

Tools and Materials:

1. Canvas. 3 yards of 60" wide duck will make one ground cloth. Tighter woven canvases will minimize paint bleed through. A good source of canvas can be found at www.bigduckcanvas.com.
2. Sewing machine. If you have a top feed dog attachment for your machine it is well worth it and will make construction much easier.
3. Thread to match the color of canvas made of 100% cotton. Black thread, 100% cotton, to match painted cloth.
4. 1 quart black latex paint. You can experiment as you like, I prefer Rustoleum semi-gloss.
5. Paint brush.
6. 18 ¼" I.D. brass grommets and assorted tools. I use Tandy #0 grommets and #0 setter.
7. ¼" punch
8. Large work surface. A 4x8 sheet of plywood set on saw horses will make for a pleasing painting surface.
9. Measuring instruments
10. Scissors
11. Pins
12. Optional: Boiled Linseed Oil, Turpentine, and Japan Dryer for a finishing top coat.

Instructions:

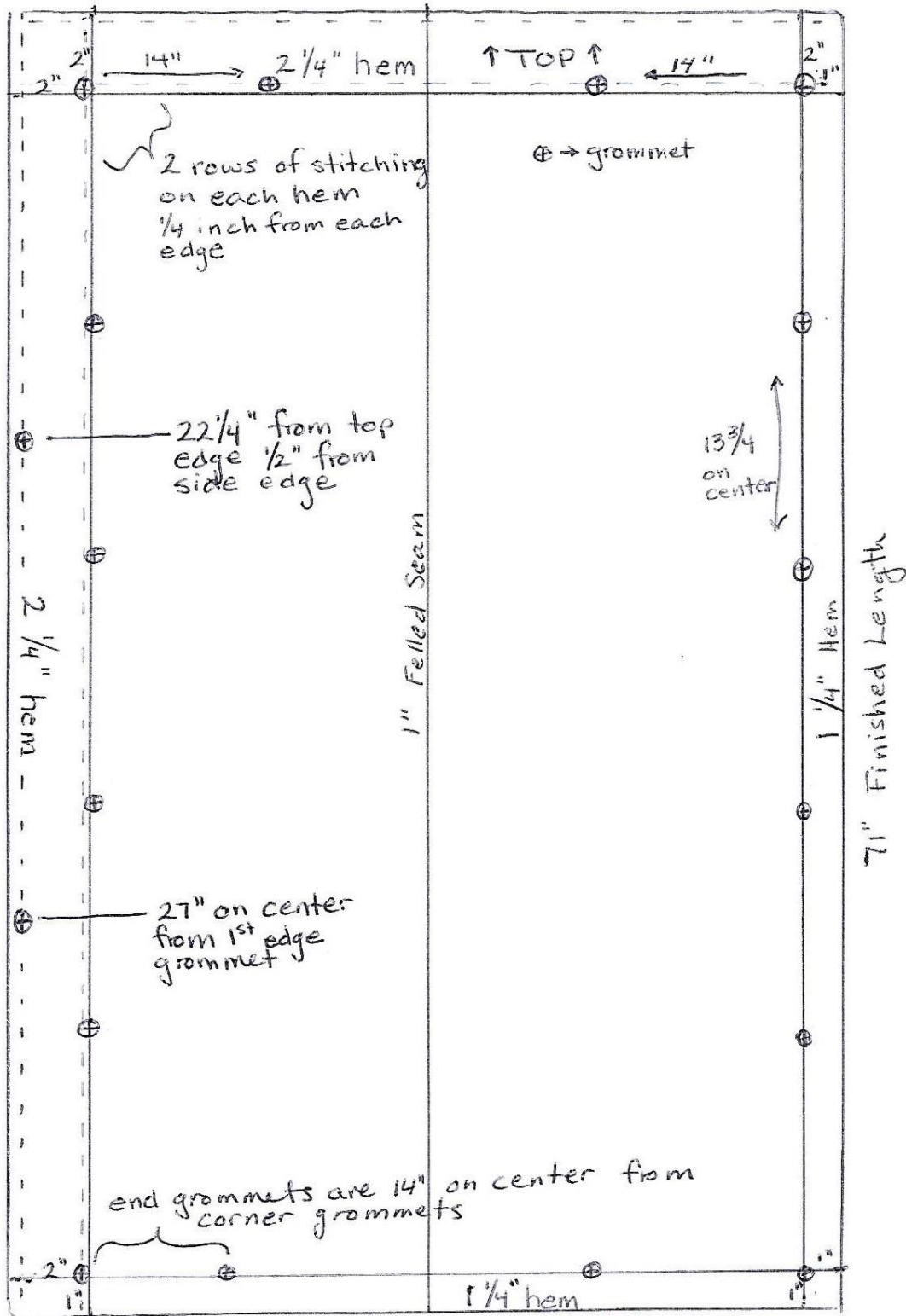
1. To make your blanket to the above specifications, cut two pieces of canvas oversized. Painting will cause any non-pre-washed canvas to shrink. How much it shrinks can vary on material and conditions. It will mostly shrink along its length. Pre-shrunk blank dimensions are two panels 74 ½" long. Cut one side of the canvas 26 ¼" wide and the other 25 ¼" wide. To factor in shrinkage, consider cutting the panels 80" long and a couple of inches wider than needed prior to sewing and painting. The wider side will receive the 2 ¼" hem and the other the 1 ¼" hem. *NOTE: You can modify the width of the blanket if you like. Soldiers were much smaller than many*

modern reenactors. You can make a ground cloth custom fit to wrap around you. It won't be period correct but it will be more useful.

2. Pin long right sides together and sew a 1" wide hem. I increase the stitch length of my sewing machine a few settings. Now fell the seam by trimming down one side of the excess to about an 1/8". Fold over longer side (in half, capturing the trimmed portion) and top stitch the seam along the edge.
3. Take your blank to your painting space and apply your black latex paint to the wrong side of the fabric. I found that three coats of paint give me a finish I like. You can certainly experiment here.
4. Once your paint is fully dried, it's time for trimming and hemming. Begin by trimming the blank to proper dimensions and then you can hem all the sides. On the examples I have, the long sides were hemmed first. I like to pencil a line to mark the point to which I fold my hem. It makes things a lot more consistent and easier at the sewing machine. For example, for the 2 1/4" hem, mark a pencil line at 4 1/2" and fold to that line. I creased the hem with my hands since it's going to be very difficult to pin. You could use plastic clamps, or even tape to hold the hem in place while you sew.
5. At the machine, using a regular foot, set your needle position all the way to the one side you'll be stitching (lateral adjustment). I typically start on the edge hem first. This will put your stitch lines 1/8" from the edge. Each hem receives two rows of stitching. Both stitches are 1/8" from their respective edges. *PRO TIP: If your machine has or you can purchase a top feed dog attachment for your machine, it will make sewing much easier for this project.*
6. Once your side hems are complete, repeat for the top and bottom.
7. Now it's time for grommets. Your inside stitch lines will essentially mark one center axis for your grommets. Use a ruler and pencil to mark the location from the edges. Use a 1/4" center punch to cut out the holes for the grommets and install. For more detail on grommet location, check out the schematic.
8. Once the grommets are installed, you're pretty much done. The renowned Missouri Boot and Shoe does not apply a boiled linseed oil top coat due to health and safety. For more information, visit their website for their excellent essay addressing this issue. However, should you decide to apply a BLO, turpentine, and Japan Dryer top coat, do so at your own risk. This finish adds some additional water protection and flexibility to the paint. These ingredients were also part of the original formulas. The turpentine thins out the boiled linseed oil and the small amount of Japan Dryer aides greatly in the cure time of the mixture. Boiled linseed oil applied to your ground cloth must be allowed to dry and fully cure hung up and completely unfolded or it will catch fire. Boiled linseed oil is an oxidizing oil that has an exothermic reaction as it dries. How long it takes to dry and cure can vary on location and weather. Sometimes it can take a few days and sometimes as much as a couple of weeks. In short, if you follow this route, do your homework, take every safety precaution, and ask around for more info if you need it. There are lots of stories of reenactors burning down their shops or setting their cars on fire because they rushed the cure and left their BLO treated items bundled up prematurely.

Ground Cloth Lay Out

46" Finished Width



Cut this panel:
26 1/4 x 74 1/2

Cut this panel:
25 1/4 x 74 1/2