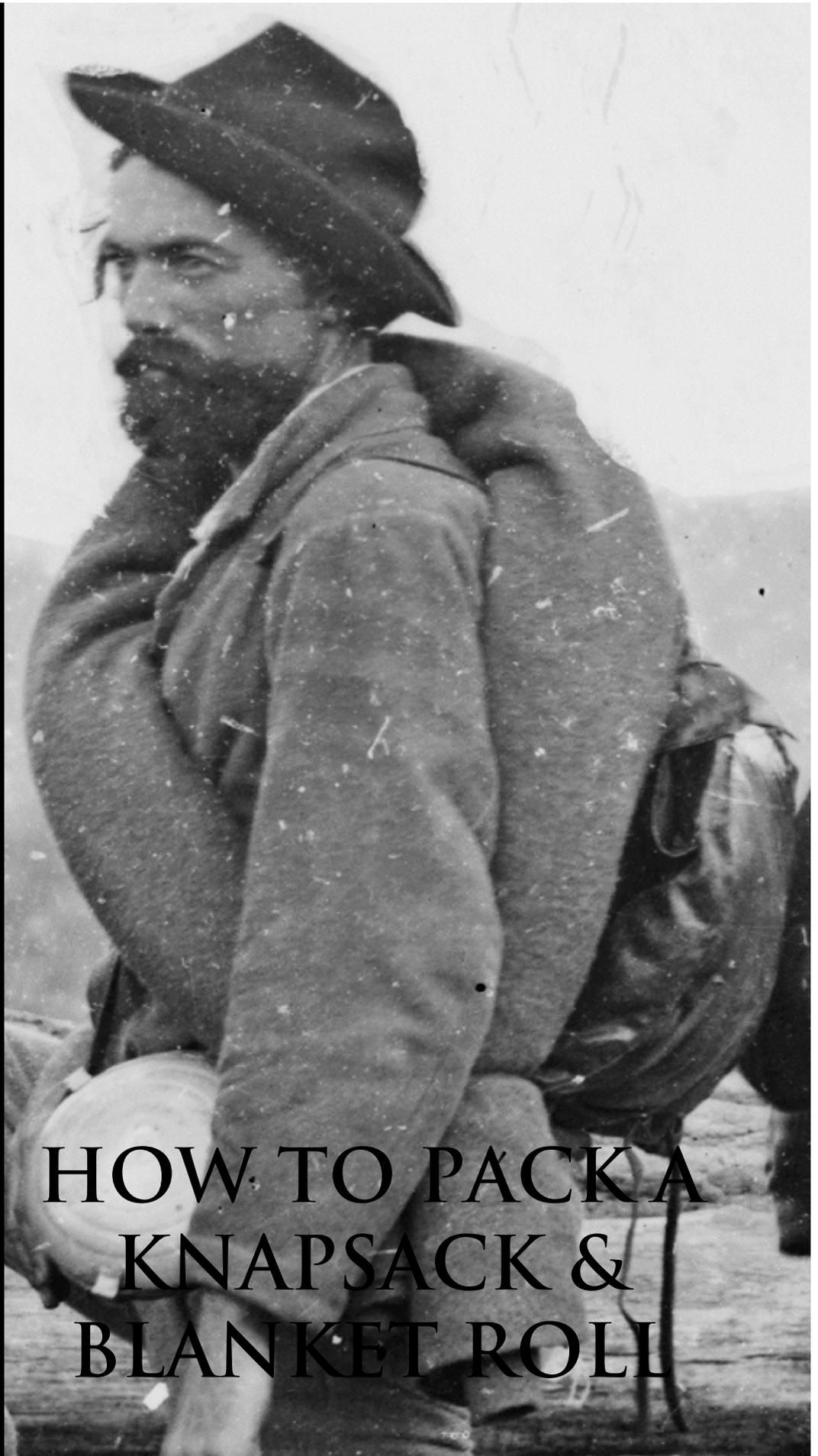


TWENTY-SIXTH  
NORTH CAROLINA



HOW TO PACK A  
KNAPSACK &  
BLANKET ROLL

# THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS

## HOW TO PACK A KNAPSACK & BLANKET ROLL

By: Jason Goodnite

In his memoirs General William T. Sherman said, “An army is efficient for action and motion exactly in the inverse ratio of its impedimenta.” For this reason Civil War soldiers almost prided themselves with being able to travel light and we as living historians should try and emulate this for the sake of honor and accuracy. Most re-enactors are way too heavy in their camping. This is mainly due to a lack of understanding as to what soldiers during the Civil War carried and how they carried it. In addition, there is a misunderstanding that to camp and travel light is to do without comforts. This perception is untrue, and while campaigning does contain some hardships and lack of comforts, it is nothing that your ancestors could not overcome and therefore it is nothing that you cannot overcome as you attempt to portray them. All that is required to do this is a little bit of research and study. We are fortunate that tons of written accounts and photographs exist to help us in this endeavor, and nothing simpler can be done to improve your impression then by carrying only what Civil War soldiers carried and carrying it in the same method they did.

## YOUR KIT:

A soldier in the Civil War would have typically carried these basic items:

- Blanket **1**
- Gum Blanket or Poncho **2**
- Shelter half **3**
- Extra Shirt **4**
- Extra Socks **5**
- Extra under drawers
- Sleeping hat (cold weather) **6**
- Small Personal items
  - \* Housewife **7**
  - \* Pipe and Tobacco **8**
  - \* Good period pocket knife
  - \* Toothbrush **9**
  - \* Testament **10**
  - \* Hemp twine (useful item in setting up she-bangs or shelter halves) **11**
  - \* Any required medications in a period container. **12**



## KNAPSACKS:

During the war several different styles of knapsacks were used including Federal double bag (early and late war versions), Mexican war packs (Kibbler packs), hard packs, and imported English soft packs (S. Isaacs and Campbell). It is also a misconception that knapsacks were not used during the war in favor of the blanket roll. It is true that blanket rolls were in widespread use but the number of knapsacks made and issued by both sides during the war directly disputes their lack of usage. Knapsacks have a bad rap in the hobby as being uncomfortable to wear. Most people who have had bad experiences with knapsacks have had them due to over packing or improper packing. If one keeps their kit light and properly packed then knapsacks can be fairly comfortable to wear.



Knapsacks came in many different forms during the Civil War but the two predominate types used during the war, and by living historians, are the Federal double bag knapsack and the Mexican war, or Kibbler, pack.

## US M1855/1864 DOUBLE BAG KNAPSACK:

This knapsack is designed with two compartments for storage (hence the name) with straps and loops on top for carrying a blanket or greatcoat. The M1864 differs from the M1855 in that the brass studs on the strap were covered by leather disks and the main bag's flaps were shortened and rounded while the smaller bag's flap was tied with white buff leather ties instead of the linen ties. On both versions leather cross straps were attached with "J" hooks on the ends which were designed to attach to the M1855 rifleman's belt. Typically these were crossed over the chest and attached to opposite strap, or often they were attached to the waist belt to provide extra support.





## To Pack:

With Blanket and Shelter half:

\* If you are carrying a shelter half (remember, soldiers were only given one half and were expected to partner up to make a whole tent) fold it and place it in the large main compartment of the knapsack along with any twine you may want to carry. (A shelter half will add a lot of weight and it is best not to use them if practicable).

\* Fold the blanket in half length wise twice (3 folds)

\* Next fold the blanket in sections down its length





\* Place the blanket into the large main compartment on top of the shelter half then buckle the flaps shut.

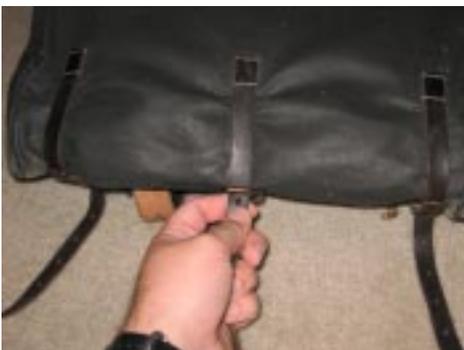
\* Place your folded gum blanket or poncho on top of the closed main compartment. Storing the ground cloth in this manner allows for easy removal without un-slinging and unfastening the knapsack.

\* Next, place your extra shirt, socks, and all personal items in the envelope style compartment and tie the flap down.



\* Finally, fold the bag over on itself and fasten it together by buckling the three straps located on the front of the knapsack.

\* A convenient way to carry your tin cup or boiler is to run the front strap through the handle and fasten it in much the same way as can be done with the haversack. This is a much more comfortable way to carry your boiler and less obtrusive during the march.



## With Extra Blanket or Great Coat:

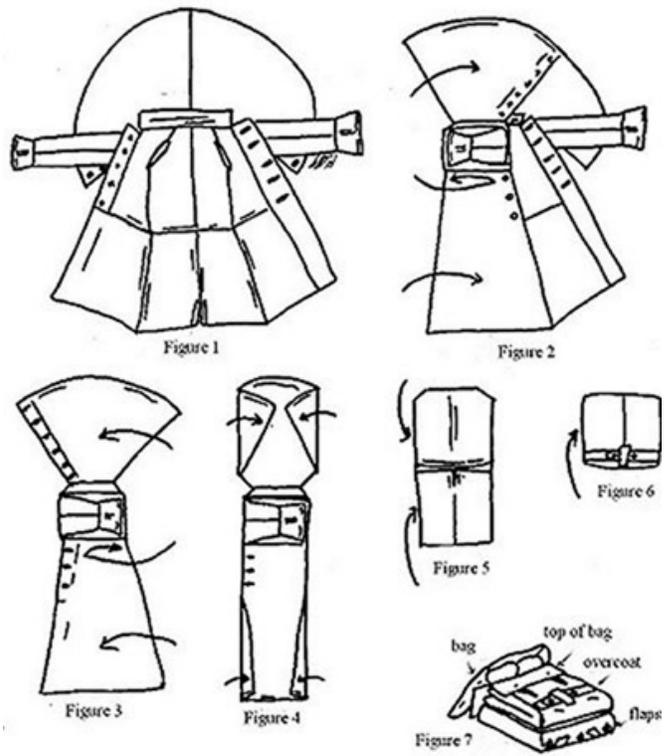
- \* Fold blanket and pack in the main compartment as described above.
- \* Place your ground cloth on top of the main compartment as described above.
- \* Place your extra shirt, socks and personal items in the envelope compartment and fasten it together.
- \* Fold the bag over itself and fasten it together (along with tin cup or boiler) as described above.



- \* Next, fold the extra blanket in half length wise twice (3 folds)
- \* Instead of folding the blanket down its length roll it up as shown
- \* Place the rolled blanket on top of the closed knapsack and fasten it using the straps
- \* If using a great coat instead of an extra blanket simply wear it in



cold weather and pack your knapsack as described in the first section. If you need to stow your great coat then it can be folded for storage in the main compartment of the knapsack by following this diagram, the blanket can then be folded and rolled on top of the knapsack per the instructions located below:

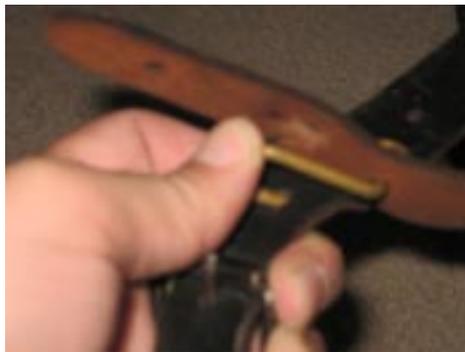


### Notes on Wearing the M1855/1864 Federal Double Bag Knapsack:

\* To put on the knapsack slide your arm through the shoulder strap that is already attached to the bag with a buckle (Left Arm). Next wrap the other strap over your right arm and attach it to the knapsack by fixing the triangle shaped ring to the hook located on the bottom of the bag. You may need to have a pard help you with this



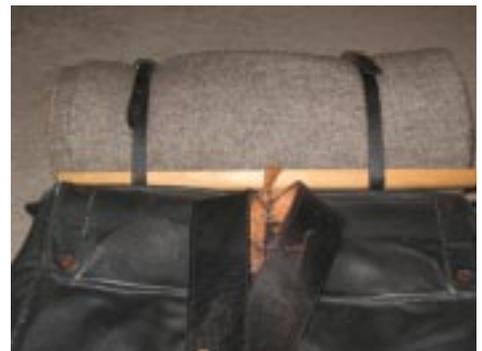
\* Another effective way to handle the cross straps, though undocumented, is to fold them back against the strap that goes under the arm and fasten the “J” hook through one of the adjustment holes. This method is much more



comfortable, especially for someone with a broad chest and shoulders.

\* You may need to play with the strap adjustments in order to find the most comfortable position. The knapsack should be loose enough to allow for free movement but not be so loose that it rides poorly on your back. There is no set way to do this, you just have to find the adjustment that fits you best.

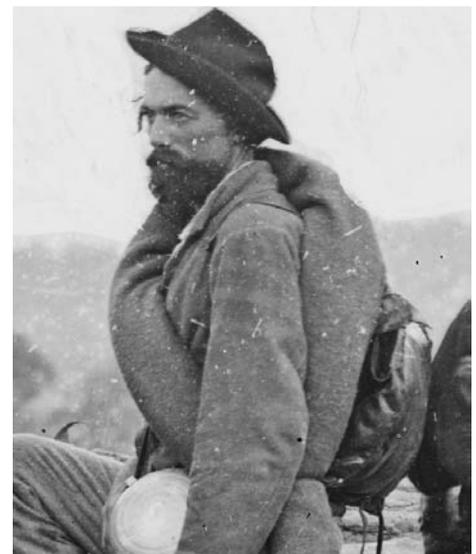
\* If you are wearing the blanket rolled on top of the knapsack a simple trick to keep it standing upright on top and not falling over is to run a stick under the blanket strap, through the rack loop, and under the remaining blanket strap. Another method is to loop the blanket strap under the leather loops on top of the knapsack twice instead of



once. This helps the blanket ride better but I find it to be less effective.

\* If bringing an extra blanket, do not try to stuff it into the knapsack compartment. You can roll it and place it on top of the knapsack as directed above but a much more comfortable way of carrying the extra blanket is to tie it into a blanket roll. Then simply sling the blanket roll over yourself and the knapsack.

\* When wearing your knapsack put it on over all your accoutrements except for the canteen (This should also be the way that you adjust the straps). The canteen goes on last and rides over the knapsack straps. This allows for easy accessibility for drinking and refilling.



## MEXICAN WAR KNAPSACK:

This knapsack is a pattern designed during the Mexican war and was used in great numbers by prewar militias, which explains its predominance in Confederate ranks. It is a simple single bag design made with tarred canvas and russet leather straps and harness. The inner compartment is a single bag with a flap closed by three buttons. The outer flap has four linen ties and is designed to store a blanket as shown. This is a simple and well made pack and can be very comfortable to wear as long as it is not over packed.

To Pack:

\* First, Place your extra shirt, socks and personal items in the main compartment and fasten it together by tying the cross flaps and then buttoning the flap shut.



\* Next, fold your blanket in half length wise twice (3 folds) and then fold it down the length of the blanket until you get a 1' x 2' square.

\* Place you blanket on top of the main compartment

\* Place your ground cloth on top of the blanket





\* Next, tie together the outer flap and fold it across the ground cloth and blanket.

\* Fasten the outer flap by buckling it with the buckles at the base of the knapsack. As described in the previous section, you can conveniently store your cup or boiler by looping it through these straps when you fasten them.

### **Notes on Wearing the Mexican War Knapsack:**

\* The Mexican War pack does have a cross strap that goes across the chest. This cross strap is much more comfortable to wear than the Federal Double Bag cross straps but can still be restrictive if the wearer has a broad chest or broad shoulders. Unlike the US M1855/64 knapsack some Mexican War packs have cross straps that can easily be removed by unbuckling the shoulder straps and sliding the cross strap off. A more convenient way is to simply slide the cross strap all the way to the back of the shoulder straps until it rests on the top of the knapsack. This effectively gets it out of the way. As with the aforementioned solution for the M1855/64 knapsack this is not documented in any historical references. It is a simple comfort recommendation that the writer has found to be very effective through experimentation.

\* If bringing an extra blanket do not try to stuff it into the knapsack compartment. A much more comfortable way of carrying the extra blanket is to tie it into a blanket roll. Then simply sling the blanket roll over yourself and the knapsack.

\* When wearing your knapsack put it on over all your accoutrements except for the canteen. The canteen goes on last and rides over the knapsack straps. This allows for easy accessibility for drinking and refilling.

\* You may need to play with the strap adjustments in order to find the most comfortable position. The knapsack should be loose enough to allow for free movement but not be so loose that it rides poorly on your back. There is no set way to do this you just have to find the adjustment that fits you best.

\* As mentioned previously, the outer flap of the Mexican War knapsack is designed to tie around a blanket for storage. I have found, however, that this method tends to make the pack bulkier and less comfortable to wear. The best method of storing the blanket is to fold it and place it on top of the single bag then fold the waterproof outer cover over the blanket and secure it with the straps on the back as described in the directions above.

\* The straps running along the back of the knapsack that hold it together can be buckled running straight down (vertical) or they can be crossed. Crossing them tends to help the shoulder straps stay on the wearer's shoulders better.

# BLANKET ROLLS:

Blanket rolls have been seen on soldiers from all over the world throughout history. Even up to World War II soldiers have used this tried and true way of carrying their belongings and the American Civil War is no exception. The use of the blanket roll in the War Between the States is highly documented in both written accounts and in photographs. There is no set way to make a blanket roll. In fact, the army regulations do not even mention blanket rolls or how to make them. Therefore, many different variations existed, each one adaptable to the comfort and convenience of the wearer. The method shown here is only one method that the writer has found to be most comfortable with some possible variations noted.



## How to Make a Blanket Roll:

\* First, lay your blanket out flat and fold it length wise once.

\* Next, fold your extra shirt in half with the sleeves lying over the body. You want the shirt to lay as flat and thin as possible.

\* Next lay your socks flat over your shirt. If you have any extra clothing that needs to be included place them on the blanket in the same manner. Just be advised that the more you put into your blanket roll the bulkier it will be.

\* Finally, sling the blanket roll over your left shoulder with the tied ends under your right arm about the height of the waist belt. Going from left to right leaves your right shoulder unobstructed for shouldering and firing your weapon.



## Storing your Ground cloth:

I have left this as a separate section as there are three basic ways to do this. Each one is really a matter of preference.

\* First, the ground cloth can be rolled up with the blanket so that it is exposed on the outside of the blanket roll. This method has the advantage of providing some waterproofing in case of inclement weather. However, the ground cloth exposed on the outside next to the neck tends to make the blanket roll hotter, bulkier and more

uncomfortable to wear. In addition, if you quickly wanted to get out your ground cloth this method makes it very difficult to do so.

\* Another method is to simply fold up the ground cloth or poncho and loop it behind the tied ends of the blanket roll next to the back. For this to work well the blanket roll must be tied securely and be tight next to the body as it should be anyway. Fold the ground cloth with enough length so that it properly drapes the blanket roll and will not fall out. The advantage to this method is that it is much more comfortable to wear but it does not provide the waterproofing to the blanket as the previously mentioned method does.

\* A final way of carrying the ground cloth on a blanket roll is to simply roll up the ground cloth as a separate roll and sling it separately over top of the blanket roll. This method also does not provide any water proofing, but makes the ground cloth more accessible than the first method but more secure than the second.

#### Notes on Wearing a Blanket Roll:

\* Always make sure that the blanket roll is secure by twisting after rolling it up and by tying it so that the blanket roll is tight around the body.

\* Make sure that the roll is tight but not too tight so as to restrict air flow. Also remember that the bulkier and heavier you make the blanket roll the more fatiguing it will be to wear.

\* Adjust the blanket roll so that the tied ends fall behind your right elbow. This makes it more comfortable on the march and does not impede your getting to your cartridge box while in action.

\* Always get a pard to help you roll and tie your blanket roll. It is really a two man operation. It really does not take long to do and the benefits of having it tied correctly and securely will be most evident while on the march.

\* As with knapsacks, make sure that your canteen goes on last over top of your blanket roll. As mentioned before, this will allow for quick and easy access to your vital water source.

It is my hope that these instructions and illustrations will help you prepare for the next campaign. I feel certain that you will come to find that re-enacting in this manner to be much more organized, efficient and simple. In addition, you will find it to be a rewarding experience that puts you one step closer to experiencing the lives of these brave men we honor and portray. As Brigadier General Richard S. Ewell wrote in 1862, "The road to glory can not be followed with too much baggage."