

BLANKETS FOR MILITARY SERVICE

Most contemporary sources only mention a grey blanket as the issued blanket for troops during the War of 1812. These sources, however, are sometimes vague in their descriptions and in identifying primary sources.¹ Some other sources do indicate that the issued blankets were not grey, but primarily white with a blue stripe at each end. This blanket was the common "point" blanket of the era. The point blanket that was utilized by the army seems to have been in use as far back as the American Revolution.

The Museum of the Fur Trade collection includes a three point blanket carried by Private Henry Marble of Westboro, Massachusetts during that war. It is four feet five inches by six feet, white with 2 and 3/4 inch wide indigo blue stripes and three points, with a center seam.²

Captain Clemson's company, First U.S. Infantry, garrisoned Fort Osage from September 1808 to the early spring of 1813. During that time, requisitions for supplies went through the Superintendent of Military Stores. These stores were purchased through the Purveyor of Public Supplies. On 31 January 1807, Tench Coxe, Purveyor, wrote to the Secretary of War:³

Sir . . . I do not understand correctly what is meant by 2000 "white blankets" in the letter of the (date omitted) which I had the honor to receive from you. I have been much used to general merchandise connected with the Southern, Western, and middle state trade. Mr. Mifflin who is my principal assistant has had similar habits and Mr. J.D. Blanchard, of Massachusetts, who has been accustomed to the Eastern, & Middle state trade & is also in this office, and with myself, unacquainted with the term. The person furnishing you with the memorandum has not we presume, been acquainted with the language of the dry good (sic) trade -

Blankets are 2½ point) Twilled white excepting one blue Stripe at
(army  3 point &c) each end, comn wool

rose—untwilled—of better wool, increasing in quality thereof as they enlarge from 6/4 to 7/4—8:9:10, 11 & 12 quarters white, excepted two roses in the smaller & four roses in the larger corners, wrought in with red, green, & yellow yarn (These are plain, substantial, & rich families (sic)

- Indian or purple or red striped duffil blankets, untwilled, white except a red or purple stripe at each end—wool about equal to 2½ or 3 points—
These have been used to the Westward but have fallen into disrepute and disuse-

The 2½ points above mentioned, have been purchased in a great measure since the disuse of the Indian or the striped duffils. I should consider them as worth here about 12 or 13/currency or \$3300 to 3400 for 2000 blankets. The main body of all blankets (or ground) I may finally remark, is of white undyed wool. The stripes at the ends are only from 2 to 4 fingers in Breadth. The points are small stripes in a corner thus 3 ===== 2½ =====

I have the honor to be &c . . .

BLANKETS (continued)

Indeed, blankets were plentiful at Fort Osage. George C. Sibley, Fort Osage factor, conducted an "Inventory of Property of the United States this day on hand at Saint Louis and lately removed from the United States Indian Factory at Fort Osage on the River Mo., 30 June 1813." Among the total of \$11,604.34 and 3/4 worth of goods, there were over 800 blankets! Among the many entries were:

8 pair stp. blankets	1.92 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 15.38
12 prs. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ do	2.03 $\frac{1}{4}$ - 24.39
1 pr. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ do for wrapper	2.03 $\frac{1}{4}$ - 2.03 $\frac{1}{4}$
2 $\frac{1}{4}$ yards Hessians	<u>.20 ct - .50</u>
	42.30 $\frac{1}{4}$

#51 A Bale contg.

40 pairs 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pt. Blkts. from Belle Fontaine in 1808
 2 blankets wrappers
 2 ...rugs

Entry #67 showed a "tierce containing ...light cold. serge, embossed serge, green cloth, thread, Indian calico and blue calico...1 pr. 3 pt. blankets - 4.18 [and] 2 pr. green cloth window curtain - 1.50."¹⁰

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to state that a common blanket utilized by the military and civilians during the years 1808 and 1812 was the point blanket. This blanket was commonly a white twilled blanket, approximately 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 6 feet with a blue stripe at each end and a center seam. It was in use until at least 1836.

In that year, the Commissary General of Purchases, Calender Irvine penned a letter to Messers. Barnham & Baker, Windham, Newhampshire.¹¹

I have received your letter of the 6th inst. The blankets required for the soldiers are to be 6 feet 6 inches long & 5 feet wide; to be twilled; to be made of good wool; to have the nap well raised upon them on one side, and a little raised on the other; and each blanket is to weigh 4 pounds; also to have a blue stripe on each end, of indigo about 3 inches wide; otherwise the blankets are to be white & perfectly clear of all foreign matter.

12 December 1836.

The center seam common on these blankets was created by the limitations of the width of the loom. The strips would be whip stitched together to form the full width of the finished product. To weave the full width blanket required a loom twice as wide as a regular one and either a fly-shuttle or two weavers sitting at the loom and throwing the shuttle between them.¹²

Back on the frontier, Captain Clemson's commanding officer, Col. Thomas Hunt sent Clemson and his men west to the Fire Prairie, fifteen minutes past 2:00 p.m. on 7 August 1808.¹³ Hunt, unfortunately, died not long after on 18 August. The


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inventory of Colonel Hunt's household furnishings includes the entry of "1 pr. blankets."¹⁴ From other evidence as well, it appears that the common soldier was issued one blanket each, though they were commonly sold as "pairs."

Imagine, if you will, a detachment of soldiers, protecting the far American frontier, marching hundreds of miles in the wilderness. Suffering harsh winter weather and poor rations, they stop for the night. As they set up the camp, they pull their blankets from within their knapsacks. On the blankets were "TWO ROSES IN THE SMALLER AND FOUR ROSES IN THE LARGER CORNERS, WROUGHT IN WITH RED, GREEN AND YELLOW YARN...."¹⁵

By David C. Bennett, October 1989

notes -

1. The United States Infantry, An Illustrated History, 1775-1918, by Gregory Urwin (Blansford Press; 1988) and The American War 1812-14, (Osprey; 1974).
2. The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1979.
3. Letter Books, Purveyor of Public Supplies, Record Group (R.G.) 92, National Archives.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Papers, John Stites Gano, CHS, Vol. II, No. 236 - 01814.
7. Fort Fayette Record Book, compiled by Michael N. Morrell, Curator, Historic Fort Meigs, Ohio. 4 December 1987.
8. Records, U.S. War Dept, Office of the Secretary, National Archives.
9. Military Collectors & Historian, Vol. III, No. 3, Sept. 1951, pg. 72.
10. Misc. Accounts, Fort Osage, 1808-23, R.G. 75, Entry #69, National Archives.
11. Letter-sent Books, Office of the Commissary General, R.G. 92, National Archives.
12. A Checklist of American Coverlet Weavers, (University Press of Virginia; 1978).
13. Westward With Dragoons, the Journal of William Clark, ed. Kate L. Gregg, (Ovid Bell Press, Inc.; 1937).
14. Women Beyond the Frontier, A Distaff View of Life at Fort Wayne, by Willa G. Cranton, (Lincoln Printing Corp., 1977).
15. Letters Received, Secretary of War, R.G. 107, National Archives.

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