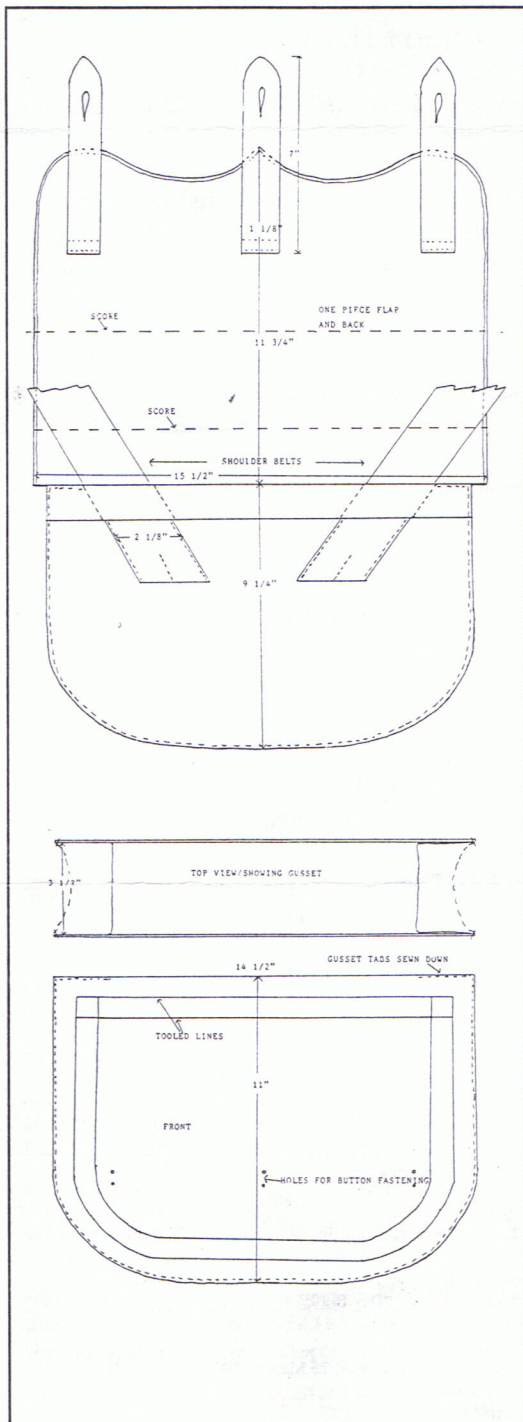


military collector and Historian
Vol. 49, No 4 Winter 1997

A War of 1812 Gunner's Haversack

Joseph M. Thatcher



LEATHER haversacks or pouches were used by artillery gunners to safely carry cartridges from the limber chest to the gun. Louis De Tousard, writing in 1809, described the pouch as "a case of black stout leather with a flap over it, which hangs from a leather belt and is used for the purpose of carrying ammunition for cannon, portfires, quick-matches, & etc."¹ This pattern for a gunner's haversack is taken from one of three New York Militia examples in the collections of Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site, administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in Newburgh, New York. All three, shipped to Newburgh from the State Arsenal in New York City in 1850, have suffered from poor storage and red rot, but are complete enough to allow analysis. They are blackened leather, suspended from a two-piece shoulder belt like those for the 1808 cartridge boxes and bayonet scabbards, and are fastened by the same pattern oval brass plate. The one-piece back and scalloped flap are joined to the front piece by a wide leather gusset which extends into the mouth of the pouch at each side. The flap is scored to allow it to bend over the 3 1/2 inch wide opening of the pouch and is closed with three straps and leather buttons. A decorative line is tooled around the flap edge, and two parallel lines are scribed around the edges of the front piece. The length of the shoulder belt and billet are uncertain, since parts of the straps are now missing. An example of the same pouch, recently located by Fellow Frederick C. Gaede, does retain its complete shoulder belt. The long billet measures about 39 inches and is pierced with pairs of holes. The short billet, measuring about 14 inches in length, has a heavy, rectangular brass frame buckle with two tines. The edges of the billets are tooled in the same manner as the flap. One of the three New York examples was accompanied by a short section of belt with a typical 1808 oval brass plate. It is likely that this originally belonged to one of a series of cartridge boxes which were also in the collection. The author knows of no surviving examples of regular artillery gunners' haversacks from this period, but suggests that these pieces could serve as patterns for either regular or militia units interpreting 1812 artillery units.

Note

1. Louis De Tousard, *American Artillerist's Companion* (Philadelphia, 1809; repr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 2: 650.

Although the haversack is identical to the three described in the text, this haversack in a private collection has a 2 3/4" x 1 1/2" brass frame buckle to adjust the length of the shoulder belt. Photo courtesy Frederick C. Gaede.

