

The British Greatcoat Sling

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With thanks to John U. Rees, and the contributors to
the Greatcoat Sling thread on the 95th Rifles forum.

Officer & NCO School
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The greatcoat sling—overlooked item of kit

- Slung blanket roll ubiquitous in North American wars 1750s-1790s.
- Greatcoat straps were required basic equipment for every British infantryman throughout Revolutionary & Napoleonic wars.
- Slung greatcoats often portrayed in period images; should be pervasive, but are rarely seen on reenactors.

Presentation:

1. **Origins**
2. **Place in kit**
3. **Construction and use**
4. **Reproducing the greatcoat sling**

1. Origins: the “tumpline” blanket-roll

Background: During the Seven Years War and the AWI the British Army adapted to conditions of warfare in North America, modifying its *tactics*, *uniform*, & *equipment*.

- **Tactics** (“*that loose, flimsy order*”):

- Two ranks
- Open files
- Faster movement
- Individual initiative
- Aimed fire

Howe’s LI tactics (1774) practiced army-wide by end of AWI-- Williamson (1782). Preserved as LI “**customary practice**”: Moore (1798), Cooper (1806), Campbell (1808, 1812), UC Militia (1812).
→ *File movement original British contribution to infantry tactics.*

• Uniform:

- Sleeved waistcoats replaced uniform coat
- Lace & trim removed
- Overalls replaced breeches & gaiters
- Hat lace removed, brim cut to make a cap

• Equipment:

- Muskets cut down, blacked; rifles issued to marksmen
- Hangers replaced by tomahawks
- Waistbelts discarded; bayonet slung from cartridge belt
- Officers & NCOs pole arms replaced by fusils
- ***Knapsacks replaced by slung blanket roll***

“Tumpline”: One name for the strap used to carry a bundle. Adapted from Native Americans for military use in North America by 18th century.

Their haversacks were rolled up in a blanket, which they carried as did the Indians and Canadians

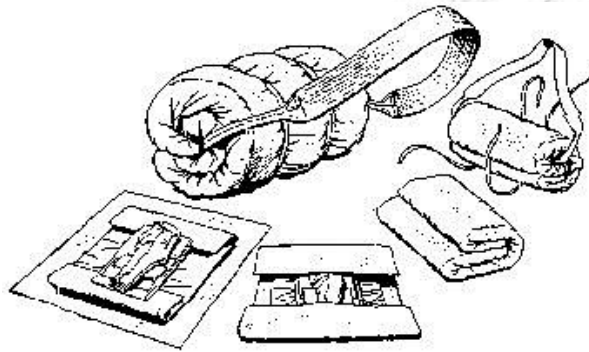
(John Knox, 1757)

The Men lately Joind having received their Field Blankets, the Serjts. are Ordered, to see that they are Mark'd with the Initial Letters of each Mans Name. The Men are to be provided with proper Straps for Carrying them & Shewn how to Roll them up

(1st Battn (Brigade of Guards) Orders 9 September 1779)



Reproduction linen wallet, (24" x 16"), for storing gear inside a rolled blanket carried on a sling (per 40th Regiment, 1777).



Tumpline, rolled with wallet of personal items



Reproduction tumpline



40th Foot at the Battle of Germantown with horizontally slung blanket rolls



Private, light company, 63rd Regiment, 1778-1781. © Don Troiani, 2005

Inference: Use of blanket-roll likely retained as Army “*institutional knowledge*” or “*customary practice*”; adapted when greatcoats were added to soldiers’ equipment.

The AWI blanket roll became the greatcoat sling of the Napoleonic wars.

2. The clothing and equipment

*In our period every soldier was issued a **greatcoat**, a **knapsack**, and **straps** for carrying the greatcoat.*

Greatcoats: Authorized by royal warrant 1801. Sealed pattern from 1808. From 1811 coats for Canada 8 buttons, longer flannel lining.

ARTICLES OF NECESSARIES.

Furnished in the first Instance at
the Expence partly of the Co-
lonel and partly of the Public. } One regimental great coat.



Knapsacks: Evolved from the slung “snapsack” to the common “envelope” style in 1770s. Envelope style replaced by standard pattern (“Thatcher”) in 1812.



97th Inverness, 1795



97th Inverness, 1795



10th Regt., N. British Militia,
1797-1802



Durham Light Infantry, 1800-1815



5th Bttn., 60th Rifles
(Royal American),
1808-1814



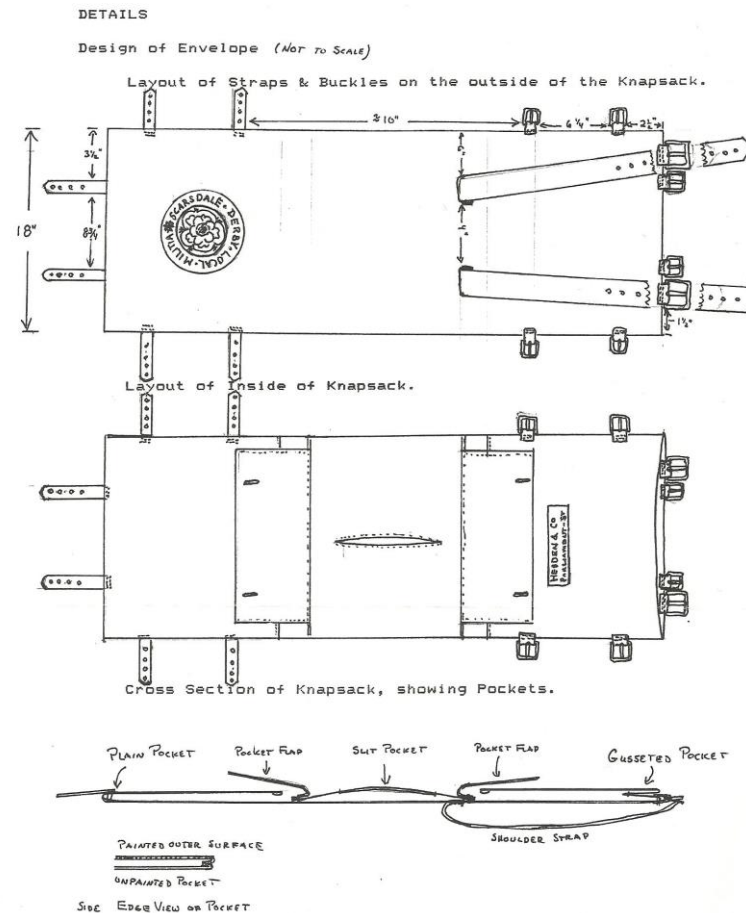
“Thatcher”, 1812



Royal Bristol Volunteers, ca. 1805

Straps:

- Envelope knapsacks predate greatcoat; *no loops for securing greatcoat straps directly to the knapsack.*



Drawing (1993), Scarsdale Derby Local Militia knapsack, 1808-1815

- “Straps for carrying the greatcoat”—some sources:

1. Necessaries [1802 clothing warrant]:



2. Report of the Board established "for the Purpose of Reporting Upon the Equipment of the Infantry", 29th June, 1811:

Necessaries: (...)

Straps for carrying Great Coat

3. Standing Orders, 85th Light Infantry, 1813:

The necessaries which every man is to be furnished with...are as follows. His regimental suit, great coat and straps, pack and cap...."

3. What did greatcoat straps look like?

Period images of greatcoats rolled in straps



Original straps



RBV knapsack and associated straps



Straps untangled, displayed as greatcoat sling

How were the straps used?

Period images show three methods:

- (1) Straps used to attach rolled greatcoat to **top of knapsack**.
- (2) Straps used to sling rolled greatcoat **horizontally**.
- (3) Straps used to sling rolled greatcoat **diagonally**.

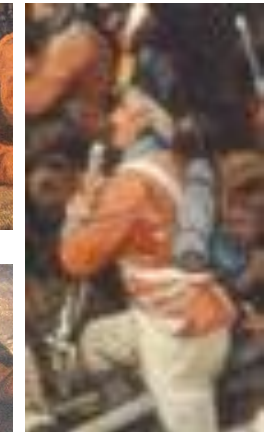
(1) Greatcoat on knapsack



(2) Greatcoat only, horizontal across back



(3) Greatcoat only, diagonal across back



The slung greatcoat was a common, sometimes preferred, field option.

April 1794 in the Low Countries:

Here some of our battalions were furnished with straps for the purpose of carrying our greatcoats, flung across the shoulders, neatly rolled up. This, in all sorts of weather, was part of our equipment

Walcheren campaign (1809):

"We had left our knapsacks on board; having only our haversacks, canteen and rolled coats with us."

Peninsula

"The bugles sounded, I rolled my blanket, strapped it on to my back, and waited for the assembly call..."

SOs, 85th LI (1813)

The regiment will wear their great coats on all evening parades, neatly rolled.... All sentinels are to have their great-coats rolled, in the neatest manner, on their backs

New Orleans:

Soon after this the two Light Companies of the 7th and 93rd Regiments came up without their knapsacks, the Highlanders with their blankets rolled and slung across their backs....

Unit images, slung greatcoats







4. Reproducing a greatcoat sling



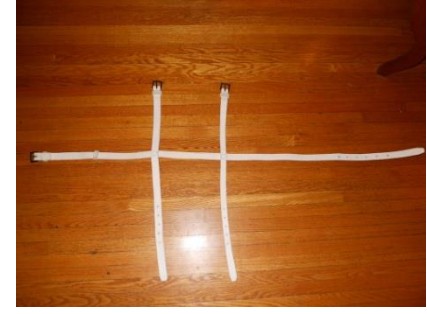
Original RBV sling



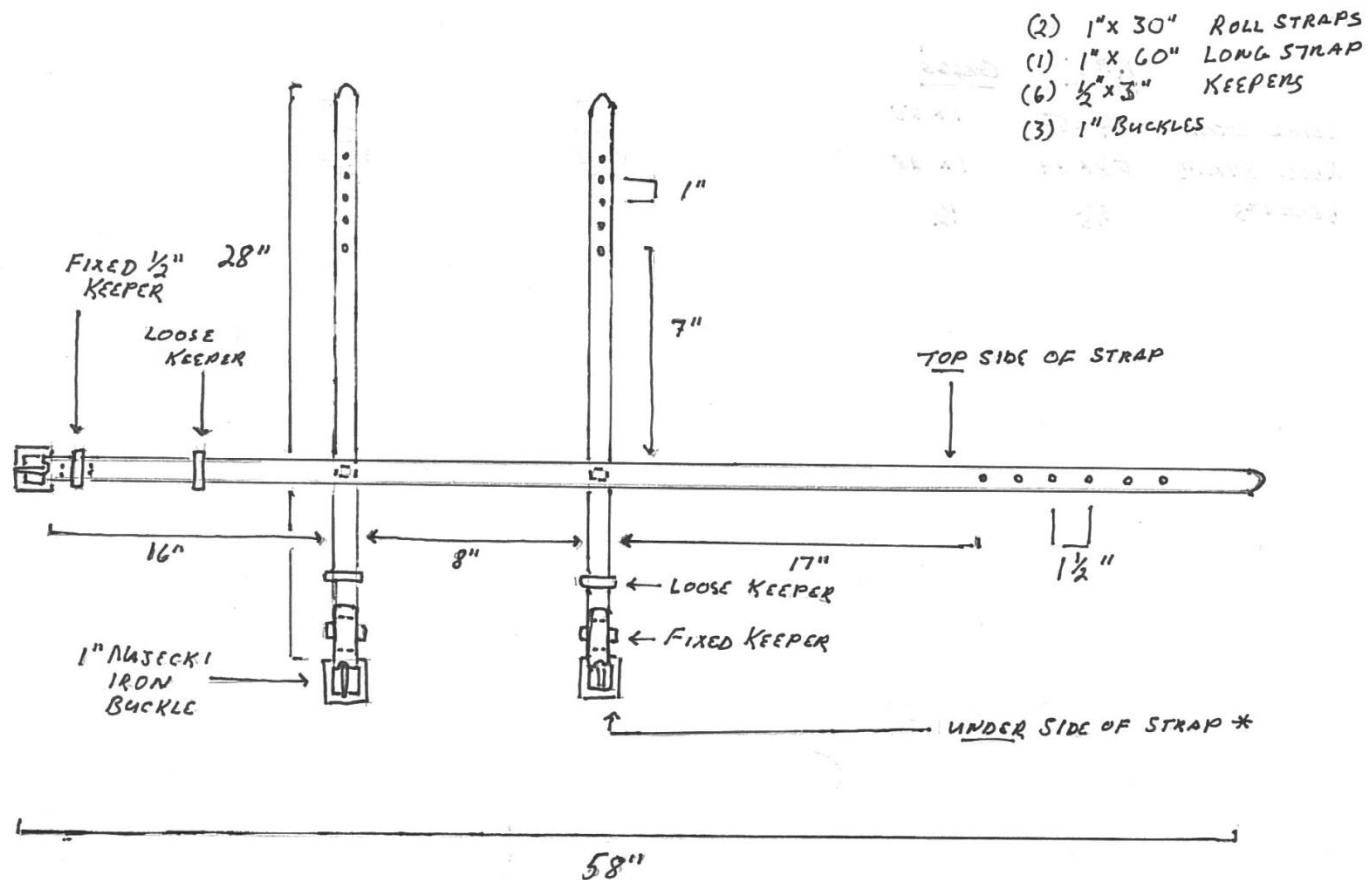
Period image



Repro sling



	RBV original	Greg's variant
Long strap	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 50"	1" x 58"
Roll straps	$\frac{5}{8}$ " x 24"	1" x 28"
Keepers	$\frac{3}{8}$ "	$\frac{1}{2}$ "



GREATCOAT SLING

* UNDER SIDES OF STRAPS ARE SEWN TO EACH OTHER

BASED ON THE ROYAL BRISTOL VOLUNTEERS OFFICER SLING FOR ENVELOPE
BRASSACK.

G. RENAUD 2013

The greatcoat roll

(1) Rolled greatcoat to be approximately 18” long

To be tolerably fit for parade required three hours' work. ...his great coat must be neatly rolled up and be exactly eighteen inches long.

Sgt John Cooper, 7th Royal Fusiliers (1809-1815)

The Great Coats are to be well rolled up, and of the length of the Blade of the Bayonet, to hang on the back transversely, and kept tight up.

SOs, Third West York Militia (1809)

The great coat when rolled up, is to be sixteen inches in length.

SOs, Shropshire Militia (1813)

(2) Rolling the greatcoat (reconstructed method)

- Lay the coat out flat, front buttoned, cape in a flat fan above the collar
- Fold in the sides of the body, sleeves, and edges of the cape so that the coat forms a long rectangle, 18" wide (the length of a bayonet blade)
- Roll the coat tightly from the bottom up
- Place roll on open sling straps; buckle the two short straps of the sling around the roll

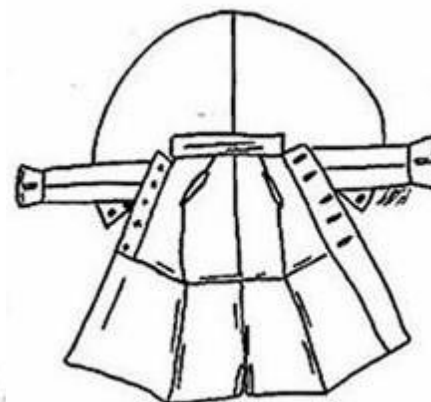


Figure 1

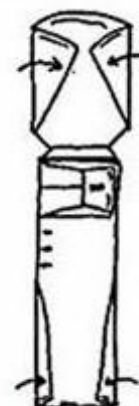


Figure 4



Greatcoat on the knapsack (reconstructed method)

(1) Place greatcoat roll on top of knapsack; wrap the long strap around the sides and bottom of knapsack.



(2) Re-buckle the short straps around the knapsack shoulder straps.



Greatcoat sling

Sling over right shoulder, over accoutrements, top of roll even with shoulder. Tightened strap will ride high on left side.



Descendants:



**Reproduction ACW
blanket/greatcoat sling**

Based on the US patent information for “Improved Sling for Carrying Blankets & Overcoats”, filed by Joseph Short on April 15th, 1862. [“Hopper roll”]



**WW II British field bedroll,
c.1944.**



Camping blanket roll harness

Recommendation: Portray marching order with slung greatcoats in lieu of knapsacks

- Practical, affordable, easily made
- Historically accurate



For additional information, images, and sources, see Greg Renault, “The Greatcoat Sling” (2014) and “Appendix: Constructing Straps for the Greatcoat” (2014).