

# Poke Sackology 101

A Civil War soldier didn't have the luxuries that modern soldiers enjoy of having pre-packaged MRE's, handy cordura pouches for everything, and cargo pockets. Much of his daily ration was issued loose, and on campaign he was often left to his own devices to carry and consume the rations. To this end, some men ate a 3 day ration issue immediately, and escaped the task of carrying and storing the various loose goods. Most men however resorted to different means of separating loose dry rations. Sometimes, it was as simple as wrapping it up in a rag, but given a little spare time, I believe that many would sew up small bags from old shirting to separate their rations. I base this on the common occurrence of this type of bag in pre-war rural society. The essence of simplicity, it could be quickly sewn up, and I have read a letter from a soldier to his brother thanking him for a package of dried fruit and pies. He mentions that the "shirting sacks" the fruit came in were just as valuable and requested needles and thread in the next package.

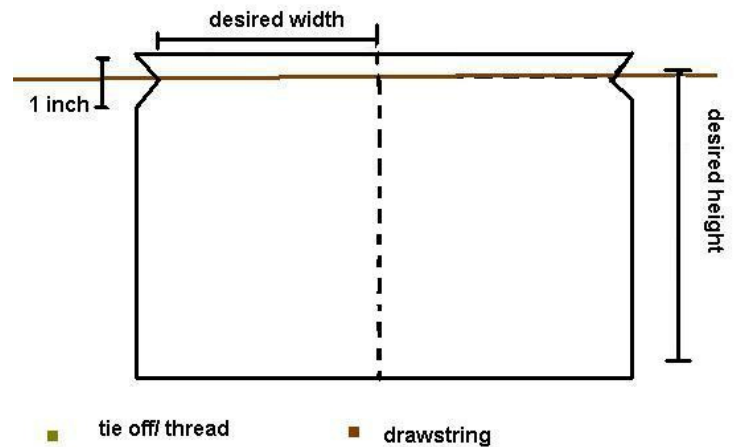
At Outpost 1, a trade with a Confederate picket landed me a handsewn poke sack of tobacco. It indirectly started me on my current progressive bent. I started sewing them by hand for my father and I, and I got pretty good at it, and I enjoyed the sewing enough that I began making up large bunches of them, and selling them to my pards when they wanted them. As such, I thought I'd post the directions to make them here. I make all my poke sacks from woven cotton material, in a variety of appropriate patterns. I don't use plain white material because I believe it is over-represented in reenacting. I use natural cotton thread, and sisal or hemp drawstrings. If you have one, use an old (clean) shirt that you've worn out, and you can make as many as 20 poke sacks out of it if you're frugal. I made a neat one with part of a cuff and a sleeve. (Poke sacks with story)

## A Little Background

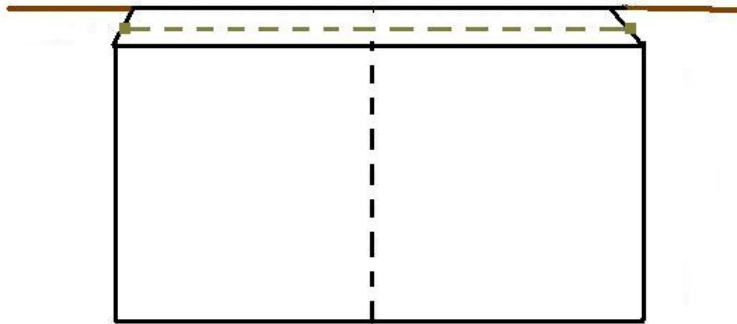
1) Cut the fabric twice as wide as you want the bag, plus 1 inch, and as high as you want the bag, plus 1 1/2 inch.

2) Fold 1/2 inch over the drawstring and press so the seam stays straight. I like using check patterns so that I can align the stitches more easily.

3) On each end, I like to cut off a small triangle. This isn't a necessary step, but it makes the bag more squared when the stitching is over.



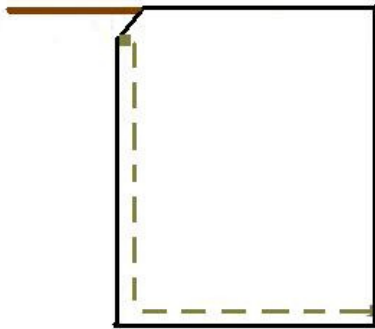
4) Once you fold the fabric over the drawstring, thread your needle and make the first stitch and tie it off.



■ tie off/thread    ■ drawstring

5) Begin stitching 1/2 inch from the edge. Be sure not to sew through the drawstring, and remember, the smaller and tighter the stitches in all your sewing, the more durable it will be, and the better it will hold small items like rice and coffee.

6) Once you've sewn along the top, tie it off once again, (do not cut the string) and fold the bag back on itself, so that it looks like you will be sewing it inside out.



■ tie off    ■ drawstring

7) Stitch down the side and along the bottom. This is where small stitches are the most important.

8) Once you reach the end, tie it off again, tie the two ends of the drawstring together, and turn your new poke sack inside out!