

Reproducing History: The Landy Lindsey "Army Blanket" Coat

By Mark Jaeger and Cathy Gurley



In the Fall 2002 *Watchdog*, Mr. Jaeger discussed a remarkable "army blanket" coat pattern, which he discovered in a wartime edition of the Jackson, Mississippi *Weekly Mississippian*.¹ This versatile item was reportedly the creation of one Landy A. Lindsey, of Hinds County, Mississippi, who published a detailed pattern and illustration of his brainchild in the 4 September 1861 *Mississippian*. These are reprinted below for the benefit of *Watchdog* readers:

For the Mississippian.

DIAGRAM FOR AN ARMY BLANKET.

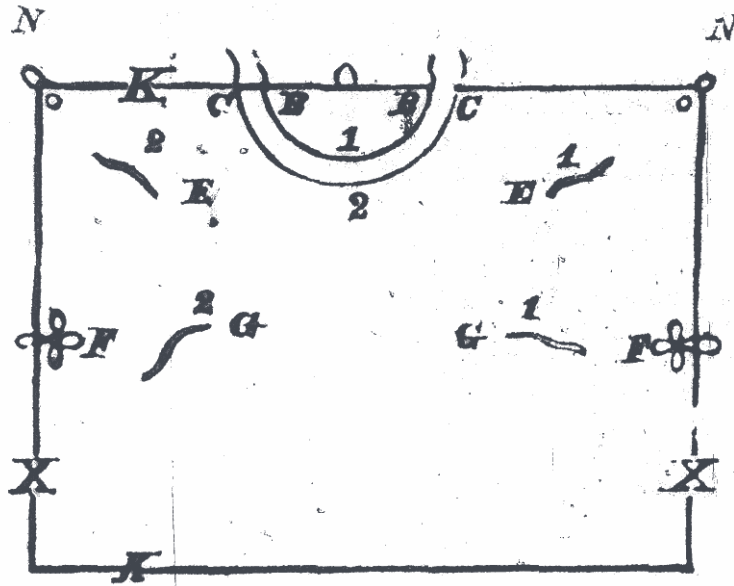
BOWMAN HOUSE, August 25th, 1861.

EDITOR MISSISSIPPIAN:--In response to your very patriotic and liberal offer to publish a diagram of the blanket (of which I spoke to

you a few days ago,) I herewith have the pleasure of enclosing you [a] drawing and discription [sic] of it, which will I hope be sufficiently plain to enable any one to prepare one.

The advantages of fixing the blankets to be used by our soldiers, in this way are very appearent [sic], insomuch as it will enable the soldier to use his blanket as an overcoat when necessary without interfering with its adaptability for sleeping on, or covering with, thus superceeding [sic] the necessity of the soldiers packing a heavy overcoat, which will be in itself, a very considerable item in a days march.

The blanket I have described below is one that I have had made from an ordinary "Navy Blanket," as a specimen, and can be seen by those desiring it at the Mississippian Office.



Length of Blanket from K to K 55 inches.

Width " " " X to X 72 "

BB and CC stout cord fastened to the blanket by a covering of braid or cloth sewed on both sides, so as to permit the cords to draw when pulled at BB or CC. EE pieces of black worsted braid ten inches long, sewed to the blanket at the lower ends.

GG pieces of the same material [sic] and length, sewed to the blanket at the end nearest the centre of the blanket.

FF loops made of strong cord sewed on one inch from, and extending two inches beyond the edge of the blanket.

DD large horn or lasting buttons²; there should also be two buttons sewed on the reverse side of the blanket at the same corners.

NN loops of strong cord sewed on the corners of the blanket extending two inches from the blanket.

Length from BB, 18 inches.

Length from C to C, 27 inches.

Length from 0 to 1, 9 inches.

Length from 1 to 2[,] 4 inches.

Distance from D to E, 10 ½ inches.

Distance from F to G, 4 inches.

Distance from D to F, 29 inches.

The strings BB and CC should extend about three inches beyond the edge of the blanket and be knotted at the ends to prevent them from drawing under the material covering them.

In order to use the blanket as a talma or overcoat, draw the point E1 and G1 together and secure them by tying the pieces of braid together, fix the points E2 and G2 in the same manner, fasten the loops FF over the buttons DD, draw the string CC until the half circle formed by it is sufficiently contracted to fit the neck, put the blanket on by running the arms through the sleeves [sic] formed by tying the points E1 and 2, and G1 and 2, and buttoning the points DD and FF together, and secure it around the neck by tying the string CC. The wearer will find that the half

circle formed by the covered cord BB will now form a hood which should the weather be such as to render a covering for the head desirable, can be used by pulling it forward and securing it in any position desired by tying the string BB at the chin of the wearer.

Very Respectfully,
LANDY A. LINDSEY.³

Two years after Mr. Jaeger initially discussed Lindsey's "army blanket" pattern, we decided to take Lindsey at his word and see if his instructions were indeed "sufficiently plain" to enable reproduction of his invention. Accordingly, for this project we obtained an all-wool "Emergency Issue Blanket" from Fall Creek Sutlers of Lebanon, Indiana, as it was a reasonably close, yet relatively inexpensive, match to the "navy blanket" mentioned in Lindsey's missive.⁴

Proceeding apace, we soon discovered that Lindsey's original pattern left quite a bit to be desired; in some instances, his instructions were either vague or excluded important details. We were therefore forced to modify Lindsey's directions somewhat to make them "work." However, at the same time, we restricted our changes, as much as possible, to those that were either logical or "period." Fortunately, the bulk of our revisions merely consisted of such minor adjustments as slightly repositioning the loops and buttons so they functioned better.

The fruit of our labors was what may well be the first "army blanket" coat produced using Landy Lindsey's pattern since the 1860's. We found that Lindsey's "army blanket" was singular in that it could be fashioned by any competent tailor or seamstress in about three hours' time, using only a few dollars' worth of materials, from most any blanket having approximately the same properties as the "navy blanket" used by Landy Lindsey. The result is an incredibly cheap, serviceable, and reasonably effective "overcoat." Another advantage, especially attractive to those individuals concerned about using expensive, reproduction "issue" blankets, was that no cutting was involved—only sewing. Consequently "issue" blankets can be easily returned to their original states.

The "interior" of the coat is displayed below and shows how the "hood" was created, as well as how, and where, the ties were attached to create "sleeves." The buttons sewn in the upper left and right corners of the blanket are not visible in the photograph, but are located approximately where our model placed his thumbs.





As illustrated at left, the blanket formed a sort of hooded coat with a "cape" when fully buttoned. The hood, in fact, worked remarkably well and the drawstring allowed for a snug fit around the head. Practical experimentation by Mr. Jaeger and our model indicated that hats or caps could be easily worn over the hood. The drawstring at the throat was also singularly effective in keeping away the winter chill.

In a slight, but still "period," departure from Lindsey's instructions we added an extra button and loop to the front of the "cape" (also visible in the photo at left). Doing this secured the cape in a neater, more "military" fashion. Although Lindsey recommended "large horn or lasting" buttons, we used large (7/8"), common shell buttons, which proved to be acceptable substitutes. On balance, we found the coat to be remarkably warm and comfortable despite some

limitations, particularly regarding freedom of movement in the arms. Indeed, Mr. Jaeger wore it on a number of cool Indiana evenings in Fall and Winter 2004 and found it to be very effective. When he needed more ventilation, he simply undid some buttons, which themselves worked well in securing the coat and could be fastened or unfastened within seconds. A closer view of the loops and buttons fastening the "cape" to the lower portion of the coat is shown below:



Pseudo-sleeves were created by knotting the ties sewn to the interior of the blanket, as depicted, and served their intended purpose surprisingly well:





If the "sleeves" were too long, they were easily folded, pinned, or sewn up to create "cuffs." As mentioned earlier, arm mobility was somewhat restricted after the wearer completely "buttoned up." However, simply undoing some buttons, or drawing up the sleeves, significantly improved freedom of movement.

We were singularly gratified to note that accoutrements could also be worn over the coat with ease although we had to make minor adjustments (mostly pulling things up or down) to ensure proper fit and comfort. Wearers could also carry rifle-muskets without restriction although Landy Lindsey most likely intended his coat to be worn in camp or while on marches when there was no expectation of meeting the enemy. Drill and tactical movements could be readily performed as shown below:







We also noted that wearing knapsacks with this type of coat could be problematic, depending on the style of knapsack used, but blanket rolls could be worn with minimal, if any, difficulty. As illustrated above, our model wore his "Pritchard"-style knapsack, which he was able to easily slip over the coat. He also concurrently pulled up his "sleeves" to permit greater facility with his rifle-musket.

Our overall conclusion about Landy Lindsey's "army blanket," based on our production and practical evaluation of it, is that his creation is decidedly not a thing of beauty—but it *does* work! We are daresay mystified as to why the Confederate Quartermaster Department failed to officially adopt a versatile blanket-coat based on Lindsey's generally practical, albeit inelegant, pattern. Moreover, we believe that had Confederate authorities done so, they not only would have partially addressed the persistent shortages of military overcoats that plagued Southern units throughout the war but, more importantly, they would have significantly reduced much of the needless cold-weather suffering endured by troops who fought for Southern independence.

A caveat: we must respectfully point out to readers that, to date, we still have no firm idea regarding how many of these "army blankets" were actually delivered to, or made by, troops in the field. However, if we allow that Landy Lindsey's invention was practical and could be made quickly, using materials easily available even in the field, we can presume with a fair degree of confidence that some "army blankets" did find their way onto the backs of grateful Southern troops.

Readers with additional questions about Landy Lindsey's "army blanket" can either contact the author or Cathy Gurley: taylor2@gte.net. Special thanks are extended to John Wickett, Company I (*Liberty Hall Volunteers*), 4th Virginia Infantry, for "doing a turn on the catwalk." We also offer our deepest appreciation to the Tippecanoe County, Indiana, Historical Association for use of the Historic 1852 Moses Fowler House as a photographic backdrop.

MR. JAEGER & MRS. GURLEY.

¹ Jaeger, Mark D. "Confederate Cold-Weather Apparel: Two Patterns from Southern Newspapers." *The Watchdog*, Fall 2002, Vol. 10, No. 4, pages 5 and 6.

² LASTING. [A contraction of everlasting.] a strong, closely woven variety of worsted, commonly dyed plain black, and used for covering buttons and for the uppers of women's gaiters. It is commonly woven with a double twill; when woven with a satin twill and finished with a luster is called *Denmark satin*. *Durance*, *prunella*, and *serge de berri* are varieties of lasting. Buttons of black lasting were often used on such period garments as women's outerwear and men's vests Cole, George S. *Cole's Encyclopedia of Dry Goods*.... Chicago, New York [etc.]: Root Newspaper Association, 1900 and personal communication with Mrs. Carolann Schmitt, "Genteel Arts," 28 September 2004.

³ Landy A. Lindsey (1828?-1905?) remains a shadowy figure. However some sketchy biographical details have emerged since Mr. Jaeger first wrote about Lindsey's "army blanket." 1850 census information indicates one "Landy A. Lindsey," aged twenty-two (or twenty-three, depending on the source), holding the occupation of "school teacher," was then residing in the vicinity of Edwards Depot (a village on the rail line between Jackson and Vicksburg), Hinds County, Mississippi. At this time Lindsey was apparently still living with his mother and two brothers (the youngest of whom was also named Landy!). According to the 1840 census, Lindsey's father (who was, yet again, reportedly named Landy), apparently owned a sizeable plantation along with twenty-three slaves. The elder Landy Lindsey was also reportedly an architect and assisted in the construction of the Old Capital building (built 1839) in Jackson. However, he fails to appear in the 1850 census, which indicates he died sometime during the previous decade.

What is more, Landy A. Lindsey also appears to have served, albeit briefly, in Confederate service. One "Landy Aaron Lindsey" is stated as having served as a captain, probably in a Hinds County company, with the Mississippi "Army of 10,000," which deployed to Kentucky and served a "Sixty Days" term there in 1861-1862. According to Lindsey Family lore, Landy A. Lindsey allegedly moved to Texas during or shortly after the war, raised a large family there, and died circa 1905.

<http://ftp.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/ms/hinds/1850/pg0129b.txt>. Personal communication with Ada Lindsey Hughes, 14 December 2004. Personal communication with Bill Lindsey, 15 December 2004. "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System": <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.htm>. Readers can also find a capsule history of the relatively obscure "Army of 10,000" at: http://www.mississippisev.org/MS_Units/army_of_10k.htm.

⁴ Chas. R. Childs, of "County Cloth," has offered a U.S. Navy blanket (approximately 78 x 58, white with blue end stripes, and stenciled "U.S. Navy") in the past. However, Mr. Childs indicates this blanket is no longer in stock and that he has no current plans to offer it again in the near future. More information can be found online at <http://www.crchilds.com/id25.htm>. The Fall Creek Sutlers "Emergency Issue Blanket" can be viewed at <http://fcsutler.com/fcblankhavers.asp>. Although misnamed, and not as accurate as other "issue blankets" being offered by such vendors as Chas. R. Childs, Quartermaster Woolens, Matt Woodburn, and Waterside Woolens, the Fall Creek product should be viewed as a reasonable substitute for the first prototype used in this project.