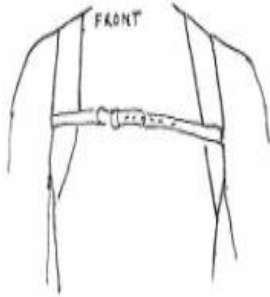


Knapsacks & Haversacks

by Gene Hickman

From the Invoice of Articles delivered to Captain Lewis are listed 15 painted knapsacks (Jackson, 1979).



There was a definite distinction between the knapsack and the haversack, in both the military and civilian communities. The knapsack (What we would commonly think of as a pack with 2 straps on the back) was used to carry equipment and personal belongings. The military of the period was issuing the knapsack, but NOT the haversack. The military issue knapsack was a copy of the British Issue Double Knapsack. It has double pockets on either side of the main fold, which

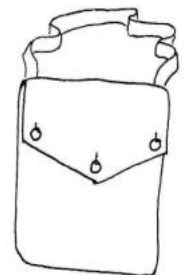


will allow a blanket to be carried between the folds. There were two white buff straps over the shoulders with a chest strap across the front. Military knapsacks were canvas and linen, painted (Spanish Brown) to waterproof them and had a white oval with a black "U.S" designation painted on.

British Officer Bennett Cuthbertson defined the Knapsack in his book- System for the Complete Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry. The Knapsack is: ...A bag or case of stout canvas or leather, worn by soldiers, strapped to the back and used for carrying necessaries; any similar recepticle used by travelers for carrying light articles... Square Knapsacks are most convenient, for packing up the soldiers necessaries and should be made with a division... a certain size must be determined on the whole, and will have a pleasing effect on a march. Cuthbertson defines the position the pack is to be worn ...to hang over each shoulder; which makes the Carriage of the Knapsack much easier, than across the breast, and by no means so heating. (Casada 2001)

The haversack was usually used to carry rations or food. It was similar to the knapsack with the exception of having a single long strap. It was usually worn over the neck and across the body like the hunting or shooting bag. Many bags had dividers or extra pockets sewed inside. The three button style bag is popular today.

18th Century Oxford Dictionary definition of a Haversack: ...the bag in which the Calvary (sic) and horsemen carried oats for their horses. Hence extended to a bag which travelers and others carried personal property, and to that used by the French and English soldiers... a bag of stout canvas, worn with a strap over the shoulder, in which a soldier carries his current days rations. Also any similar bag used for a like purpose by travelers, etc. (Casada 2001).



Haversacks were usually made of coarse linen, hemp or canvas. Besides painting, other sacks and haversacks were also saturated with an oil and/or wax mixture to waterproof them. The haversack we commonly see in military painting and drawings (Rev War thru Civil War) is the 3 button flap style depicted here. However, civilian and Rev War haversacks of the day were commonly "homemade" items and could have leather straps, only one button, ties, pegs, or any number of various closures and straps.

According to the journals knapsacks were one of the few items that survived the expedition and most men still had theirs through the entire expedition. Knapsacks are frequently mentioned in the journals. However, we have no documentation of haversacks being issued for the expedition. Even though they were so common in both the military and civilian community before and after this period, they were not a military issue item at the time. Both the knapsack and haversack can be easily and cheaply constructed, but they are readily available from many traders and sutlers.

The New Invented Knapsack is very popular with both Revolutionary War and Lewis & Clark reenactors. However, it was NEVER ADOPTED by the U.S. Army, before during nor after this period. In one of the prints in the Gass journal, individuals appear to be wearing New Invented Packsacks across their back. However, it may either be editorial/illustrator license or they are blanket rolls. All through the journals references are to knapsacks.