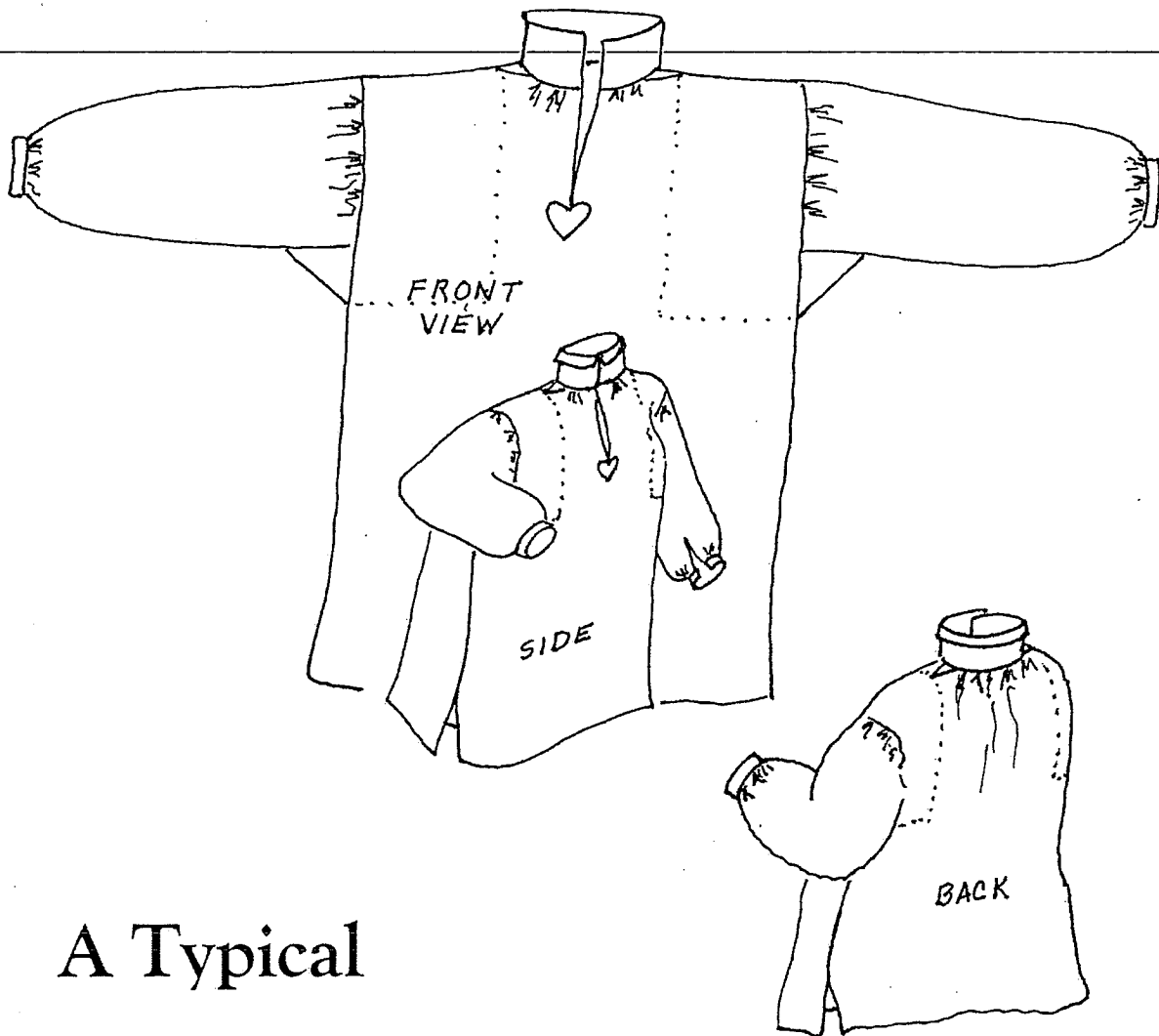


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# A Typical Eighteenth Century Military Shirt

A practical construction guide by Judith Wicker

A Typical 18<sup>th</sup> Century Military Shirt  
Construction Guide



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## A Typical 18<sup>th</sup> Century Military Shirt Construction Guide

All measurements are finished length/width, and do not allow for seam allowances. Remember to add seam allowances to your measurements.

**STYLE AND COLOR:** We are using the document, "Shirt, Enlisted Man's" - Revolutionary War Period c. 1760-1790, from the BAR. Cotton broadcloth for the enlisted men and a finer grade for the officers, in white, is acceptable. The enlisted men do not have ruffles. The commissioned officers do.

**Collar and neck:** Use 20th century shirt that fits the man as a guide. Allow 1/2" extra for fitting, and check sewn collar for fit before attaching it to the shirt. The collar is 3-1/2" wide, finished. It has two buttonholes set in. Finished appearance, with stock, should allow 1/2" to appear turned over at top of the stock. The neck slit is 9" long, finished. The officer's shirt would have ruffles along the neck slit.

**Cuff and sleeve:** The cuff should fit snug enough not to drop below wrist. It is 1" wide, finished. The sleeve slit at this point is 4-1/4 to 4-1/2" long. The officer's shirt would have ruffles attached to the cuff. We suggest making the sleeve a little blousier than shown in the article if the soldier has a heavy arm, and increasing the arm opening on the shirt (operation 10, p.9) if necessary.

**Body:** Length 36" to 39" long. Since the tail is not seen, it may be longer. Reinforces either side of the neck gusset fit from shoulder seam to neck gusset and to the bottom of the sleeve gusset front and back. Shoulders are dropped, not fitted to the point of the shoulder. Measure from neck to wrist, with elbow bent, for length required for both shirt body and sleeve. Allow at least one extra inch for "ease".

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While 18th century shirts were made by hand, the North West Territory Alliance has no restrictions on using machine stitches in construction. Hand sewing on the outer, visible areas does lend a more realistic look if you can sew finely enough – roughly about 10 to 12 stitches per inch. If not, probably machine stitches will look more authentic.

Shirts were commonly made of linen, which will give a much better look. Cotton is acceptable in the NWTA. Check with your own unit as to the color and fabric you can use.

If your unit uses a uniform shirt, there may be specific dimensions to follow. Check with your unit before cutting out the pieces.

### LIST OF PIECES FOR CONSTRUCTION OF THE SHIRT:

**1. BODY:** One piece, folded at the shoulder. Common width – 32 to 34" wide. Common length – twice the distance between shoulder and mid-thigh. A very slim or very broad-shouldered man might need to alter the width. Remember - this shirt has a dropped shoulder.

**2. BODY REINFORCES:** Two, each about 25" long by about 8-9" wide. The actual width and length depend on the body width and the armhole size. The length should equal the armhole opening plus 1/2". The width should permit the reinforce to extend from the armhole edge to just covering the point of the neck gusset, plus 1/4".

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**3. SLEEVES:** Two, sized according to the width of the body piece. Measure the distance from center back neck to the wrist knuckle, with the elbow bent, and add about three inches. Then subtract one-half the width of the body from this measurement. The result is the length of the sleeve, including  $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowances. The width of the sleeve usually runs about 22".

**4. SLEEVE GUSSETS:** Two, each formed of two 6" squares. Cut four 6" squares.

**5. CUFFS:** Two, 2 -1/2" wide by about 10 - 11" long. The length of the cuff should be about 2" longer than your wrist measurement, including seam allowance.

**6. COLLAR:** One piece, 7 -1/2" wide by      long. Length can be determined by measuring the part of a well-fitting dress shirt that buttons at the neck and adding about 1". This will produce a fairly close-fitting collar that will fold about 1/2" down over a military stock. A finished height of 3 -1/2" seems to work best to produce that look.

**7. NECK GUSSETS:** Two, 3 -1/2" square.

**8. FACING FOR FRONT NECK OPENING:** One piece, 2 -1/2" wide x 11" long.

**9. TAIL GUSSETS:** Two, each 2" square.

**10. HEART REINFORCE FOR BOTTOM OF FRONT NECK OPENING:** One, formed by doubling two 1 -1/2" squares.

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## CONSTRUCTION GUIDE, PRIMARILY FOR MACHINE-SEWN SHIRTS

The shaded areas on the drawings indicate the outside, or right side, of the garment. The unshaded areas indicate the inside, or wrong side, of the garment.

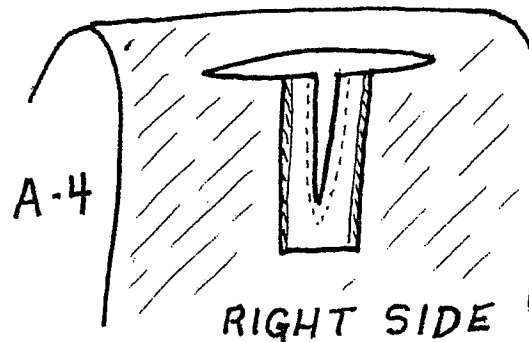
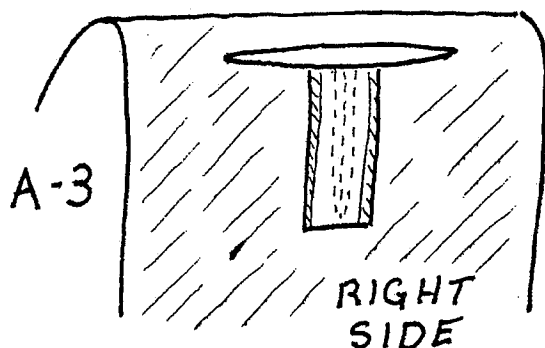
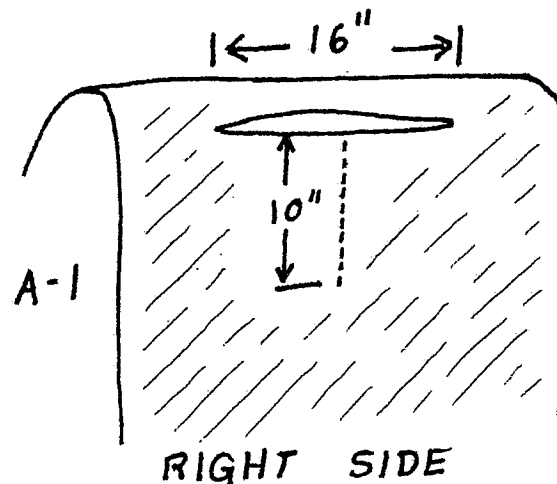
### A. PUTTING THE FACING ON THE CENTER FRONT NECK OPENING AND GUSSETS AT EACH SIDE OF THE NECK OPENING:

1. Fold the body material in half. Find the center point across the width of material. Mark a line 8" either side of this mark, for a total of 16" wide across the shoulders. From the center point, mark a 10" line down the center front of the body. CUT ALONG THE 16" MARK. DO NOT CUT ALONG THE 10" MARK AT THIS TIME.

2. Mark a 10" line down the center of the facing for the front neck opening. Press under 1/4" along both long sides of the facing. Stitch in place.

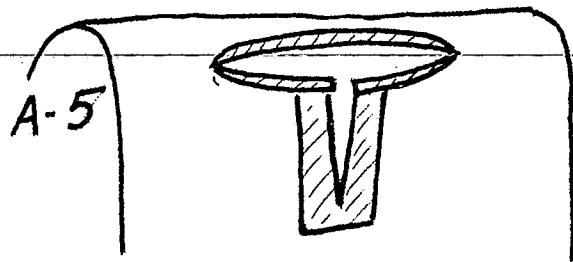
3. Pin facing to body, with the 10" marks coinciding, RIGHT SIDES TOGETHER. Sew @ 1/8" from the marking, on both sides of the mark, ending in a point just below the bottom of the mark.

4. Cut open along the mark. Turn and press open. Tack facing in place.




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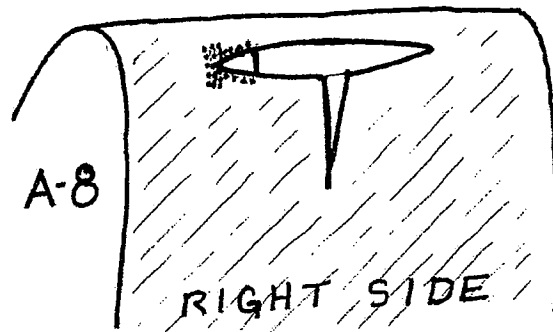
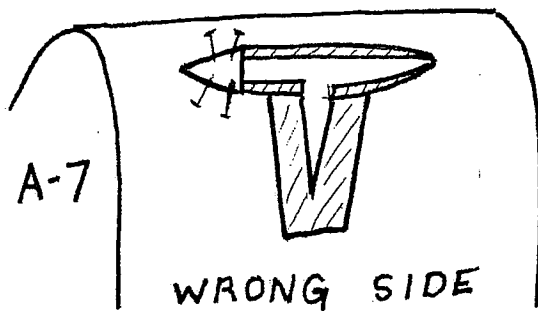
5. Press under 1/4" of material along the neck slit, narrowing as little as possible at the two points of the slit.



6. Fold the neck gussets into triangles and press.

A-6 

7. Place one neck gusset at one point of the neck slit, ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BODY MATERIAL, with the gusset point overlapping the point of the slit @ 3/8 - 1/2". Pin or baste in place.



8. ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BODY MATERIAL, top-stitch the gusset in place @ 1/8" from the edge of the material, bar-tacking at the point.

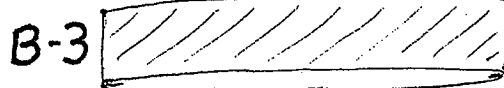
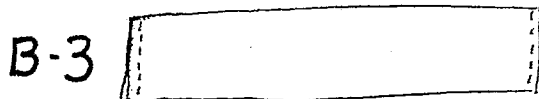
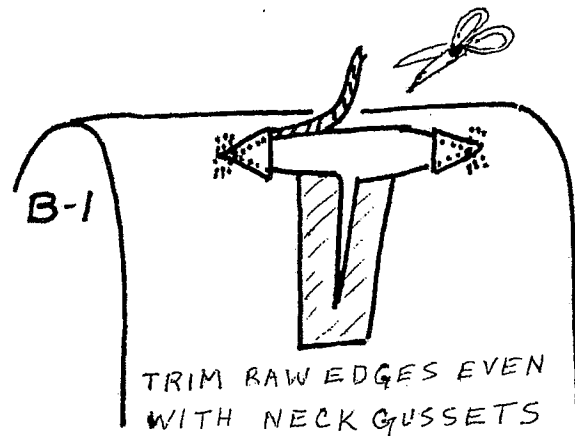
9. Repeat with gusset at other point of the neck slit.

### B. PUTTING THE COLLAR ON THE SHIRT

1. Trim the body material at the neck slit so that the raw edge is even with the gusset edges.

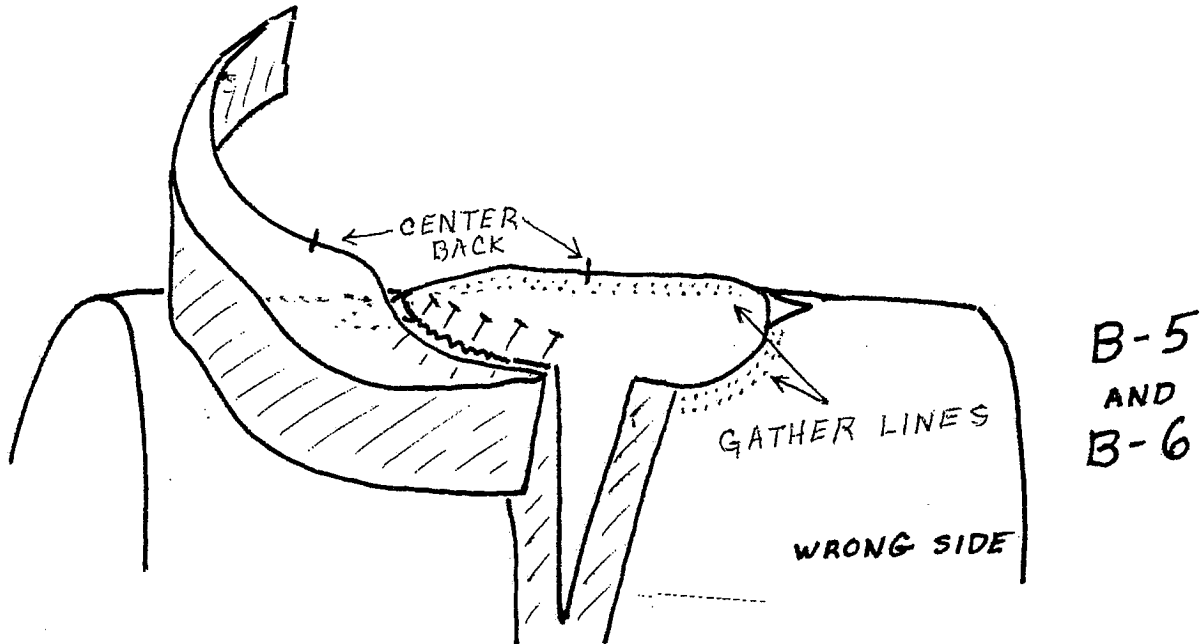
2. Sew two gathering lines, @ 1/8" apart, along the neck opening between the gussets in back and the gussets and the facing in front.

3. Fold the collar piece lengthwise and sew a 1/4" seam at each end. Turn and press.

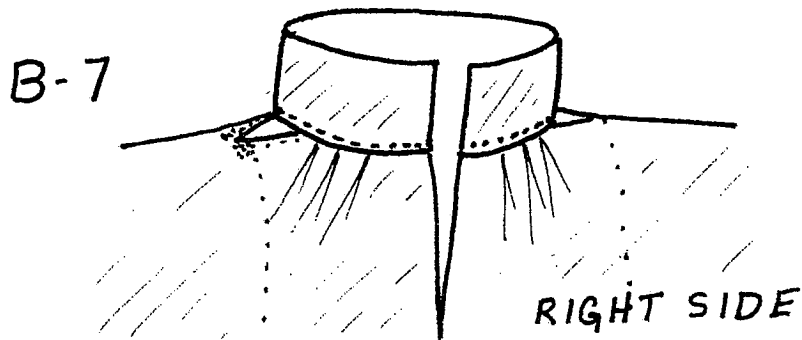


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4. Mark center back and halfway between the center and each end of the collar. Mark center back of the neck.
5. Pin one edge of collar to neck edge, RIGHT side of collar to WRONG side of neck edge.
6. Gather the neck edge by drawing on the gathering lines until the shirt edge matches the collar edge. Pin and sew.

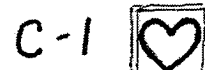


7. Press up the sewn edge of the collar and press under an equal seam allowance on the other edge of the collar. Top stitch or hand stitch this edge to the RIGHT side, or outside, of the shirt, making sure all raw seam edges are caught inside the collar. Press.



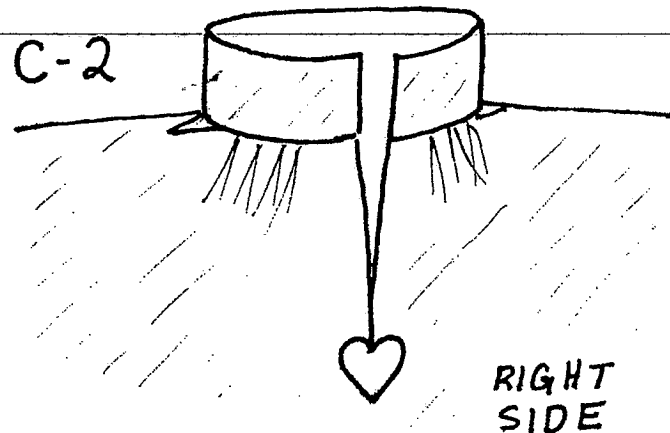
### C. PUTTING ON THE HEART REINFORCE:

1. Draw a heart on the double thickness of the heart material. Cut out the heart.

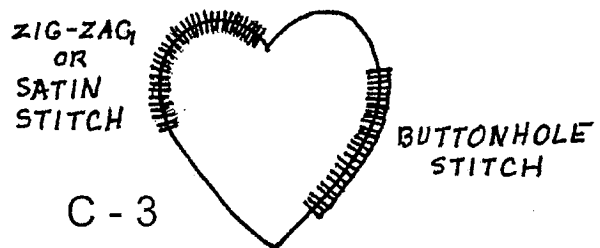


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2. Pin the heart on the **RIGHT SIDE** of the shirt, with the top of the heart just touching the bottom edge of the neck opening.



3. Using hand or machine stitch, satin stitch or buttonhole stitch the edge of the heart to the shirt. Make sure the facing is lying flat on the inside of the shirt.



### D. SEWING ON THE BODY REINFORCES:

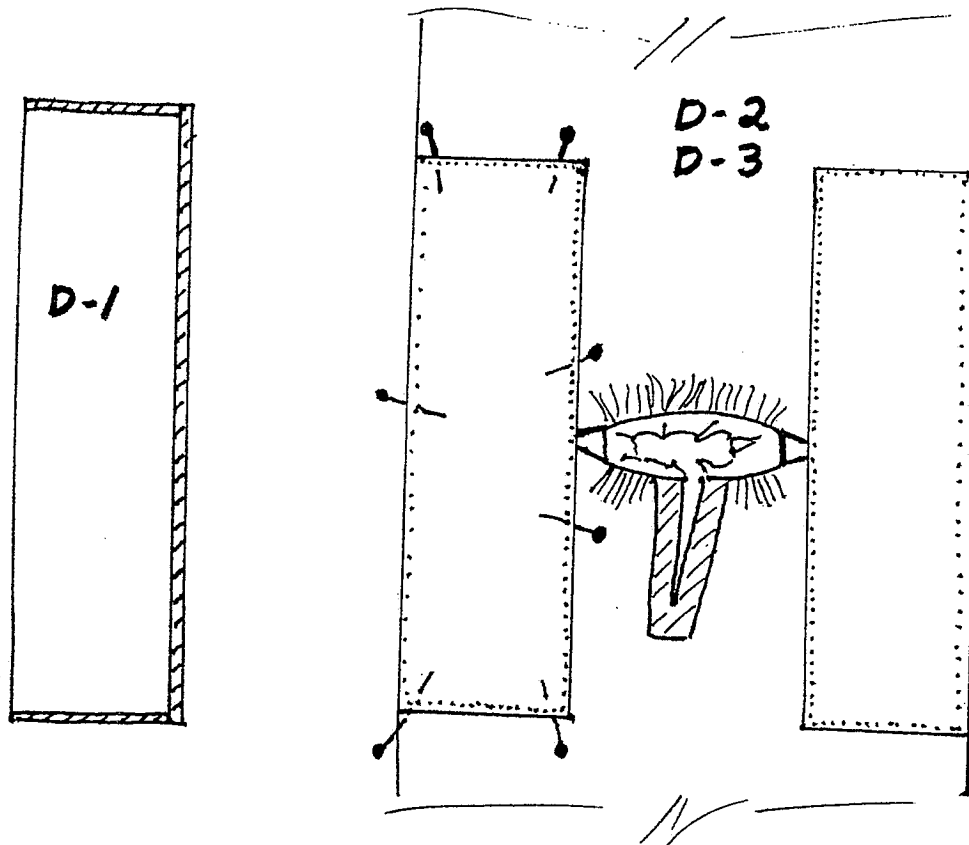
1. Turn under 1/4" seam along two short sides and one long side of each reinforce. Press and stitch in place. Mark the midpoint along each long edge of the reinforce.

2. Pin one reinforce piece to the shirt body, **WRONG SIDES TOGETHER**, with the reinforcement midpoint aligned with the shoulder line. The raw outside edge of the reinforce should match with the outside edge of the shirt, and the center point of the other edge of the reinforce should overlap the point of the neck gusset.



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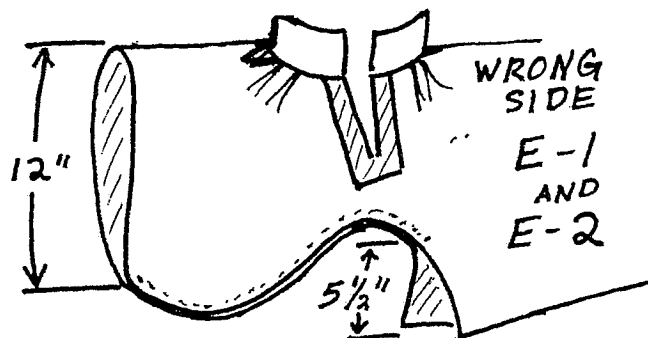
3. Top stitch the reinforce, about 1/8" from the edge, all around the seam edges. Baste the raw edges of the shirt and the reinforce together.



4.  
Repeat on the other side with the second reinforce.

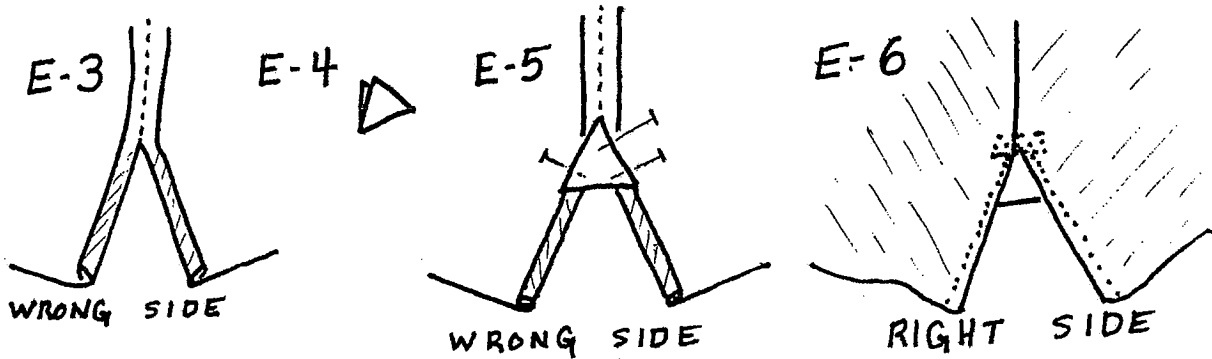
### E. SEWING THE SIDE SEAMS AND INSTALLING THE TAIL GUSSETS IN THE VENTS

1. Mark a point 12" down from the shoulder on each side. Mark a point 5 - 1/2" up from the bottom on each side.
2. WITH RIGHT SIDES TOGETHER, pin one side. Sew between the two marks.



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3. Turn, press and hem the open side edges at the bottom of the shirt.
4. Fold the tail gussets into triangles, like the neck gussets, and press.
5. Place one tail gusset on the **WRONG SIDE** of the side vent, with the point overlapping the top of the vent opening by  $3/8 - 1/2$ ". Pin or baste in place.

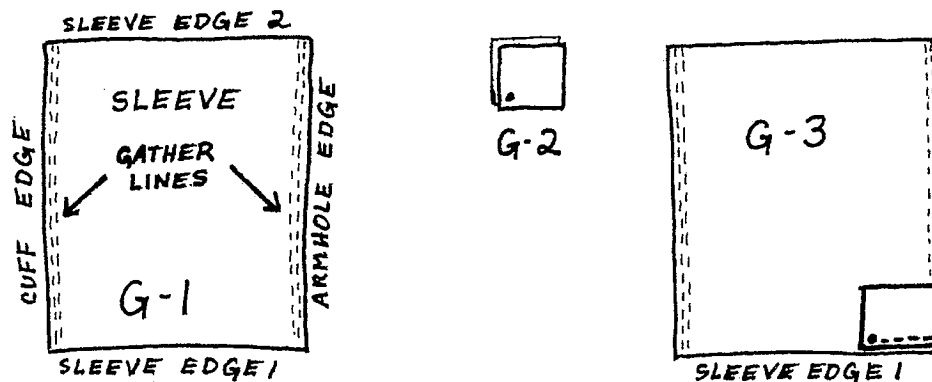


6. From **RIGHT SIDE** of shirt, top stitch the gusset in place, @  $1/8$ " from the edge, bar-tacking at the point for reinforcement, just like the neck gussets.
7. Repeat with the other side seam.

**F. SHIRT HEM:** Turn, press and stitch a hem at the bottom of shirt front and back.

### G. SETTING UNDERARM GUSSETS INTO THE SLEEVE SEAMS

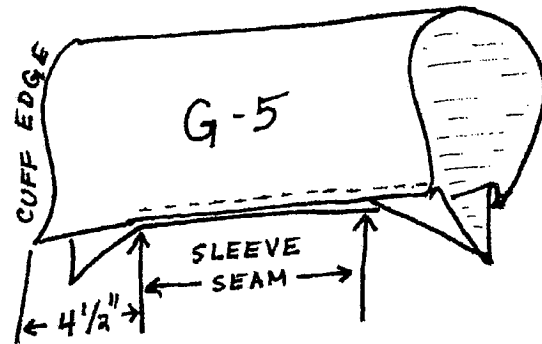
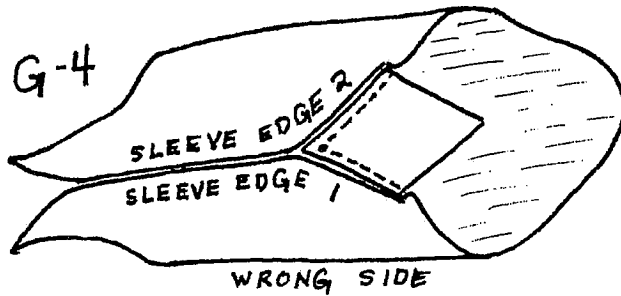
1. Sew two gather lines @  $1/8$ " apart at both armhole edge and cuff edge of each sleeve.
2. Place pencil dot in one corner of sleeve gusset,  $3/8$ " from each edge. (Remember, each sleeve gusset has two pieces of material placed together.)
3. Pin gusset to sleeve edge #1, as shown. Sew  $3/8$ " seam from armhole edge to dot.



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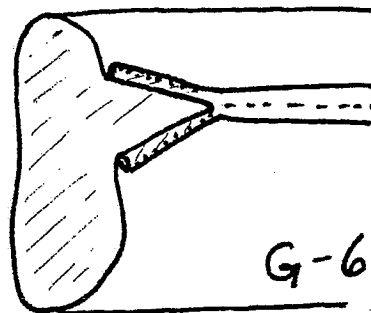
4. Pin adjacent edge of gusset to sleeve edge #2, as shown, and sew from dot to armhole edge.

5. Mark sleeve edge 4 - 1/2" from cuff edge. Pin sleeve edge #1 and sleeve edge #2 together between the gusset and the mark. Sew a 3/8" seam between the gusset and the mark (4 - 1/2" from cuff edge).



6. Turn, press and hem the open sleeve edges down to the cuff edge, just like the side vents.

7. Repeat with the other sleeve.



### H. PUTTING THE CUFFS ON THE SLEEVES

1. Like the collar, fold the cuff lengthwise and sew a 1/4" seam along each short edge. Turn and press. (Refer to directions for putting on the collar.)

2. Mark cuff at center and halfway between center on each side. Mark the cuff edge of the sleeve likewise.

3. Pin one open edge of the cuff to the sleeve, RIGHT SIDES TOGETHER.

4. Draw the gather line on the sleeve evenly until the two edges match. Pin and sew.

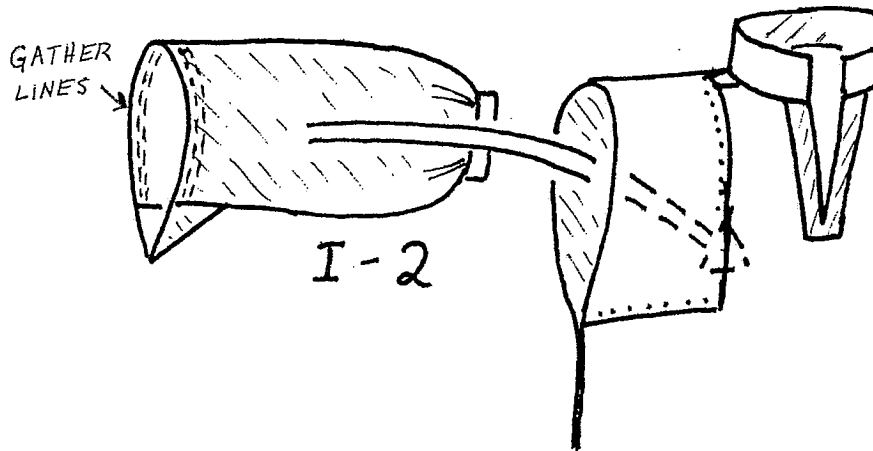
5. Press the sewn edge of the cuff up, and press under an equal seam allowance on the other edge of the cuff. Pin to the INSIDE of the sleeve and stitch in place.

6. Repeat with the other cuff and sleeve.

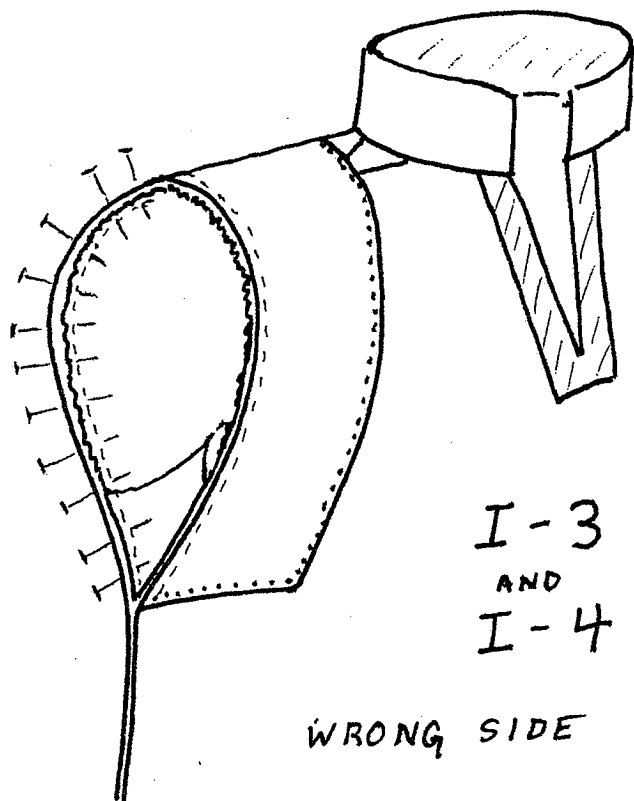
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## I. SETTING THE SLEEVES INTO THE BODY OF THE SHIRT

1. Mark top of shoulder and top of sleeve.
2. WITH RIGHT SIDES TOGETHER, pin sleeve to armhole opening.



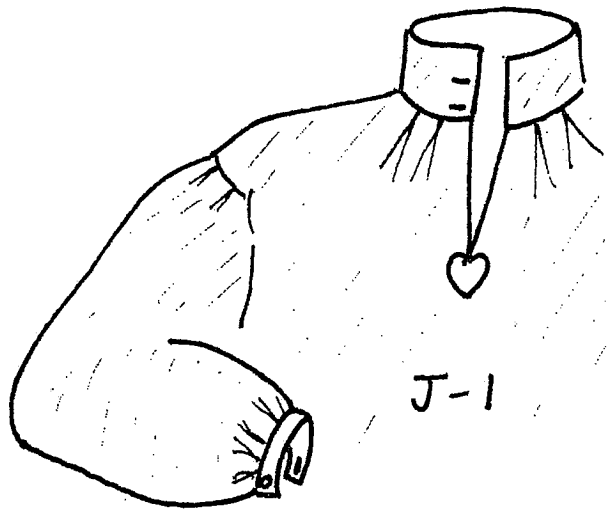
3. Draw gather lines evenly until sleeve and armhole edges match.
4. Pin and sew sleeve to body.
5. Repeat with the other sleeve.



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### J. SETTING NECK AND CUFF BUTTONHOLES

1. The buttonholes are set in the left side of the collar and the rear edge of the cuff.
2. There are, generally, two buttonholes in the collar. One is set right at the base of the collar, just above the neck edge, and one is set @ 1 -1/2" from the top of the collar.
3. Buttonholes should be sized to the buttons specified by each unit.



### DOCUMENTATION FOR MILITARY SHIRT STYLE:

The shirt style used in this construction guide is a typical lower or middle class shirt worn by men of the Eighteenth Century. It was common for upper middle class and upper class men to wear the same style shirt with ruffles attached to the front neck slit and the cuffs.

Examples may be found in many collections. This list contains a sampling.

**Baumgarten, Linda;** *Eighteenth Century Clothing At Williamsburg*; 1986, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Items #1953-967 and G1971-1552, as seen on pp 50 and 51; Wallace Gallery of Decorative Arts, Williamsburg, VA

**Klinger, Robert;** *Sketchbook 76*; 1967, Union City TN, Pioneer Press, examples cited on p. 6; Gunston Hall, VA, Smithsonian Institute.

**Neumann, George C. & Kravic, Frank J.;** *Collector's Illustrated Encyclopedia Of The American Revolution*; Secaucus, NJ, 1977, Castle Books; Item #1, a photograph on p. 243; Edward Charol, private collection.