Notes on the Federal Issue Sack Coat

Paul McKee

FIG 1. Unlined federal enlisted issue sack coat (blouse) in the Royal Arsenal Museum, Copenhagen. Perhaps the earliest known example of the sack coat adopted in 1857 is this specimen, which was part of the exchange of military equipment with the Danish government in 1858. Because of the early date of manufacture, it is certainly an example of prewar Schuylkill Arsenal manufacture and would be entirely hand sewn. Note how the collar is wider and the cuff slits much deeper than sack coats associated with war-time manufacture. Also note the unusual double pocket stitching which is straight at the bottom and runs all the way to the top button. (Photograph courtesy of Frederick C. Gaede)

THE Federal issue sack coat of the Civil War is a paradoxical garment. In its day it was cheap, common, utilitarian, and entirely lacking in military panache; in fact, it was rather homely. It was used hard until worn out, issued out as second rate clothing during the Indian Wars, given out to reservation Indians, and finally ending up as moth fodder in great-great-grandfather's attic. Yet no other 'common' Federal Civil War garment has generated such intense interest among 20th Century collectors or commanded such premium prices as the humble fatigue sack coat.[1]

It is the aim of this short article to describe the Federal issue sack coat, drawing on observations of original artifacts in private and public collections. Care was taken to include only enlisted sack coats which either bore Federal inspector markings or had a known Civil War provenance. Depot produced garments have been included as well as contractor produced pieces. However, a word of caution is in order. No matter how large a sampling is used for making such observations, the number of remaining artifacts is dwarfed by the millions of sack coats manufactured between 1861 and 1865. For whatever reason they survived the ravages of time, extant sack coats are exceptional by the mere fact that they have survived.

Origins

In civilian dress, the pilot coat or "paletot" first appeared in the 1830s as a loose and comfortable alternative to the formal frock coat, especially for casual or sporting wear. *The Tailor's Guide* by Compaing and Devere describes them as follows:

> We term Paletot, or any other name you may prefer, a garment having no seam across the waist, and in which the skirt is of one piece with the

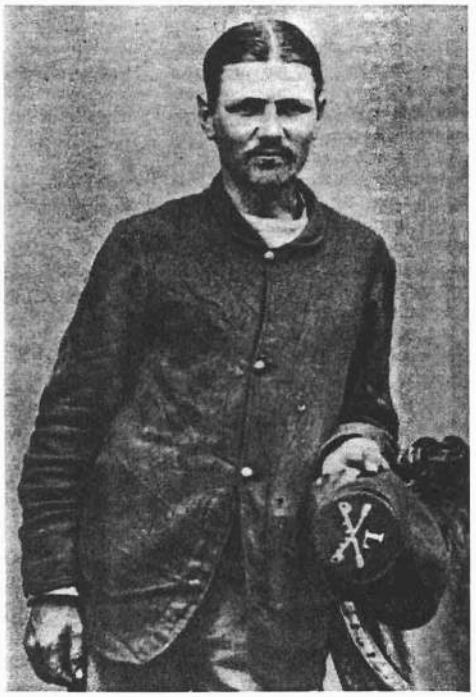

FIG 2. Sergeant "Boston" Corbett, Co. L, 16th New York Cavalry (the man credited with having shot John Wilkes Booth) in an image taken in 1865. Corbett wears a sack coat whose extremely narrow cuff stitching and sharply tapering front facing resembles the late-war coats manufactured under the contract of J. T. Martin, 18 October 1864.

forefront... Even in summer, paletots are worn as over garments in the night or in case of bad weather, or, if worn alone, they are intended to leave the wearer easy in his motions.[2]

Although the paletot grew in popularity for civilian use through the 1840s, the army continued to rely on variations of the tight-fitting uniform jacket and later the uniform coat for fatigue and campaign purposes for all branches of the service.[3] Doubtless the rigors of western campaigning, as well as an eye to economy, moved Captain George B. McClellan (First Regiment U. S. Cavalry) in 1857 to write:

> For service on the prairies, the men should have a loose flannel coat, leaving their uniform coat in garrison; the ordinary dark blue sailor's shirt, cut open in front, and provided with a lining and pockets is as good as anything that can be devised.[4]

Indeed, the War Department finally adopted a military version of the paletot known as the sack coat in the general uniform regulations of 1857. Originally intended for fatigue use in the mounted service, General Orders No. 3, 24 March 1858, approved its use for all branches. In either case, the fatigue sack coat was issued out along with (rather than replacing) the uniform coat for the infantry and the uniform jacket for the mounted arms. The "Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861" contains the widely familiar description of this sack coat:

> 1157. For Fatigue Purposes—a sack coat of dark blue flannel extending halfway down the thigh, and made loose, without sleeve or body lining, falling collar, inside pocket on the left side, four coat buttons down the front.
>
> 1158. For Recruits—the sack coat will be made with sleeve and body lining, the latter of flannel.

On the eve of the Civil War, the entire source of sack coats for the regular army was the Army Clothing Establishment at Philadelphia, commonly referred to as Schuylkill Arsenal. On 15 April 1861, when the President issued his call for 75,000 volunteers it had become apparent that Schuylkill by itself could not supply the wants of such a large volunteer force. On 23 May 1861, the War Department had authorized the issue of less expensive clothing items to the volunteers, thus putting even more emphasis on the production of the sack coat.[5] The story of the rapid expansion of the Quartermaster Department under the capable hand of Colonel Montgomery Meigs during the first year of the War lies outside the intended scope of this article. Suffice it to say, that by February 1862 when the Federal government completely took over the issue of clothing from the states, sack coats were being produced in vast numbers not only at Schuylkill, but at a range of new depots such as Steubenville, Cincinnati and St. Louis, among others. Additionally, ample quantities of sack coats were also being purchased from over a dozen private contractors such as J. T. Martin, William Deering, J. C. Ludlow, Joseph F. Page and James B. Boylan, among others. By War's end, the major depots of Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati and St. Louis reported having well over one million sack coats immediately on hand for issue ... and this in addition to the stocks of

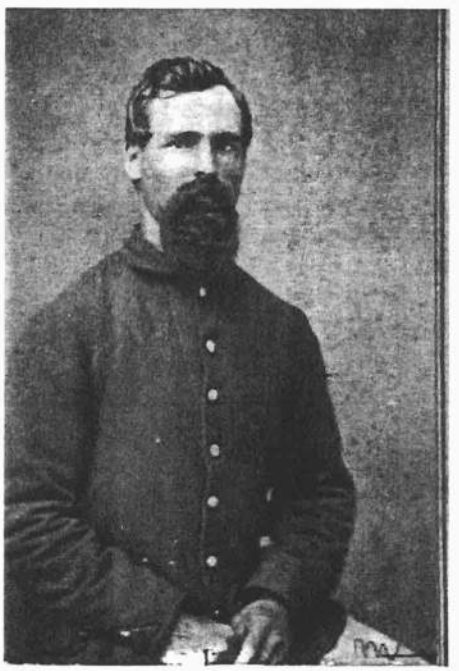

FIG 3. Unidentified federal private in sack coat which has been field altered by adding extra buttons in between the four specified in regulations. Note the common sack coat collar and cuffs as well as the tapered facing stitch. (Scott Cross Collection)

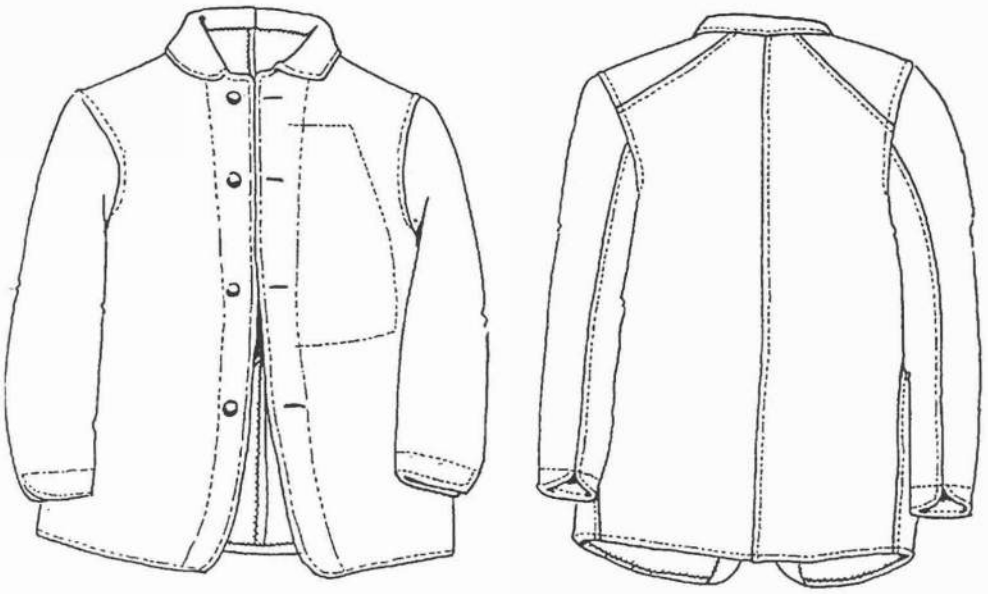

FIG 4. Unlined sack coat of unknown manufacture, front and back view. The body is of 4-piece construction and is entirely hand sewn with hand felled seams and hand worked buttonholes. Traces of white paint were noted on the inside on the pocket piece. Note the squared-off corners on pocket stitching. (Smithsonian Institution)

numerous lesser depots and the millions of sack coats already issued out to troops during the four years of Civil War![6]

Supply and Usage

Although uniform coats continued to be drawn by foot troops throughout the War period, by far the sack coat was the most commonly used outer garment by all branches. For each year of enlistment in the Regular Army an infantryman was allowed to draw two sack coats as opposed to one uniform coat. If the soldier overdrew this allowance, the cost was deducted from his pay. With the cost of sack coats at $2.10 compared to $6.56 for the uniform coat (published costs varied throughout the period), there was certainly incentive for soldiers to opt for the lesser-priced garment, unless compelled by their commanders to draw specific uniform items.[7]

When sack coats were requisitioned by commanding officers for issue to troops, they arrived in bales of garments, bound together with iron straps with buckles. The sizes 1–4 were distributed in the following proportions per 100: twenty of size 1, forty of size 2, thirty of size 3, and ten of size 4 garments.[8] The men would draw their clothing without regard to size and were expected to get a proper fit by trading garments among themselves or by altering the clothing.[9]

The regulation specifying lined sack coats for recruits and unlined sack coats as fatigue uniforms for veteran troops appears to have been disregarded in actual practice. Reports from the various depots indicate nearly twice as many lined sack coats were purchased from contractors than the unlined variety. There is also evidence that there was a seasonal preference for the lined sack coat among veteran troops as well. According to clothing estimates filed for the XIV Army Corps between December 1863 and September 1864, only lined blouses were being requested for the entire corps during the winter months. It was not until March 1864 that unlined blouses were again requested, and then only 395 of them compared to the 2,194 lined blouses requested that month. By August 1864, only unlined blouses were being requested.[10] The daily reports of clothing issued and on hand at Chattanooga, Tennessee covering the period from March 1863 to December 1864 also show greater quantities of lined sack coats both on hand and issued out during cold weather months.[11]

Many soldiers were prone to altering the issue sack coat to suit individual tastes. Photographs exist showing sack coats

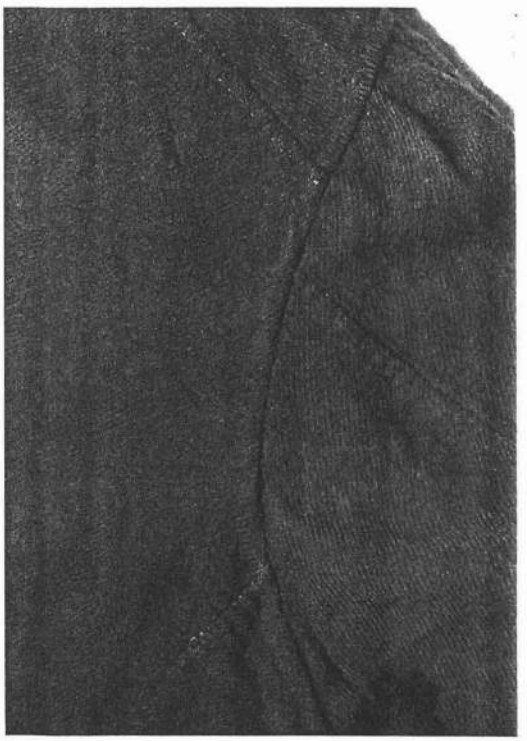

FIG 5. Photograph of felled shoulder seams on unlined sack coat in Figure 4, exterior view.

FIG 6. Unlined sack coat of unknown manufacture. Identified to a member of the 20th Ohio infantry, who was wounded in the arm at Atlanta, the coat bears repaired holes in the sleeve, presumably the work of the rebel ball which wounded him. Note the facing which begins extremely wide at the collar and sharply tapers to the corners of the skirt. White paint was also noted on the pocket piece of this coat. Coat body is 3-piece construction and is a combination of machine and hand sewing techniques. (Robert Wiley Collection)

FIG 7. Schuylkill arsenal marked lined sack coat. Entirely hand sewn, this specimen is peculiar in its 2-piece body construction (no side seams; single seam up the rear), the stylishly wide sleeves, the single row of top stitching on the cuff and front facing, the pointed collar, and the unusually dense and somewhat light color blue wool. Sleeve head is stamped "3 SA" with three dots, indicating mid-war manufacture. Seams are felled only where they are exposed beneath the coat lining. Also note the straight bottom pocket stitching. (Smithsonian Institution)

with added pockets on the breast or buttons added between the standard four, bringing the number to seven to be polished for Sunday inspection (FIG 3). Some soldiers even cut the skirts of the sack coat to the length of a shell jacket. Many photographs showing this type of alteration are identified to western infantry troops like those from Illinois, where the state-issued infantry shell had enjoyed a vogue long after the Federal government took over the clothing of troops. Could this alteration be an attempt to replace a worn-out state shell when the real item was no longer available?

Description

The unpublished 1865 "Quartermaster's Manual" by Colonel G. H. Crosman of Schuylkill Arsenal describes the regulation sack coat (at least as established at Schuylkill at the end of the War) as follows:

> Blouses, unlined:—3 yards 4 inches of ¾ dark blue flannel; 4 brass coat buttons; 6¼ skeins of dark blue linen thread, No. 35; 3–36 of a yard of ¾ drilling; and 1–36 of a yard of brown linen. Add, for lined blouses, 1¼ yards of 3/4 linsey or gray flannel, and ⅞ of a yard of 4-4 unbleached muslin.

This manual goes on to state that the 3/4 dark blue flannel be pure indigo dyed, woven with 48 threads per inch, to weigh 5½ ounces per linear yard, and to be able to bear 25 pounds lengthwise to the square inch and 17 pounds crosswise to the square inch. The dimensions of sizes 1–4 were specified as follows:

	#1	#2	#3	#4
Length of back	30"	30½"	31"	32"
Length of sleeve	32"	33"	34"	35"
Length of collar	8"	9"	10"	10"
Width of breast	36"	38"	40"	42"
Width of skirt	26"	27"	28"	29"
Width of collar	2½"	2½"	2½"	2½"
Width of sleeve hand	6½"	6½"	6½"	6½"

Although the Crosman manual lists only the four sizes above, it is interesting to note that a J. T. Martin contract from the New York depot dated 21 December 1864 was for 500 coats of size 5, 250 of size 6, and another 250 of size 7 costing $5.13 each. Contracts for coats in "boy's sizes" are also known.[12]

Observations from Existing Garments

Of the existing sack coats, perhaps the earliest is the one which was part of the exchange of then-current military clothing with the Danish government in 1858 and now resides in the Royal Arsenal Museum in Copenhagen. Although the author has not seen this garment in person, from the photographs it appears to be of the unlined variety and cut with a

wider collar and deeper cuff vents than those associated with wartime manufacture. Due to its early date of manufacture, this is certainly an example of Schuylkill production and would be entirely hand sewn.

Of the original, wartime sack coats surveyed, there was considerable variation in the color and weave of the dark blue wool flannel. This is not particularly surprising since all yard goods during the war were supplied by private contractors, even in the case of arsenal-produced clothing.[13] None of the garments were of the dark navy-blue shade, but were of a deep and rich blue with a very slight greenish cast common to indigo dying. Several coats (one, a Schuylkill-marked specimen) exhibited a lighter shade bordering on a medium blue. All flannel observed had a noticeable diagonal wale as in twilled goods, varying in distinctness from garment to garment.

Original sack coats broadly conform to the following description. Sleeves were all 2-piece and cut on a slight curve. Cuffs were faced on the inside and top-stitched along the edge and across the top of the facing (some lined coats omitted the top stitching along the top of the cuff facing). One coat viewed at the Smithsonian had cuff facings constructed from the same bright blue flannel from which the coat lining was made! Cuffs were usually split at the rear seam with the cuff turning a rounded corner as it approached the split. The cuff split would be on the average of 1¼" deep with examples as shallow as ⅝" or as wide as 1¾". Bodies were cut in either three piece or four piece construction. (In the 4-piece variation, the additional seam would run up the center of the back.) The corners of the skirts would be rounded and the front would be faced on the inside with flannel and interfaced inside, tapering distinctly from collar to skirt. The facing would be top-stitched as the

FIG 8 (right). Unmarked lined sack coat, 3-piece body with extensive machine sewing. Note keyhole-shaped buttonholes. Lining is of mixed blue and brown linsey-woolsey. (Smithsonian Institution)

FIG 9 (far right). Lined sack coat of unknown manufacture. Body is 3-piece construction with extensive machine stitching. Lining is brown flannel wool. Sleeves are marked with a diamond and "3". This coat is about as basic as they get. (Smithsonian Institution)

FIG 10. Lined sack coat with Cincinnati inspector's marks (name illegible) and 3-piece body construction. Note the unevenness of the machine sewn stitching on the coat skirt. This example is unusual in that it also is missing the second row of top stitching on the cuff and no pocket stitching is visible on the exterior. The pocket is constructed to the lining rather than the coat front. Also rather odd is that the cuff facing is constructed of the same loosely woven, bright blue flannel with which the coat body is lined. (Smithsonian Institution)

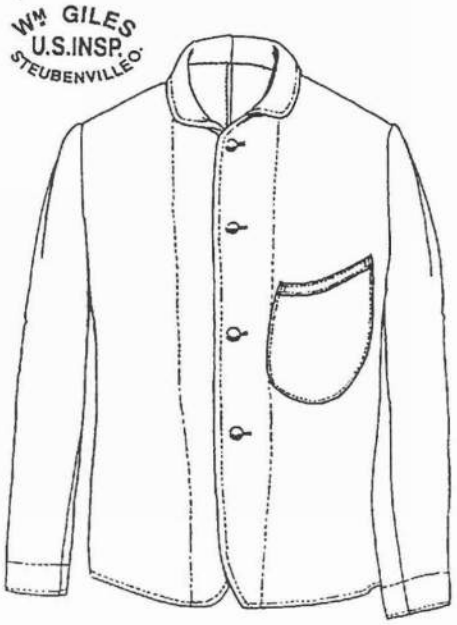

FIG 11. Steubenville Depot produced sack coat. This garment is unusual in that it sports an exterior patch pocket, sleeve lining but no body lining, and body seams which are all hand-felled. Reportedly, all these features appear to be original to the coat's manufacture. Sleeve lining stamped "WM GILES / U.S. INSP. / STEUBENVILLE O." (Jan Gordon Collection)

FIG 12. J. T. Martin 18 October 1864 contract lined sack coat (Cincinnati Depot). Perhaps the most common sack coat in modern collections, this coat exhibits features common to Martin coats: narrow 5/8" cuff stitching and shallow cuff slits (compare these to the Danish exchange coat), facing seam tapering to 3/4", and sewn box stays on the pocket. This coat is of 3-piece construction and is heavily machine sewn. Lining is loose gray flannel and is hemmed on the bottom. Sleeves are marked with contract "J. T. MARTIN OCT-18-64" and inspector marks. "GEO.B.FRY, U.S.INSP. CINTI O." in separate sleeve linings. Note how the skirt corners do not match. (Smithsonian Institution)

cuff, starting wide near the collar and echoing the taper of the facing as it ran to the bottom of the skirt. Considerable piecing was often present in this facing. The familiar kidney-shaped pocket on the left side of unlined sack coats was constructed of flannel with a separate facing piece applied to the inside on the pocket opening. Stitching for this pocket would naturally show on the outside of unlined sack coats. Usually this stitching would also show on the outside of lined sack coats, but examples with no exterior pocket stitching are commonly encountered as well. (On these, the pockets were constructed by sewing to the lining rather than the coat exterior.) Collars were all uniformly 2½" wide with rounded corners. They were commonly constructed of four pieces with interfacing material inside with a running stitch showing where the interfacing was attached to the under collar. Collars were also top stitched and some coats were encountered with pieced under collars. The four general service buttons were roughly spaced 6" apart with hand worked buttonholes. Some buttonholes were keyhole-shaped, others were simply slotted. Some buttonholes were corded (a heavier cord running around the entire opening and trapped under the buttonhole stitch), others were more simply sewn with the normal buttonhole stitch.[14] All unlined sack coats observed had all hand-felled seams. A close examination of one garment revealed that one side of the seam allowance was clipped narrow and the other side folded over and under it with a felling stitch securing it in place. These tiny felling stitches would show through to the garment exterior and almost give the impression of being top stitched. Body seams, sleeve seams, and armhole seams would all be felled in this manner. On lined sack coats, this felling stitch would usually be omitted, however several coats showed felling stitches on the side seams only where they were exposed beneath the lining edge. Linings varied considerably in color and weave varying from gray and blue wool flannels to brown and tan linsey-woolsey fabric. Linings were left unattached along the bottom edge which was either hemmed or left as a raw selvedge edge depending how it was cut from the bolt.

There was a great variation in the quality of sewing from coat to coat. Schuylkill products were entirely sewn by hand; the products of the other depots would show varying combinations of hand and machine sewing. Contractor-produced clothing would commonly be almost entirely machine sewn, many with wandering and wavy stitch lines. It is the understanding of this author that St. Louis sack coats were also heavily machine sewn, but in 12 years of research, no examples of sack coats from this depot have been located. All seam felling when present was hand-worked, as were the buttonholes as noted above.[15] Occasionally thread stays, or bar tacks, of buttonhole stitch would be encountered at pocket openings, the collar notch and at the top of cuff vents, but the

majority of sack coats viewed did not have this detailing. All sack coats viewed were sewn with brown linen thread. It is assumed that this linen thread was originally dyed dark blue with logwood dye which has oxidized brown with exposure to light and oxygen. This has been scientifically determined to have occurred to the brown linen thread in Schuylkill-produced trousers, and it seems likely to apply to these sack coats as well.[16]

Markings, when present on lined sack coats, are the usual ones encountered in Federal issue clothing and would appear stamped in the sleeve heads. They would consist of size markings, inspector markings and in the case of contractor-produced garments made after 1862, contractor markings showing the name of the contractor. By 1864, markings also included the date of contract under which they were manufactured.[17] Sizing would either be marked with dots signifying sizes 1–4, by arabic numerals 1–4 or a combination of both. Current thought is that dot marks alone signify early War manufacture, combination dots with arabic numerals are mid-War period, and that numerals alone date from the later part of the War.[18] Inspector markings would identify the name of the inspector and the depot in which he worked. These marks would often be laid out in a oval cartouche or rectangular designs. Inspectors at Schuylkill, however, used a number system to identify its inspectors. There was a possibility of confusion between markings for inspectors 1–4 and sizes 1–4; this may offer a plausible explanation for the mysterious diamond and Maltese cross markings sometimes encountered.[19] Schuylkill-produced sack coats would also commonly show an SA mark in sans-serif type face, and often appeared on the same stamp as the numeral sizing marks. Paper labels that sometimes appear on Schuylkill trousers and uniform coats were not present on any of the specimens viewed for this study. None of the unlined sack coats were marked in any readily apparent manner. Two (both of veteran usage) show remnants of what may be white stencil marking on the interior pocket.

A curious Schuylkill-marked sack coat in the Smithsonian Institution's collection was among those viewed in this survey. Appearing pristine and unissued (FIG 7), it exhibits high-

FIG 13. Sleeve markings in J. T. Martin sack coat in FIG 12.

FIG 14. Cuff and buttonhole detail on J. T. Martin sack coat in FIG 12.

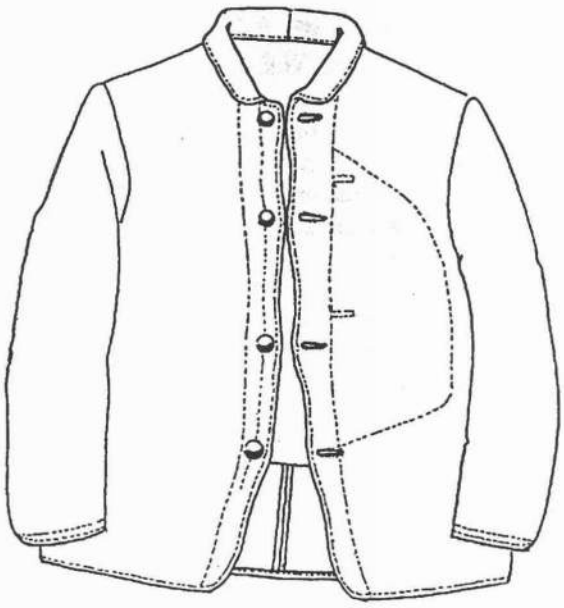

FIG 15. Another J. T. Martin 18 October 1864 contract lined sack coat (Cincinnati Depot). Made under the same contract as the coat in FIG 12, the coat differs in that it is 4-piece construction and has a brown flannel lining with a raw selvedge edge. All markings are in the right sleeve lining and is marked "1" for size one. The scalloped edge along the buttons is probably due to being worn by a man who wasn't size 1. (Henry Herrenstein Collection)

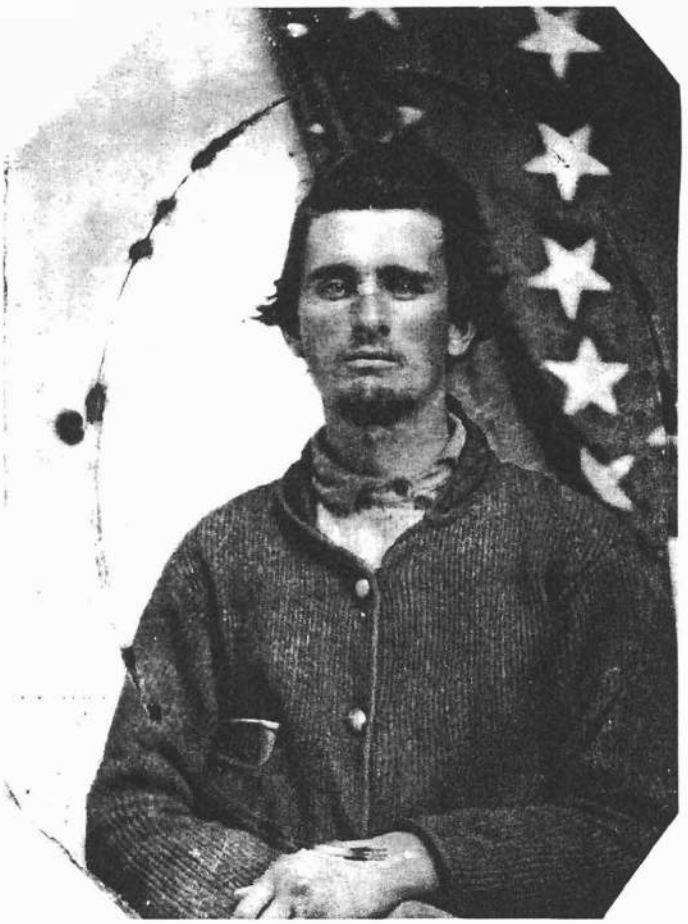

FIG 16. Ninth plate tintype showing a soldier in what may well be an example of the rare knit issue sack coat. Note the roll collar and widely spaced metallic buttons just like on a common sack coat. However, the texture of the material is definitely knit like a sweater. Note also the exterior left breast pocket (reversed in the tintype format) into which the subject has thrust his wallet or diary. (Author's Collection)

quality hand sewing as usually associated with the products of the Philadelphia Depot. However, it differs greatly from the standard lined sack coat in the cut of the pattern pieces. The body is of 2-piece construction, having no side seams from the armholes downward and only a single seam up the back besides the normal shoulder seams. Additionally, the sleeves are cut stylishly fuller and the collar is more square cut than the standard sack coat. The blue flannel is unusually bright in color and is more densely woven than the usual sack coat flannel. There is only a single row of top stitching on the cuff and coat front as opposed to the double row of top stitching found on most issue sack coats. The left breast pocket is not fully rounded, rather cut straight at the bottom. Yet the right sleeve head is very clearly marked "3 SA" with three dots, the same as any other enlisted clothing produced at Philadelphia. It is well known that Schuylkill employed a piece work production method utilizing local labor working out of their homes. At the arsenal, pattern pieces were cut and gathered along with the proper notions into "kits" which were taken by a large force of local women to be made up into uniforms. The completed garments were then returned to the arsenal where they would be inspected and the work paid for. With this method in mind, it is reasonable to find uniforms from Philadelphia with widely different sewing techniques, especially considering the fact that only hand sewing was allowed. Also, it is known that the newer depots occasionally departed from the norm (e.g., St. Louis uniform jackets with only 11 button fronts). But if Schuylkill Arsenal tailors were responsible for the cutting out of pattern pieces, then why would this garment show such eccentricities of cut, especially considering it was produced at the main clothing depot of the War?

What may be the only known example of a Steubenville depot sack coat (FIG 11) has surfaced in the collection of Company Member Jan Gordon. It exhibits detailing and construction techniques which challenge the conventional thinking about depot-produced sack coats. Two details are particularly striking. First, there is an exterior patch-type pocket on the left breast instead of the common interior pocket. This pocket appears to be original to the manufacture of the coat, showing the same machine stitching and top stitching as the rest of the coat with no apparent evidence of a removed interior pocket. Second, it is only lined in the sleeves; the 4-piece unlined body has felled seams exactly as seen on common unlined sack coats. The sleeve lining is clearly stamped "WM GILES / U.S. INSP. / STEUBENVILLE O." Is this a lined or unlined sack coat? It may be possible that this was originally a lined sack coat whose body lining had been removed, thus eliminating the interior pocket which was replaced with an exterior one. But the coat shows no obvious signs of alteration, the pocket is machine sewn the same as the rest of the major seams, and the stitching which secures the sleeve lining to the shoulder seams does not appear to be resewn. Most telling is the presence of felled seams in the body, a feature not to be found on lined sack coats and something not likely to be done to a coat whose lining had been removed. If this is indeed an `as-issued' sack coat, it is not known if it reflects design features common in Steubenville products.[20]

Contractor Sack Coats

Contractor-produced sack coats viewed by the author tended to conform to the standard description with an emphasis on machine sewing. Over six million were reported to have been purchased by the principal depots during the war period.[21] A sample contract to J. C. Ludlow reads in part as follows:

Articles of Agreement made and entered into this Fourth day of June Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and sixty two between L.Col. G. H. Crosman, Deputy Quarter-Master General, U. S. Army, of the first part, and W. A. & J. C. Ludlow, Newark, N. J . of the second part ... have agreed, and by these presents do mutually covenant and agree, to and with each other, as follows, viz:

First— That the said W. A. & J. C. Ludlow shall have manufactured and delivered at the UNITED STATES ARSENAL, on the Schuylkill River, Philadelphia, by or before the Sixteenth day of June next, the following articles, to wit:

Five thousand Flannel Sack Coats or Blouses, unlined of the Army pattern, to be made of Army standard Indigo Blue wool dyed, twilled flannel. Weighing five ounces to the yard of 27 in. of the following sizes

17 Nr 1	Breast 36 in	Length 30^2 in
30 " 2	" 38 "	" 31^2 in
33 " 3	" 40 "	" 32^2 in
20 " 4	" 42 "	" 33^2 in

Second— It is agreed that all the above named articles shall be like and equal in all respects, as to shade and color, quality of material, workmanship, finish, &c., to the sealed standard samples, deposited in the Office of Army Clothing and Equipage, Philadelphia, on which this contract is based.

Third— In case of failure on the part of the party of the second part to deliver the articles within the time and in the manner specified in this agreement, the party of the first part is authorized to make good the deficiency by purchase in the open market, at the expense of the said party of the second part.

Fourth— It is agreed that the articles upon being delivered shall be examined and inspected, without unnecessary delay, by a person or persons appointed by the United States, and after such Inspector shall have certified that they are in all respects as contracted for and fully equal to the samples aforesaid, they shall be received, and become the property of the United States; and all such articles as may be condemned and rejected by said Inspectors, shall be removed from the Arsenal, within ten days after the contractor shall have been notified of said rejection.

Fifth— It is agreed, that for and in consideration of the faithful fulfillment of the above stipulations in all their parts, the party of the first part agrees that the party of the second part shall be paid by the United States, at the Office of Army Clothing and Equipage in Philadelphia, as follows, viz:.

For the flannel Sack Coats or Blouses, one dollar & eighty seven cents each.[22]

Noteworthy among the contractor coats are those produced by John T. Martin of New York, the most prolific contractor of the war. Martin produced all manner of clothing for the army throughout the war period. Between August 1862 and February 1865, Martin was contracted to produce over 1,000,000 sack coats under various contracts to Cincinnati, New York and Philadelphia Depots. The one sack coat most commonly encountered in modern collections is the J. T. Martin sack coat made under the 18 October 1864 contract from the Cincinnati depot for 250,000 lined sack coats (FIGs 12, 13, 14, 15).[23] Three such sack coats were viewed in the preparation of this article. It is interesting to first note how these coats all differ from the average coat, and then to note differences among these coats made under the same contract. All three coats had a distinctive cuff design. The cuff vent is extremely shallow at ⅝" and the two rows of stitching on the cuff is quite noticeably narrower (⅝" apart as opposed to the more common 1½"). All three coats showed extreme tapering of the front facing; on one coat, the facing even cut across the bottom buttonhole. All three also had a distinctive "box" stay of machine stitching at the top and bottom of the pocket opening, showing on the outside of the coat and measuring approximately ¾" x ¼". With the exception of these details, all three could be considered standard lined sack coats. The differences among the three are subtle. One had a four piece body; the others were three piece. One had a steel gray wool lining; the others had linings of different shades of brown. The lining on one was hemmed at the bottom, the others were selvedge edge. All three were marked "J. T. MARTIN, OCT-18-64" and bore Cincinnati inspector marks. The names of the inspectors were illegible except on one which was George B. Fry, who was active at Cincinnati only from 10 February 1865 to 15 August 1865. This means that the Fry inspected sack coat would have been accepted at Cincinnati no earlier than four months after the contract date, and more likely even later. The

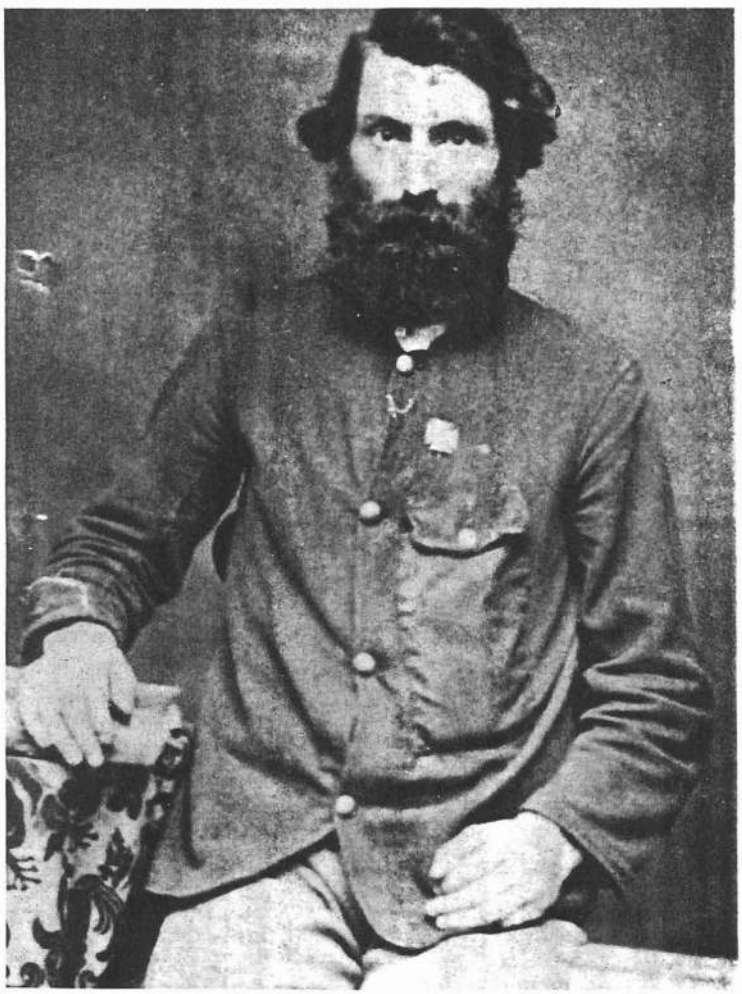

FIG 17. Unidentified enlisted man wearing a sack coat to which an outer pocket has been added. This unusual alteration shows that this soldier felt the need for an extra coat pocket. Note the 5th Corps Badge pinned to his breast, above the pocket. Carte-de-visite *from the collection of Michael J. McAfee.*

late date of manufacture and the unusually large quantity contracted explains in part why so many of this particular contract exist today.

Knit Sack Coats

Odd as it may seem, the Quartermaster Department also provided knit shirts, knit jackets, knit trousers and knit sack coats as items of issue, even though they never appeared in the 1861 *Army Regulations* or the 1865 "Quartermaster's Manual." The New York Depot reported having purchased some 580,144 knit sack coats during the War. Fortress Monroe reported having 752 and New Orleans 21,070 knit sack coats on hand for issue on 30 June 1865.[24] What did these knit sack coats look like? None are known to exist in private or public collections. However, the author recently uncovered a 9th plate tintype which may very well show such a knit issue sack coat. Unidentified, the soldier is posed before a patriotic backdrop and wears what would appear at first glance to be merely a basic sack coat with roll collar and standard brass buttons. But closer inspection reveals a distinct knit fabric, as you would see on a sweater (see FIG 16). There is a single exterior pocket low on the left breast (reversed in the tintype format). Although not conclusive, the details of this image are indeed compelling.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this short article has only scratched the surface on the topic of sack coats. Each of the original sack coats viewed deserve careful, detailed study. And more information has yet to be gleaned from public archives and private records. So few coats exist to this day that we should feel fortunate indeed, that any have survived for our study. We should also feel fortunate that public institutions and private collectors are generous enough to share them with us. To the soldiers who wore them, the concern with sack coats was one of getting enough when they were needed; and the Quartermaster Department was certainly able to do just that. With the current market value for the humble sack coat hovering around the cost of a new compact car, I can only imagine the old veterans shaking their heads in amusement and disbelief.

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Notes

1. According to *The Civil War Collector's Guide, 6th Edition* (Orange, VA: Publisher's Press, 1993), the market value of the federal enlisted sack coat is between $9,000 and $14,000.
2. Campaing and Devere, *The Tailor's Guide* (London, 1855), quoted in Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600–1900* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1964), pp. 114–115.
3. Uniform Jackets and Uniform Coats are often referred to as shell jackets and frock coats by collectors. *The Revised U. S. Army Regulations of 1861* describes the Uniform Coat as "a single-breasted frock coat;" however, the Uniform Jacket is never described as a "shell" jacket anywhere in the *Regulations*. Throughout this article, the official names Uniform Jacket and Uniform Coat will be used.
4. Captain George B. McClellan, "Report to the Secretary of War Communicating the Report of Captain George B. McClellan (First Regiment United States Cavalry) One of the Officers Sent to The Seat of War in Europe, in 1855 and 1856" (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1857).
5. Frederick P. Todd, *American Military Equipage, 1851–1872* (The Company of Military Historians, 1974), pp. 38–40 (hereafter cited as Todd).
6. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: GPO, 1881–1902), series III, vol. V, pp. 275–276, 285 (hereafter cited as *Official Records*).
7. Todd, p. 39.
8. "Quartermaster's Manual," (Washington: GPO, 1865), pp. 31–32.
9. Captain August V. Kautz, *Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers* (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1864). Kautz recommends the practice of appointing skilled soldiers as quasi-official company tailors who would provide these alterations to uniforms for a nominal fee.
10. "Estimate of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage Requested by 14th A.C., December, 1863 to September, 1864" (original documents in the collection of Norman Feil).
11. "Daily Report of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage Received, Issued, and Remaining on Hand at Chattanooga, Tennessee, March 3, 1863 to December 26, 1864" (original documents in the collection of Norman Feil).
12. Earl J. Coates and Frederick C. Gaede, eds., "U. S. Army Quartermaster Contracts" from National Archives, RG 217, entry 236 (unpublished production draft, December 1993), p. 192 (hereafter cited as Coates and Gaede).
13. Alfred Alexander Woodhull, *A Medical Report upon the Uniform and Clothing of the Soldiers in the Union Army* (Washington: Surgeon General's Office, 1868).
14. Hand worked buttonholes, no matter how neatly constructed on the outside of a garment, can always be identified by inspecting the reverse side where the stitching will be somewhat uneven. All federal issue clothing during the Civil War, either government produced or contract goods, will have hand worked buttonholes.
15. Some collectors have spoken of the existence of machine-felled unlined sack coats, but none have been encountered by the author.
16. Ann E. Cordy and Kwan-nan Yeh, "Investigation of Thread Colour Change in United States Civil War Uniforms," *Textile History*, 17(1) (1986), pp. 91–98. See also Earl J. Coates, "Brown Thread, A Civil War Myth," *North South Trader*, vol. V, no. 5, (August 1978), pp. 19–38.
17. Robert C. Huntoon, "Federal Issue Trousers, Historical Notes," (Grand Rapids: Past Patterns, 1990). The requirement of having the contractor mark his clothing with name and date of contract was part of a successful attempt to prevent contractor fraud and inferior-quality products.
18. Conversation with Donald Kloster, Curator of Military History (retired), Smithsonian Institution, March 1982.
19. Ibid.
20. The author has not had the opportunity to examine this coat first hand, but spoke with Mr. Gordon at some length and obtained detailed photographs from which the drawing for this article was prepared.
21. *Official Records*, p. 285.
22. National Archives, RG 92, entry 225, CCF, "Ludlow," box 588.
23. Coates and Gaede, pp. 192–193.
24. *Official Records*, pp. 275, 276, 285.