

### The Facing

It's now time to finish the front edge of the coat, and install the facing. The facing is used to protect the lining from wear, as well as give a sturdy front edge to the coat. At the same time, it should be as thin and compact as possible. During the installation of the facing, there is also some shaping added to the front of the coat.

### Trimming the Canvas

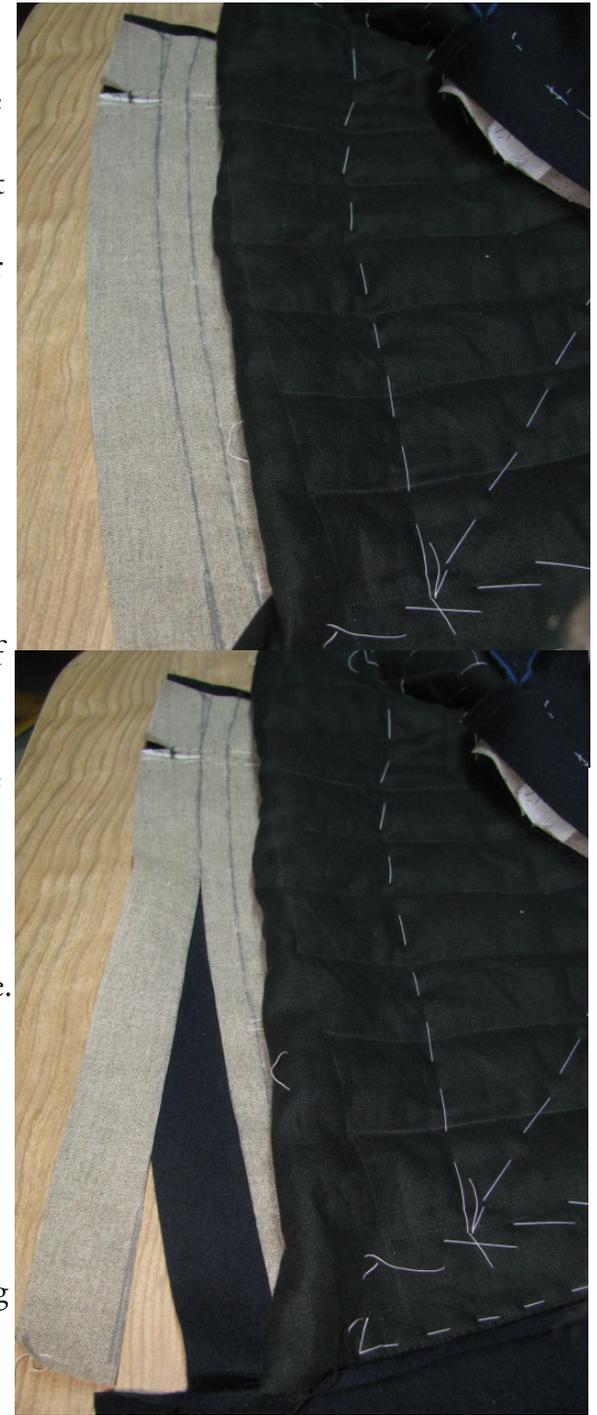
Begin by noting the basting line that was used to secure the canvas to the forepart at the center front. These stitches should be going directly along the center front line, which is two inches away from the front edge. You should still have tailor's tacks there, as well. If the stitches do not align with the center front line, add some more basting stitches that do, catching the forepart wool and canvas only – not the lining.



On the canvas side, fold the lining underneath itself so that it's out of the way. Using black chalk, chalk over the center front line that you just basted. This line, being the center front, is where the outer edge of the buttonholes will be placed on the left side, and where the buttons will be placed on the right.

You don't want the buttons and buttonholes to be on the direct edge of the coat, so an allowance will need to be added to the canvas so that they are spaced  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the edge. With your chalk, measure out half an inch beyond the center front line and draw another line. This is where the canvas will be cut, marking the edge of the coat.

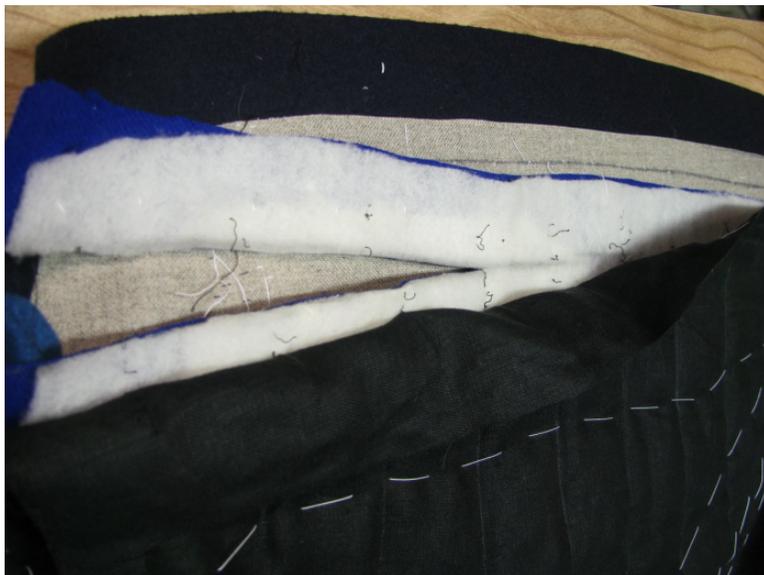
Carefully trim the canvas along this outer line, ensuring you do not cut through the wool or lining at any point.



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

### Trimming the Lining

On the left side of the coat, the wool batting and sacking or interfacing should be cut back to prevent bulk in the buttonhole area. Fold just the lining back – you should have room to do this because you stopped the quilting four inches from the edge of the front.



Draw a line on the wool batting an inch and a quarter away from the center front. Trim both the wool batting and interlining along this line, as shown.

## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

Next trim back just the wool batting, so that the layers are stair stepped. Fold the lining back into place, and trim back about a half inch away from the edge of the canvas. The lining itself should be caught in the buttonholes, to prevent movement.



Repeat the process on the right side of the coat, only you do not have to trim the lining back so far.

Trim everything just slightly shorter than the canvas, then layer the interlining and wool batting as before, about a half inch for each.

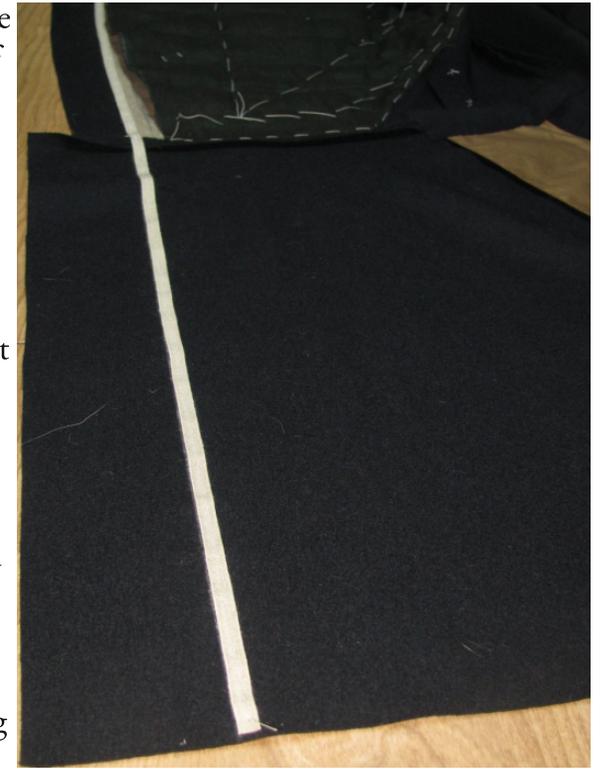


### Taping the Fronts

Using a ruler, draw a line from the bottom edge of the canvas to the bottom of the skirt. It should be the same depth as the canvas, and should stay parallel to the front edge of the skirt.



Lay your linen stay tape along the inner edge of the line, starting at 1/8 inch away from the bottom of the skirt. Baste the tape to the skirt with neutral tension, and continue basting the tape up past the waist seam, onto the edge of the canvas. The tape should be on the canvas, and on the outer edge, should be a scant 1/16 of an inch off the edge of the canvas. This will allow the outer edge stitching to catch the wool only.



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

When you get about 8 inches from the neck point, or wherever the most fullness or roundness is, you will need to hold the stay tape on tightly, gathering about a half inch to one inch (depending on your size) of fabric between that point and an inch from the top of the canvas. This will make the front edge inclined to pull in towards the body, and also affects the balance of the coat, allowing the front edges to hang straight, parallel to each other.



At the top of the coat, miter the stay tape so that it takes the corner without overlapping. To do this, first make a cut at about a 45 degree angle, aiming right for the outer corner of the canvas. Trim just to the edge of the stay tape, not all the way through.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

Then move the tape into position on the neck edge, and trim off the excess at the corner. Baste the tape along the neck edge until you reach the piping.

Now slip stitch the stay tape to the wool, making sure the stitches do not show through to the right side. When you get to the area with the canvas, the inner side of the stitching should catch only



the canvas, while the outer side should catch only the wool. At the area with the fullness worked in, you should see the ripples disappear as you stitch the tape down.



### Trimming the Forepart

At the waist seam, about 3/8 inch outside the stay tape, make a few stitches in place. This is to keep the seam intact when you trim the front edge.



On the wrong side of the wool, mark an edge 3/8 beyond the edge of the canvas.

At the waist seam, use a seam ripper to remove the stitching from the stitches you just made, to the edge. Then trim the wool along the line you just measured out.



At the top of the front edge, place some shirring stitches into the wool, which will allow us to gather the wool into a nice corner. Start the shirring stitches with one or two stitches in place for security.



At the top of the skirt, draw a line continuing the center front 1/2 an inch down the skirt, and square over to the front of the skirt. Trim this little rectangular piece of fabric off. When the skirt facing is folded back over the tape, there will now be no overlapping seam allowances, reducing bulk. This is especially important for the waist seam buttonhole.



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat



### Finishing the Edge

Fold the edge of the skirt over the stay tape, and baste down along the edge. When doing this, the folded edge should not be too tight. Let it fold naturally over itself. Then baste a second row of stitches along the raw edge, so as to keep it from moving when you stitch it down.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

Fold the wool over the canvas on the forepart, again keeping it at an easy tension, and baste. When you get to the top at the neck point, draw in the shirring stitches, and adjust the fabric so that you have a nice corner. It will never be perfectly square, but it should be close. You may have to fiddle around with this for a bit.



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

Press the front edge of the coat from the collar to the skirt bottom, while not allowing the iron to extend more than an inch onto the coat. When pressing the chest area, use a tailor's ham to ensure the area with the tightened stay tape remains properly shaped.



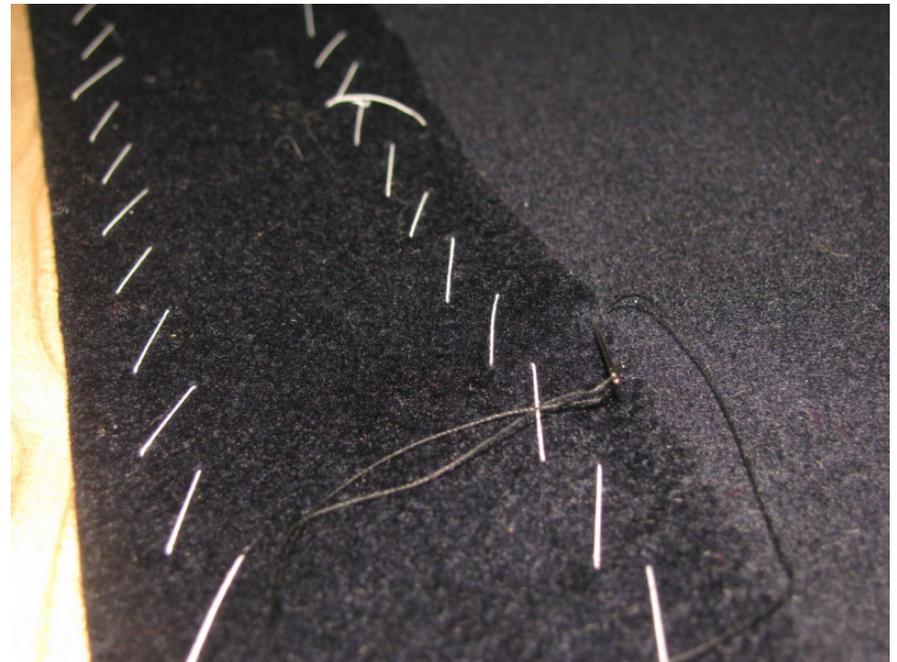
Cross stitch the seam allowance to the canvas on the forepart, catching only the canvas. This cross stitch should begin at the collar and end at the waist seam.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

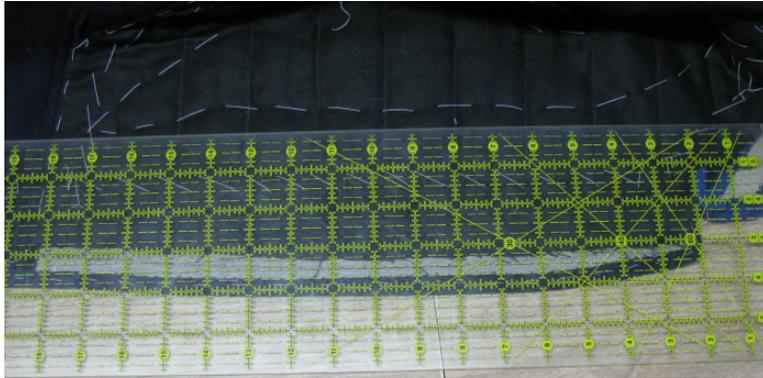


Finish off the skirt facing by felling 10 to 12 stitches per inch, making sure they do not show through to the front. Don't stitch the top or the bottom sides of the facings, those will be finished later.

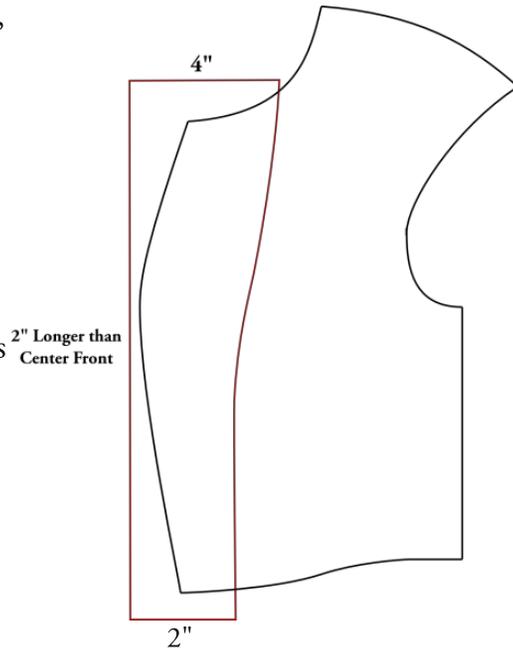


## Cutting the Facing

To cut the facing, you will first need to measure the length of the forepart. Measure at a depth about 4 inches in from the front edge of the coat. Begin your measurement at the collar, and end half an inch below the waist seam. I like to add 2 inches to this measurement to give room for error.

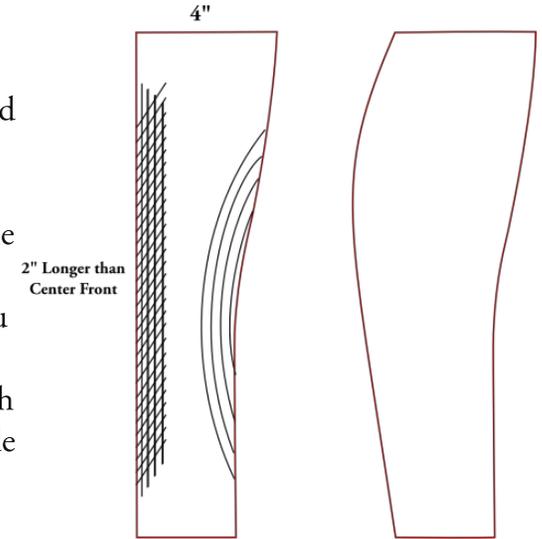


Drawing directly on the fabric, measure out a facing piece. The length should be equal to the measurement you just took plus the two inches. At the bottom, it should be slightly wider than the skirt facing's width. Make the top four inches wide. The outside edge should be cut straight, while the outer edge should be formed with a compound curve, as shown, gradually tapering to the bottom seams width.



## Ironwork

Since there is some curvature to the coat, but not the facing, we must add that in through some iron work. You can trace the curve of the coat onto some paper (remember, it's not the same as the pattern you started with), and lay that on your ironing table. With both facing pieces right side together stretch the outer, straight edge until it



matches the curve you drew on the paper. If there is any rippling on the inside edge, that will need to be fulled (shrunk) out until smooth. At the end, you should have a facing piece that curves to match the coat. The benefit of this is that the facing is cut on the straight grain, giving it more strength and durability.

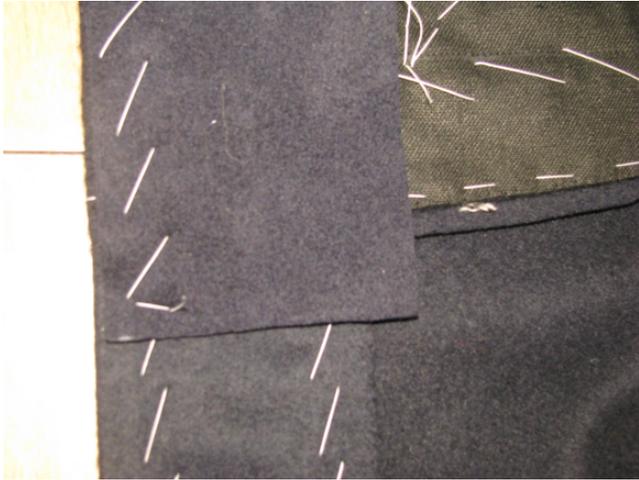
## Basting

Lay the facing wrong sides together on the coat, matching the front edges. The facing should be set back about 1/8 inch behind the turned edge of the forepart. Baste along the front edge. Note



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

how the facing extends below the waist seam by about half to three quarters of an inch. This is to give the in-seam buttonhole some fabric to grasp.



Now turn the coat right side up, and holding the coat and facing in place with your hands, baste the inner edge of the facing down by feel. The reason to turn it over like this is to ensure the facing is basted on while the coat is shaped as it will be worn. If not done this way, you'll have a loose facing with a lot of puckering.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

### Trimming the Top Edge



The top edge of the facing needs to be carefully trimmed to match the front of the coat. Cut it back 1/8 from the edge at the area in front of the collar, near the top corner. When you get to the corner, taper it back and cut less away so that the top of the facing lines up with the top edge of the bottom row of collar piping.

### Sewing

Starting at the inside edge or the outer edge, depending on which side you're on, fell down the facing to the coat front, around the bottom edge, and onto the quilting on the inner side.

At the top, you'll sew down the facing as usual, until you get to the collar. Here, you'll need to do a bar tack to bind all the layers together permanently. Try to catch both the facing, the collar, while angling the needle to barely show on the right side of the coat. Do about six stitches in place as pictured.



At the top of the facing where it overlaps the collar piping, just do some medium sized basting stitches. It's best to avoid a harder finish such as the felling, because it will interfere with the collar and neck drape. This area will later be secured more permanently when we attach the inner collar.



### Buttonholes

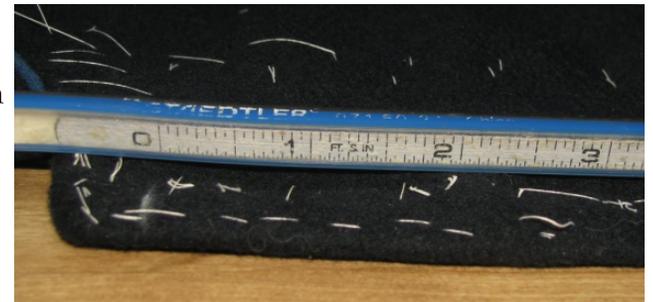
Hand-tailored buttonholes are a thing of beauty, and in the hands of a skilled tailor, can make a coat stand out amongst others. Properly sewn, they will add a level of detail that you can be proud of, yet at the same time will sit unassumingly against the background of the coat. On the other hand, a badly-done buttonhole will absolutely ruin the look of a coat, so practice on scraps of fabric is a must.

Most people will at first find buttonholes very difficult to make. With practice, however, you will gain proficiency and it will become almost second nature. The best way to learn is by having somebody teach you. However, finding a skilled tailor willing to teach you is not always the easiest thing to do. I have created several videos and documented each step in order to try to take the place of a personal tutor. At the very least, you will not have to go searching through old books to pick up hints here and there.

### Layout

To begin with, the buttonholes must be marked out on the jacket. The bottom buttonhole location should be marked first, and in the case of a frock coat, should be in the waist seam. The top buttonhole should then be marked, according to your desired style. In my case, an enlisted frock coat, the top buttonhole will be placed ½" from the neck point.

Using a tape measure or bendable ruler, measure the distance from the top buttonhole to the bottom, running a half inch away from the front edge of the coat. Determine the number of buttonholes you



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

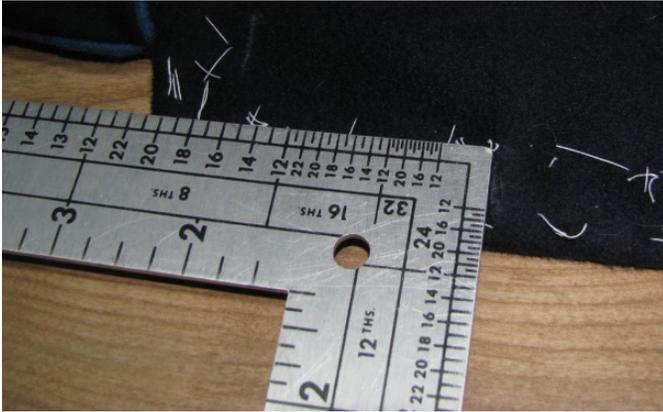
want, and subtract one from that number, equivalent to the number of spaces between buttonholes. In my case, there are nine buttonholes, and eight spaces.

Starting at the top, place your tailor's square with the divisional side up, so that the top buttonhole to bottom buttonhole

measurement corresponds with the number of spaces between. In my example, the top to bottom measurement was

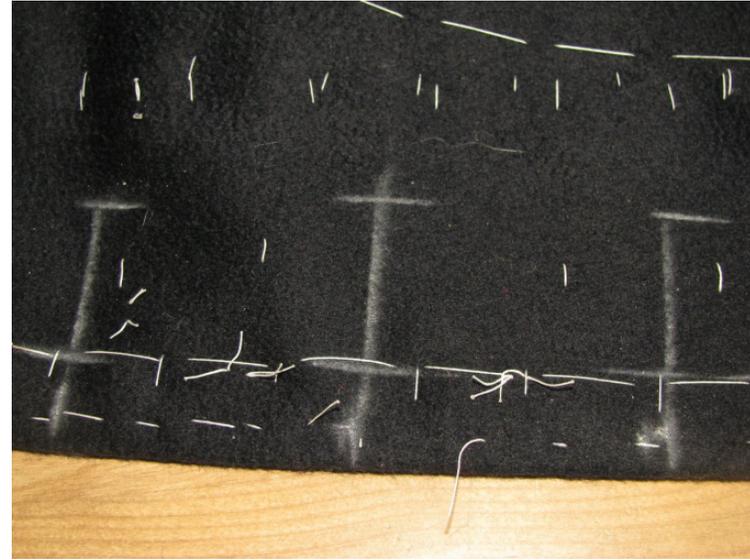
16 inches, and I want it divided into 8 spaces between. This happens to be the nice round number of 2, but with other measurements, it can easily be more complicated, hence using the tailor's square.

Mark off on the edge of the coat each buttonhole mark according to the ruler. Be sure to take the width of the chalk marks into account. If you forget, go back and adjust, as I had to do in this case. You will discover this problem when you get to the second from bottom buttonhole, and discover there is a smaller interval between them.



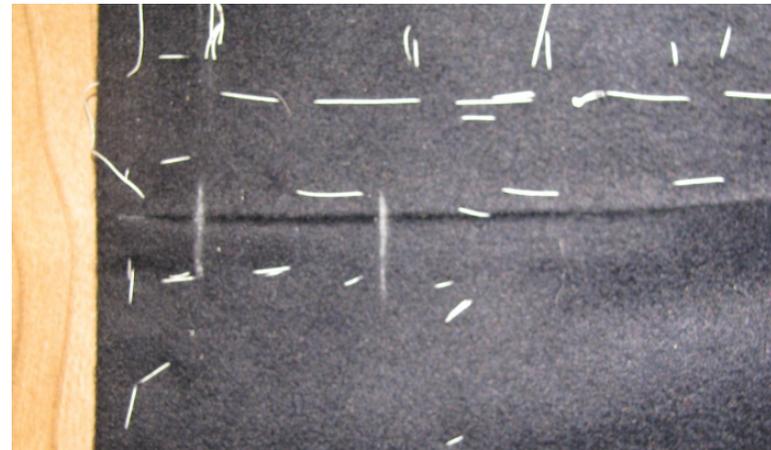
## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

Next, draw lines square from the edge of the cloth corresponding with each buttonhole mark. These need to be at right angles with the front of the coat, and not parallel with each other, as the front of the coat has a curve to it.



Mark  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the edge at each buttonhole, marking the outer edge of the buttonhole. For the inner edge of each buttonhole, mark a line  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch larger than the width of the button.

On the waist seam buttonhole, you obviously don't need to mark the placement horizontally, just the end points.



## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

### Basting

While there may be basting stitches still holding the canvas and facing in place, you need to ensure that there is absolutely no movement when cutting the holes. Using basting thread, baste around each buttonhole as shown, using a padding type stitch. The needle is inserted right to left, and you stitch in the same towards and away from you.



On the waist seam buttonhole, you want to make sure the seam does not come apart when you cut into it. On both ends of the buttonhole, just beyond the chalk marks, make a small bartack by taking five or so stitches in places, catching both the forepart and skirt.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

### Cutting the Holes

There are several tools used in cutting a tear-dropped shaped buttonhole. First, you need a sturdy surface, such as a work bench, in order to have a place to hammer. On top of that, place a scrap of lumber, preferably beech as it lacks oils and resin that could stain the cloth.



To cut the buttonholes, I use a hollow punch to cut the eyelet area. These are available at most hardware stores for less than five dollars, and are hollow, so as to cut the fabric instead of just pushing it aside, like an awl. I recommend a size 1/8 or 3/16 in diameter.

Ideally, your chisel will be the same size as the desired buttonhole length. If it's smaller, it will still work, but you'll need to carefully align each cut, which is prone to error.

Finally, a small hammer is used to hammer the hollow punch and chisel through the cloth. I happen to have a small antique hammer that works well. Much larger and it becomes difficult to control, especially with such a low tolerance for error.

## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

Place the hollow punch directly on the intersection of the horizontal and outer construction lines. Hold it near the bottom if you can, for better leverage and preventing movement. Give it a few strokes with the hammer, cutting through to the wood underneath. You should have a clean cut. If there is any fabric that did not get cut, you need to sharpen your punch. You can also rotate it in the hole to move the dull spot out of the way.

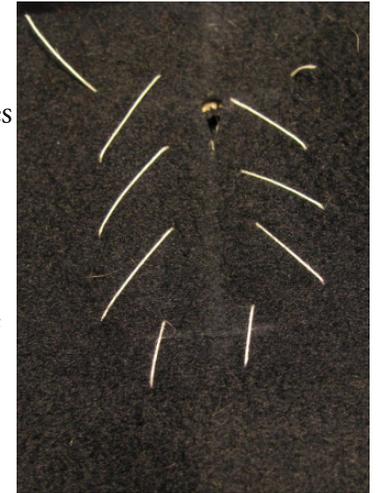


After punching each hole, take your chisel, and line it up with the center of the hole, which should be on the chalkline. I like to do this by feel first, by dragging the tip of the chisel along the hole until you feel it get to the center. Then check with your eyes for alignment. When you are sure it is lined up, cut through the fabric with the chisel. If you need to make more cuts because of a small chisel, do not pick the chisel up. Instead drag it over following the cut you just made. The second cut should be made with just half to three fourths of the blade, while the rest is still over the cut you just made. In this way, you can help ensure the individual cuts line up to make a straight line.

## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

### Trimming the holes

After the buttonhole are cut, you need to trim the little triangular shaped pieces from near the eyelet, giving each hole a nice tear-dropped shape. Use some small, sharp scissors for this task. You may have to trim through one layer at a time, depending on the thickness of the cloth.



### Overcasting

Now you must overcast the edge of each buttonhole with a whip stitch. The stitches should be about 1/16" in depth if you can. This however will depend on whether or not the fabric frays. Start by holding the coat with the tear-dropped end facing away from you, and sew clockwise around the buttonhole. The purpose of these stitches is to bind the layers together. As you are sewing, try to push any canvas or linen that shows back under the wool outer layers, so that they are hidden.

The stitches should be fairly dense, about 12 to 15 per inch. Use your regular sewing thread for this stage. When finished, the stitches should be enough to strengthen the buttonhole and prevent fraying, making the actual button stitch almost decorative in nature. On one of my antique coats, the actual buttonhole twist has long worn away, but the overcast stitches remain, protecting the hole to this day.

### Four Cord or Gimp

In order to prevent the buttonhole from stretching out of shape, and to provide firmness to the buttonhole, a thick strand of special silk thread called gimp will need to be placed underneath the buttonhole stitches.

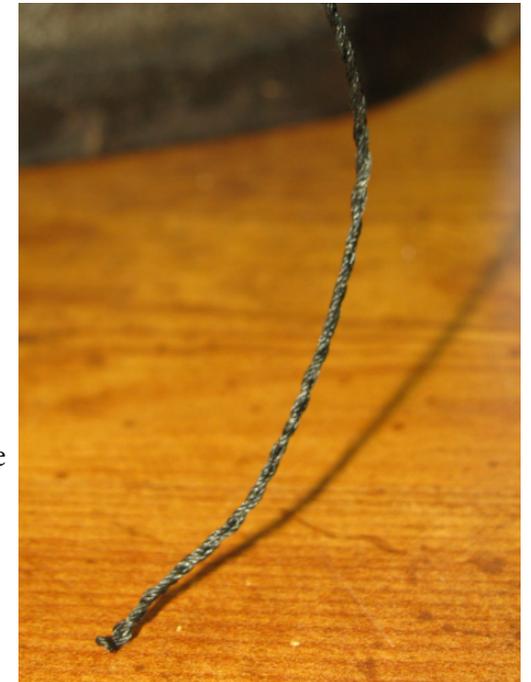
There are a couple of producers of this gimp out there still, but I use one in particular called Agremen gimp, which is from Gutermann. As far as I know, it is only produced in Spain. It is made with filaments of silk, which are then bound by another layer of silk thread, making it very strong and stiff. Other gimps I have seen have contained or been made with polyester thread, so I have avoided them.

If you do not wish to use this type of gimp, it is possible to make your own, using a strand of silk buttonhole twist. Cut a length about 18 inches long, and double it. Secure the ends by weighing it down, taping it, or with your teeth. Begin twisting the thread around itself, stopping just before the point when it begins to form little tension knots.



Take both ends in your hands, being careful to not let the ends untwist, and join them together. You'll see both halves (really quarters) of the doubled thread begin to twist over each other. Help them along by smoothing the pieces together with your hands. When you are happy with the results, form a knot at the end where the cut ends are, securing the four-cord.

Now wax the four-cord by passing it over beeswax four or five times. Place it between a folded sheet of paper, and press, melting the wax into the threads. The four-cord is now complete. Repeat this process for each buttonhole.



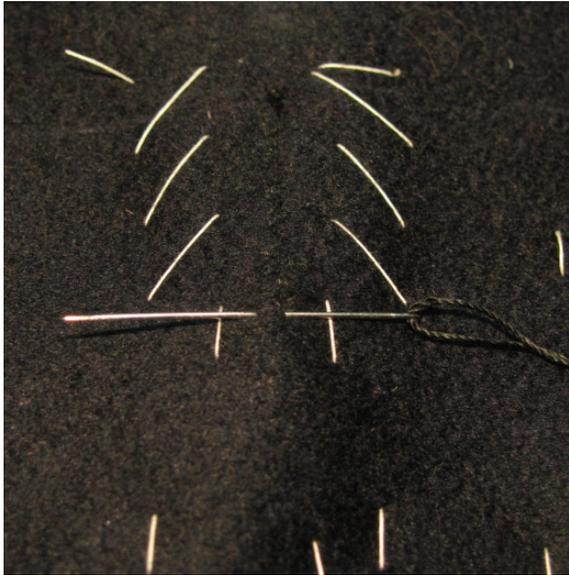
### The Buttonhole Stitch

A proper buttonhole should be made with silk buttonhole twist. The twist is thicker than normal thread, and will aid in the formation of the purls. I've seen two sizes generally available. Size F is very thick, although that makes it easier to work with. Gutermann makes a thinner buttonhole twist which is closer to original buttonholes I have seen. Being thinner makes it harder to work with, however.

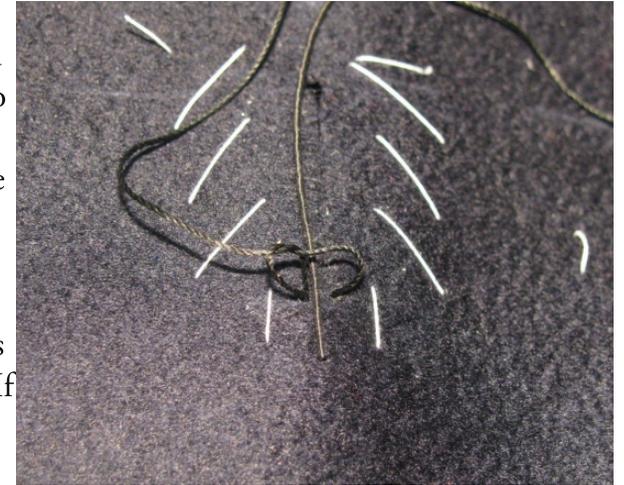
Cut a length about one yard long for a one inch buttonhole. Wax and press the thread, and knot one end. Holding the edge of the coat with the

buttonholes away from you, insert the needle between the layers of wool, at the left bottom edge of the buttonhole. Your first stitch is used to hide the knot in between the layers. Insert a second stitch next to the first, no more than 1/16th apart. Poke the needle out 1/16 to 1/8 away from the edge,

but do not take it out completely at this time. The length of the buttonhole stitch depends entirely on the fabric used. Each coat will be different, so you really need to experiment. If the thread is too close to the edge, it can pull out, especially on easily-frayed fabrics. If it is too far from the edge, you will see puckering and have a generally messy buttonhole.



With the needle still poking out of the wool, take the doubled threads that come from the eye of the needle, and pass them under the needle to the left, forming a loop. Then draw up the thread so that there is about a 1/4 inch of slack in the stitch. At this time, insert the buttonhole gimp between the threads, so that it lays on top of the fabric. If using four-cord, the knotted end should



be placed away from you. Draw the stitch firm, moving the thread side to side to lock the stitches. The stitches need to be firm, but not tight. By forming the stitch in this manner, you create a double purl, rather than the single purl commonly done by home sewers. The benefit of this is a stronger stitch, and one that will stay in place longer, even if a stitch happens to break someday.

The purl should be placed either directly on top of the gimp, or slightly to the inner edge. The first method raised the stitches, giving a very firm buttonhole. The latter makes the buttonhole a bit softer, with a lower profile. Again, experiment and see which you like best.

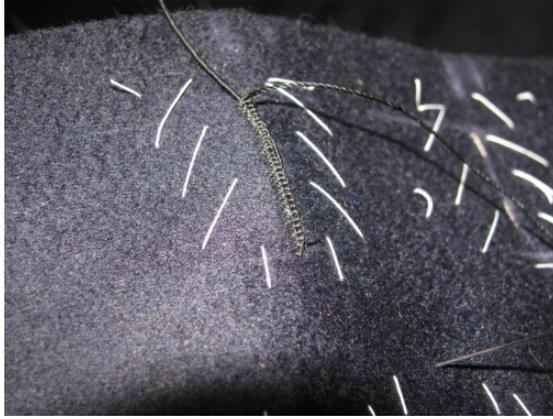


Continue working each stitch in the same manner across the lower

## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

edge of the buttonhole, making sure they are spaced evenly both in depth and proximity. Each stitch needs to be taken over the gimp, holding it in place. The spacing between stitches should be close enough that the purls touch, but not so tight that they interfere with each other.

After you've made about five stitches, carefully pull the gimp so that the end lies flush with the first stitch of the buttonhole.



When you get to the tear-dropped area, the purls need to gradually be placed directly on top of the gimp, to make room for more stitches in the tightly curved area. The stitches can also be made slightly deeper, if desired.

Continue on to the upper half of the buttonhole, turning the coat as you work. Make sure that the stitches are made similarly to the lower half, as it's easy to space them slightly differently if you aren't careful. When you get to the second to last stitch, carefully trim the gimp flush, then make one last stitch.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

### Bar Tack

Bring the thread up as if you were going to make another stitch, but instead, make a bar tack across the end. This is done by taking three stitches across the end of the buttonhole. These should be the same width as the buttonhole, or slightly smaller, for a neat appearance. Bring the thread out to the right side as if you were

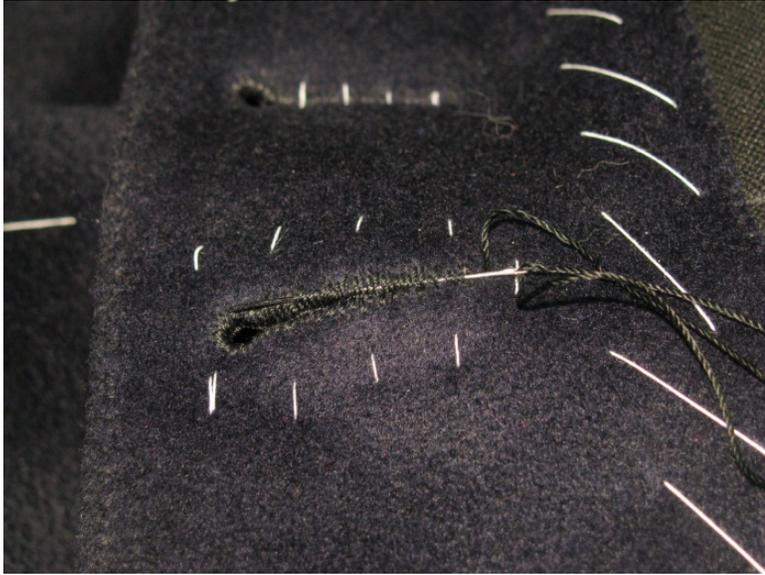


going to make a fourth stitch, but instead, insert the needle under the three stitches, wrapping the thread around. This should be done across the entire length of the bartack, and if desired, you can make a single purl for each by bringing the single end of the thread under the needle, as per a blanket stitch.

## Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

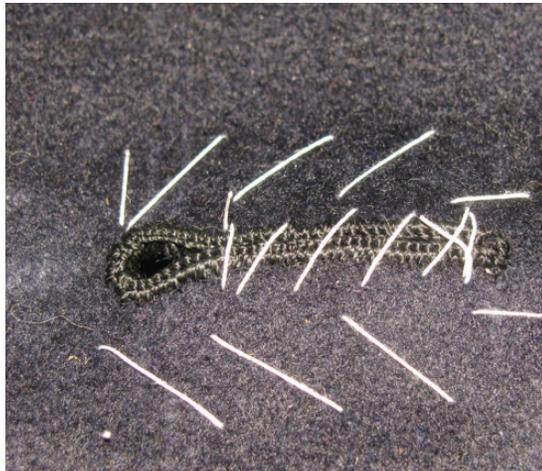
### Finishing

Pass the thread to the bottom, and insert the needle underneath the buttonhole stitches three times in alternating directions. This will finish the buttonhole without unsightly knots or stitches.



### Basting Closed

At this point, the buttonhole is completed and should be basted closed to prevent it opening or stretching out of shape during the final pressing. All other prior basting stitches around the buttonholes can be removed, however.



## Module Eleven — The Facings and Buttonholes

### Practice Makes Perfect

Buttonholes must be practiced on scraps before you try them on an actual garment. If you cut two pieces of wool and a piece of canvas 18 x 6 inches, you can baste them together and practice buttonholes up and down both sides. The hardest part of making a buttonhole is learning the best practices, which is either through trial and error, or from somebody showing you how. I had to make over four hundred buttonholes to get to this level. At the same time, I was able to teach someone to get to the same quality with only a couple of tries. Hopefully this tutorial will help you reach that level as well.

