

The French Knapsack Arrangement

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All foot-soldiers would agree that the mainstay of the entire kit was without a doubt the *havresac* ("knapsack"), or more simply, the *sac*. As the trench paper "Le Petit Écho du 18e Territorial" joked, it was "...to all those who had the fortune of carrying it...the heavyweight champion." Though it was the model 1893 pack which the French infantryman wore during the war, the antiquated design had hardly changed since the days of the Second Empire (1852-1870). It was composed of an interior wooden frame with a canvas body (either tan or green).

The *sac* went by several nicknames including, "Azor" and "As de Carreau." The first of these is the French equivalent to the ubiquitous dog's name of "Fido," in reference to the material once used in the production of the sack—dog skin. The second nickname, "Ace of Diamonds," is a play off the word *carreau*. This word literally means "checker" or "square," which is also the same word used for the suit of diamonds in a deck of cards. The "Ace," of course, represents the top card. The knapsack's weight when fully loaded was generally in the area of 25 to 30 lbs, though some soldiers recorded that it could be as much as 45 lbs.

Every amount of the knapsack's space was used. The interior was to be packed in a specific fashion to make use of the limited room. Folded at the bottom of the pack and making a sort of cushioning was the extra shirt, the handkerchief often covering over it. The rifle rod was then placed on top of the shirt at the bottom of the pack (or else it was kept in the flap pocket to avoid loss). The police bonnet, toiletries (mirror, razor, shaving brush, soap), wash-towel, grease can, pair of extra socks, extra rifle cartridges (up to 80), rifle kit and sewing kit were placed on top of the shirt as well, along with the rifle cleaning and boot brushes which were lined along the top of the pack. Along the bottom of the pack, the reserve rations were placed. This included two dry vegetable sachets, cans of preserved meat and condensed soup, and hardtack biscuits (in canvas baggies). When not in use, the jacket (with its lining on the outside) was folded up and placed on top of all of this securing everything below. The soldier's individual booklet and personal papers were placed in the flap pocket.



An assortment of materials was fixed to the outside of the knapsack using a system of leather straps. There were two "greatcoat straps" (30") on the top (one on each side), two "side straps" (20"), a "



"big load strap" (5' 6") that ran up the center and a short "cross strap" (14"). The blanket, often rolled inside the tent canvas, was arranged in various fashions. It could either be made into a short roll and placed on the top of the pack or made into a long roll with the ends secured to the side of the pack. It could also, in the style of the Colonial and Zouave troops, be folded like an accordion and stacked upwards.

The next biggest item was the squad camping implement. Each soldier was issued at least one of the following: camp mess-kit ("dish-for-four"), 'Bouthéon' camp stew-pot ("bottle"), model 1881 collapsible canvas bucket ("water-cow"), canvas distribution sack, 'Montjardet' model 1910 lantern, or the 'Keppler' model 1896 coffee grinder. The camp mess-tin,



stew-pot, and canvas bucket were all strapped to the back of the knapsack using the big load strap.



The soldier's portable entrenchment tool was also fixed to the outside of the pack. Each man was issued one of the following: a spade-shovel, spade-pick, round-shovel (model 1916), pick, wire-cutters, collapsible saw, billhook, or hatchet (reserved for corporals). These were secured to the side of the pack or on the

the top alongside the blanket. The cross strap helped secure the handles of certain e-tools to the pack. Tent poles and stakes were slid between the straps on the left side or top of the pack. Perched on the very top against the blanket, as per regulation, was the soldier's individual mess-kit. It was fixed to face at a slight angle to the rear so as to not inhibit the soldier when firing in the prone position. Finally, anything and everything else that couldn't find room on the interior or in the soldier's haversacks, was thrown on as best they could. Straps and twine helped to secure extra boots, sheep-skins, loaves of bread or tinned rations, haversacks, and civilian-model lanterns and coffee grinders.



With the command "*Sac au dos*" the men did their best to put the awkward packs on their back. The typical method was to leave one shoulder strap fixed and the other one undone. Usually the right strap was left undone. The soldier lifted the pack and slid his left arm through the left shoulder strap, then grasped the end of the right shoulder strap and pulled

upward to drag the right side of the pack up to his shoulder. Holding the strap tightly to maintain the pack at the shoulder, the soldier then inclined forward and pulled the shoulder strap down and behind him, bringing the end of the strap to the right buckle. Finally, he ran the strap through the buckle and fixed it at the desired length. With a particularly heavy load, the man often turned to his neighbor for assistance in lifting the pack and buckling the right shoulder strap. If a comrade wasn't in sight, the soldier could also lean against a tree to suspend the pack.



In or On the Backpack

Item Type	Item	Weight
Clothing:	Jacket	2.1 lbs
Equipment:	Backpack	3.9 lbs
	Brushes (1 of each for 5 men): Clothing, Boot, Rifle Cleaning	3.2 oz, 2,9 oz & .71 oz
	Hand Towel	1.8 oz
	1 Grease Tin	2.1 oz
	Cotton Underdrawers	1.6 oz
	Cotton Shirt	1 lbs
	Greatcoat Strap	1.1 oz
	Spoon	1.8 oz
	Individual Mess-Kit	.9 lbs
	Rest Shoes	2.3 lbs
	Canvas Gaiters (1 pair)	5 oz
	Gaiter Foot-Straps	1 oz
	Soldier's Booklet	1.5 oz
	Handkerchief	1.8 oz
	Soap	5.3 oz
	Sewing Kit	5.3 oz
Camping:	Tent Canvas (with accessories)	2.4 lbs
	Blanket	3.4 lbs
	Ration Baggies	1.6 oz
	Squad Cooking Implements ¹	---
Armament:	Rifle Cleaning Rod	1.4 oz
	Rifle Cleaning Kit (1 for 4 men) & Accessories	5.5 oz
Rations	Reserve Rations (2 days)	5 lbs
Tools:	Portable Tools ²	---
Total:		21—23.5 lbs

¹At least 1 of the following: Camping Mess-Pan (2 per squad): 2.3 lbs; Camping Stewpot (4 per squad): 2.7 lbs; Coffee-Grinder (1 for 2 squads): 2.2 lbs; Distribution Sack (2 per squad): 2 lbs.

²One of the following: Spade-Shovel (112 per company): 2 lbs; Pickaxe (32 per company): 3.6 lbs; Hatchet (1 per squad): 2.2 lbs; Axe (3 per company): 3.5 lbs; Pick (4 company): 3.5 lbs; Articulated Saw (1 per company): 1.2 lbs; Wire-Cutters (4 per company): 1.2 lbs.