

IMITATION RAINBOW SELVAGE

By Jerry Smith

The cost and availability of "broadcloth" with a distinctive selvage edge has stymied the efforts of many a craftsman in putting together his straight dance suit, Osage skirt, dance trailers, traditional Southern Plains aprons, etc. Well, "selvation" is at hand, but first a bit of history.

The ancestor of what the Indians call "broad-cloth" was among the early yardage traded on this continent. This distinctive multicolored selvage edge was a special marking by which to identify the European mill of manufacture. The edge was cut off when this very fine wool was made into uniforms and other clothing.

Another trade cloth referred to as "strouding" was much more prevalent amongst the plains tribes. This cloth in red or blue had an off white selvage edge. Ben Lanford suggests that it is possible that strouding which had neither the nap or sheen of the broadcloth may have been "blotter" cloth to end a run of cloth. In recent times as the distinctive edge was discontinued as a trade mark, trading posts in Oklahoma and elsewhere placed orders to copy this old style cloth with a distinctive boarder.

Thus, today you will see several different distinctive edges on outfits at pow wows. "Pawnee" cloth milled for Pawnee Bill's Trading Post has a 3/4" yellow selvage edge. Plume Trading Post cloth has a 1 3/4" red, yellow, blue (8 stripes) edge, while another cloth has 3 stripes of (red, blue, yellow) 1 1/8" wide border.

For a few years in the sixties traders had sold out their supply and had not placed another order with the mill. The cloth could not be obtained at any price. Fortunately, Lessard, Stewart, Supernaw and now a Texas gentleman have had runs made and the cloth out of Texas is still available at about \$25 - \$35 a yard. The price is well beyond what many are willing to invest in a set of clothes. Therefore, several people have experimented with imitating this cloth. The following method of using spray paint is that perfected by George Ferguson. Use a good grade of pure (100%) wool, navy blue or red. Pendleton markets an excellent weight and weave at about \$15 a yard. Straight dancers can use old sailor pants. A piece of the real thing can help you with the right shade. But since the shade of one cloth varies from another it is not mandatory. Depending on which selvage edge you wish to imitate, mark off the edge of your cloth to indicate where lanes are to be placed. See Fig. 1, 2 and 3. Use a metal or cardboard shield to mask off the lane or lanes to be sprayed; masking tape can also be used. Tape is recommended on pieces over 14" long. If you are working on navy cloth, you need only spray the red and yellow stripes;

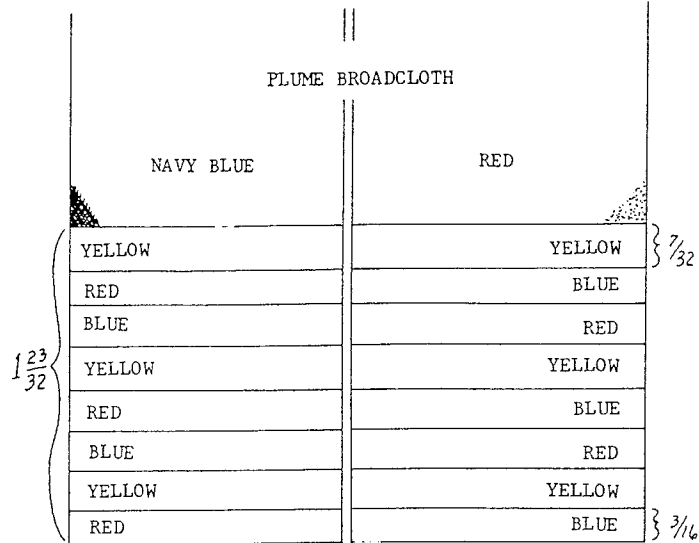


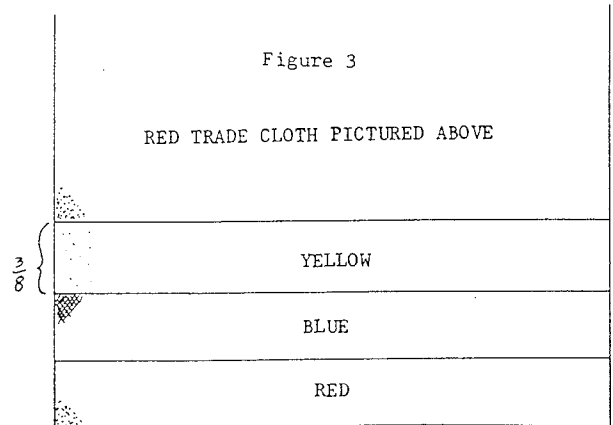
Figure 1

Figure 2



Figure 3

RED TRADE CLOTH PICTURED ABOVE



on red, only blue and yellow. Cover the balance of material with paper. Spray open lanes lightly. Do not try to make itsolid. Remove shield or tape immediately. If using a shield the other color can be done without waiting. If using two colors, mask again and repeat above procedure. Use Testors enamel.

When the paint has dried give it a good brushing with a suede brush. This will result in the impression that the color is woven into the cloth as it will rough up the nap of the cloth. Experiment with at least a couple of samples as to drying time, amount of brushing and paint before you tackle the real thing. Please don't tell us of your results. We just want to think it is the real thing.