

BATTLE VESTS- Engineering

WARNING--THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS ADVANCED TECHNIQUES FOR GETTING THAT FABULOUS FIT! I GIVE STEP BY STEP DIRECTIONS TO DRAW THE PATTERNS I USED IN "THE ZEN OF STRIPES". BEGINNING SEWERS MAY HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY. PRACTICE ON CHEAP MATERIALS, PLEASE!

A plaintive lament: Standard commercial pattern sources do not offer patterns of any kind for fitted men's shirts, tops, vests, etc. The style today is casual, unfitted, unconstructed--t-shirt like. So, guys, here's what you have to do:

- 1) Go to a thrift shop, Salvation Army or the like and look for an old dress shirt. If you are lucky, you'll find something that you can button that has darts in the back. (Darts are those tapered, pointed tucks that help the fabric shape to the curves of your body. Women's clothes have 'em in front, too). Knit fabrics (like t-shirt knits) usually don't have darts, so look for woven fabrics. If you can't find any with darts in back, pick the smallest shirt you can get buttoned all the way up (We're looking for fit, not comfort.). Often men's shirts will have a pleat center back. If yours does, remember to pin that much out of the back all the way down the center back.
- 2) When you get your shirt home, put it on inside-out and have someone pin in the darts till the shirt really fits your back contour. For those who have to start from scratch, the darts should be located along a vertical line 1/2 way between the center back and the side seams. Mark the dart lines with a marker. Mark the correct sleeve length on the sleeve as well--We'll use that later.



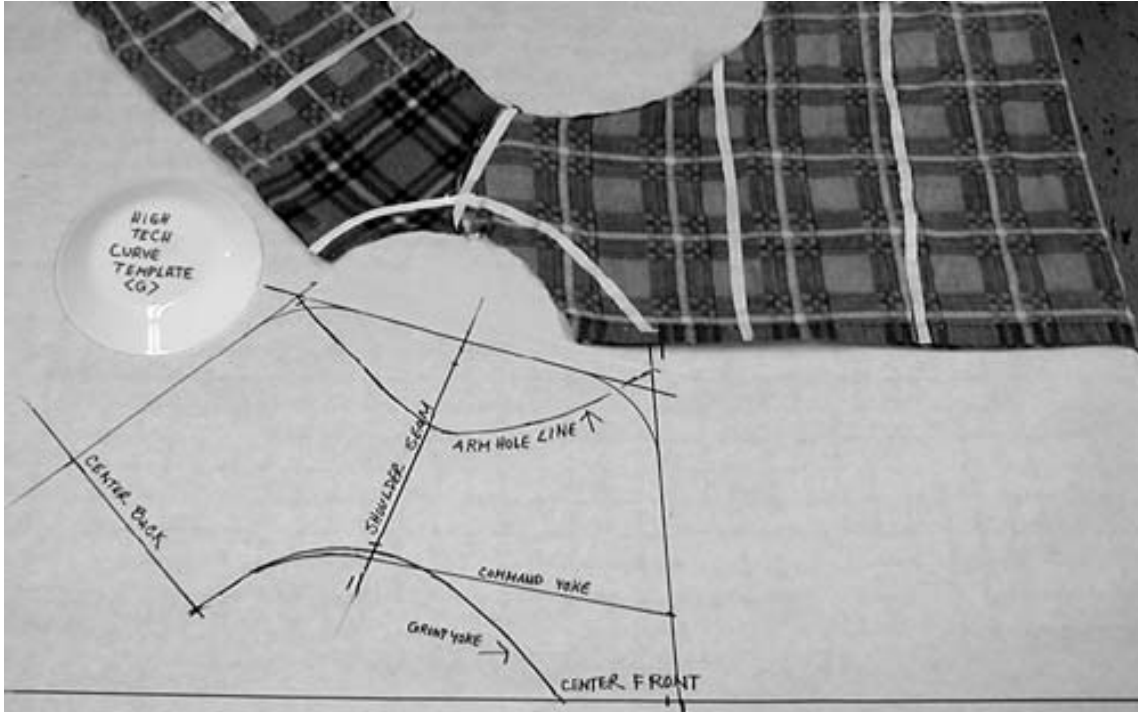
- 3) Take a marker and redraw the armhole so that the line is on the actual place where the shoulder meets the arm. Most shirts extend beyond that point. If you can find the spot where the collar bone meets the arm socket--it's a little dent--draw a line from there straight to your neck. That's the place where you want the shoulder seam line to be. It may be an inch or so from the front of the yoke. If you ironed the shirt sleeve flat, the crease would just about go to that spot. Do the same for both shoulders. Also, the new shoulder seam should follow the true slope of the shoulder. Mark the changes, but leave the pins in for now.
- 4) Take a string and tie it around your waist, then mark the location of that line on the shirt. Reposition the string where you want the chest tube and mark it again.



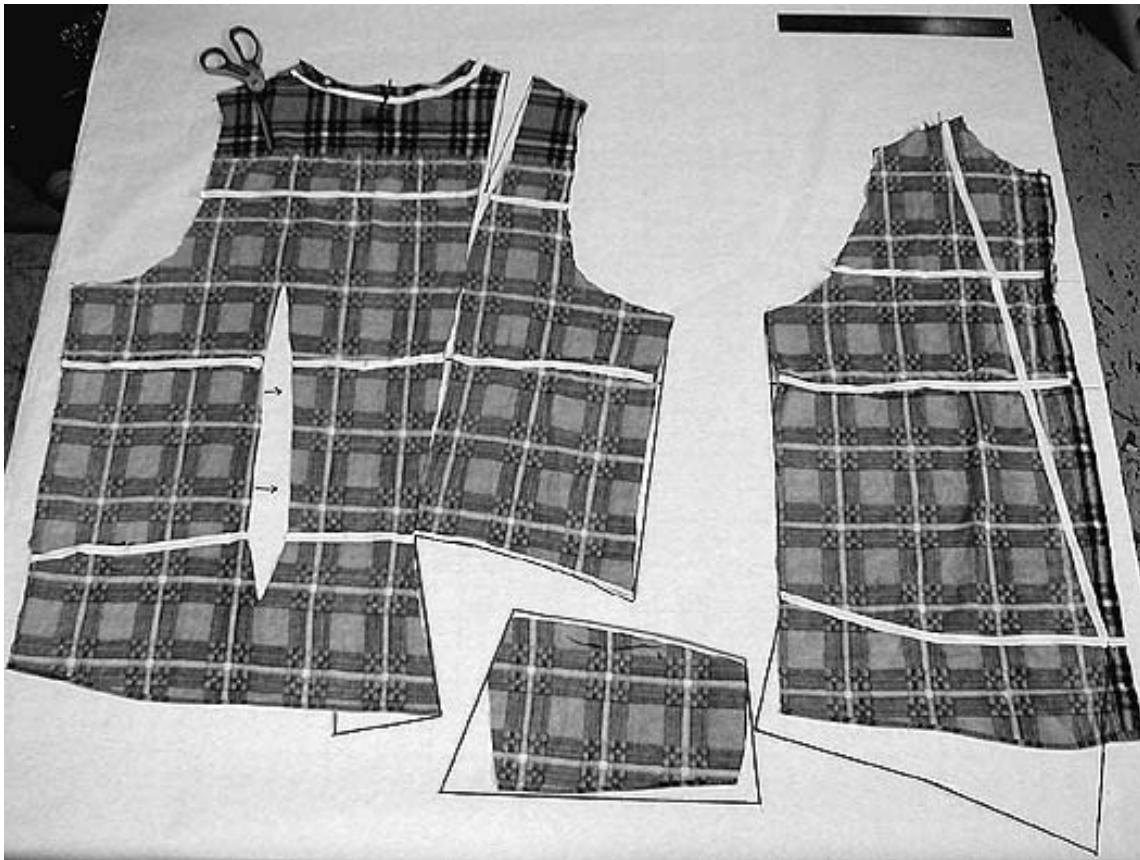
- 5) With a pair of scissors, *carefully* cut away the collar, then cut off each sleeve at the armhole you redrew. Save the sleeves for later. Have someone use a ruler and marker to draw a line where you want to bottom of the Klingon yoke to go. Make sure the front and back are level with each other. Then draw the front neckline. For a grunt style, a v-neck about 2 1/2" lower than the shirt neckline in front and 1" wider than the shirt neckline at the shoulders and center back. OR--draw a line from the shoulder line you drew at the neck, down to the waist. That'll give you the command vest look.



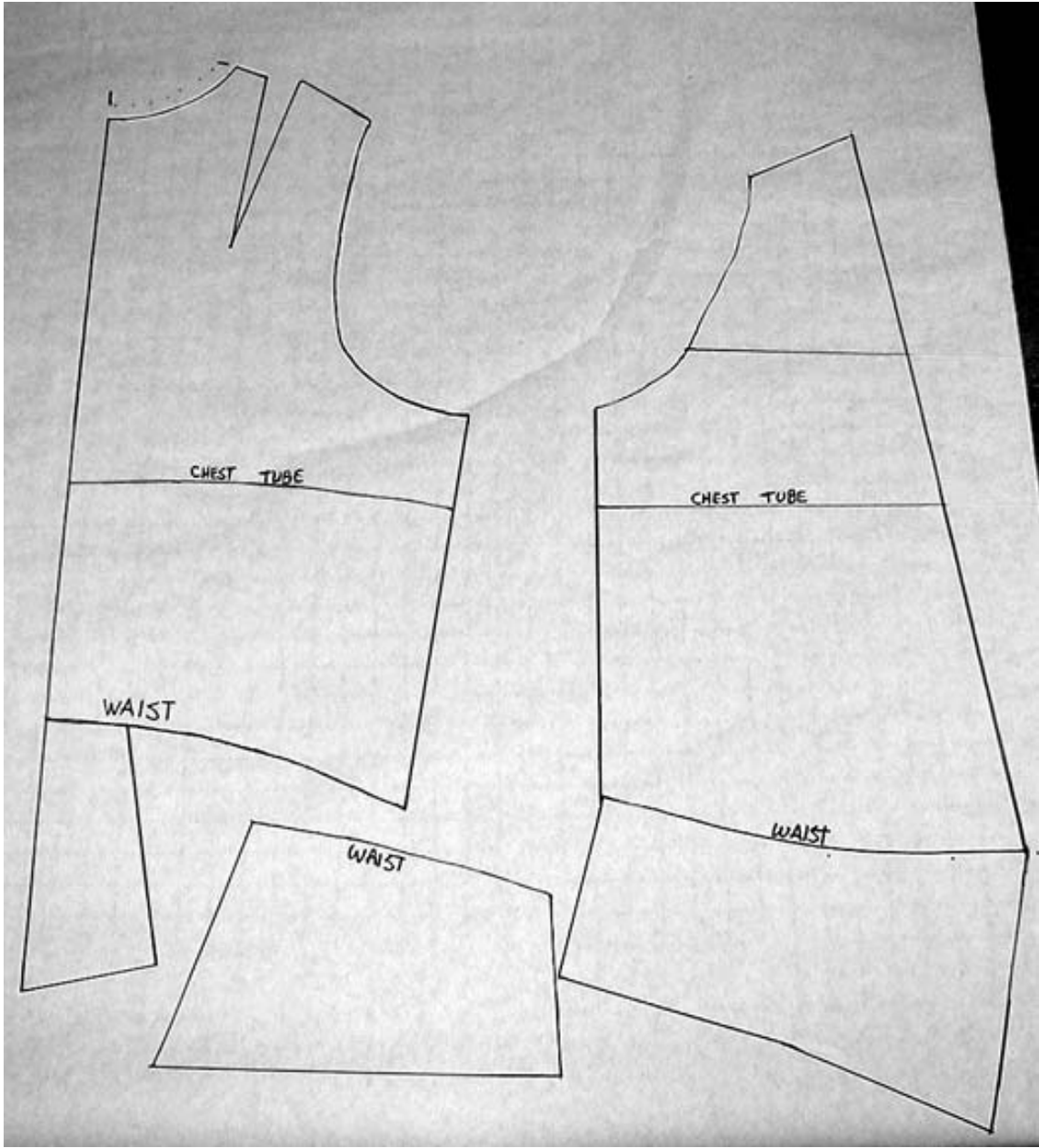
- 6) Take off the shirt and cut it apart *carefully* at the side seams. Cut the front of the shirt through the buttonholes--that's center front. Where the buttons are sewn on the other side is also center front. Cut out the neckline you chose. (I didn't on the photo 'cause I wanted to show both necklines.)

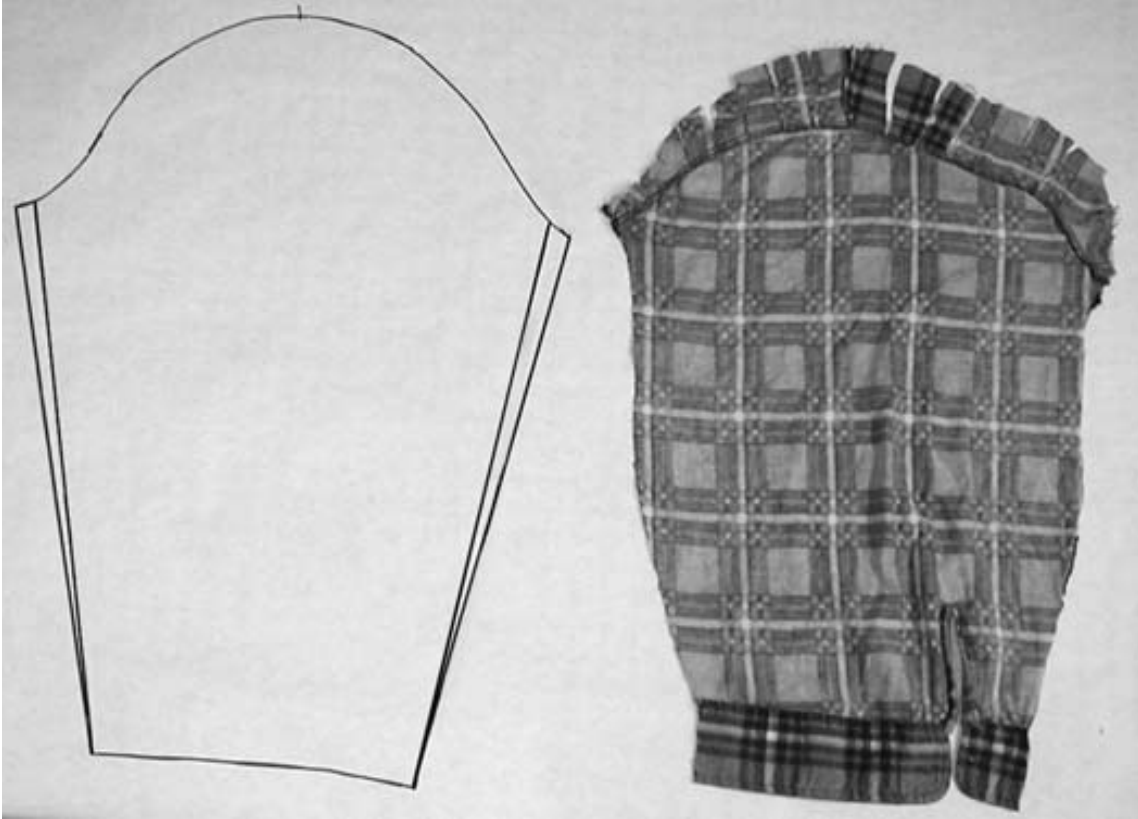


- 7) You can now lay the shirt flat, and trace the pattern for the Klingon shoulder yoke. Draw the neckline, the center front on the v-neck, center back. Mark the shoulder seam line, too. Mark the bottom front and back of the yoke and where that line hits the armhole. This can be done right through the fabric if you use a sufficiently juicy marker, at least at corner points. Extend the shoulder line about 1 1/2-2" beyond the armhole. I have found that the outer edge of the yoke should be a straight line approximately perpendicular to the shoulder line. I use the points where the bottom yoke lines meet the armhole as minimum yoke widths. I'll go wider to get that perpendicular line. If you are not sure, cut the yoke out of paper and try it on to see how it looks. For the final grunt style, you'll obviously have to cut the pattern folded along the center front and open in the back.



- 8) Now comes the fun part--moving the darts around! Think of the dart like a paper cone hat. Regardless of where you put the seam, it still fits your head the same way. I find it much easier to do the stripes if I have all the darts come off the shoulder. Cut the front apart from the back of the shirt at the drawn shoulder line. On the back, draw a line through the center of each dart, then from the top of each dart to the center of each shoulder. *Carefully* cut the back apart along the lines you just drew *except right at the top of the dart, about 1/4" above and below the dart. This is the pivot point.* Cut away the part of the shirt below the waistline and toward the sideseam. Hang onto it. It is a separate pattern piece. Leave the center back part attached. Now, *rotate* the remaining portion containing the armhole until the dart lines meet and pin the dart together. if you lay the back flat, you'll see the new dart opening at the shoulder. You can redraw the point of the dart so it is just above your shoulder blade. Now the back pattern pieces are done, except for the angles at the hem and the seam allowances. If this shirt fit you *really* tight, add a little (1/8-1/4") to the back and side seams--just add the same amount to the center back yoke pattern.





- 9) Cut the sleeve open down the seam right through the cuff. You'll notice that it won't lay quite flat, because part of the shoulder is attached to it. Cut slits into that part all the way to the old sleeve/shoulder seam. Then the sleeve cap will fan out flat. At the bottom of the sleeve you may have to leave the cuff unbuttoned, especially if you can't put your hand through the buttoned sleeve. Draft the sleeve pattern following the fanned out shoulder line, the open cuff, and add the same amount you added to the side seam to the under arm seam (at the top only).

OK. Now, add seam allowances and whatever binding or facing you want on neck and armholes, and you're set!

I want to thank Ky'Phur for being my vict---er-uhh---model for the photos, as well as for the demonstration at Empire Union.