HOW TO MAKE A GOLF BAG

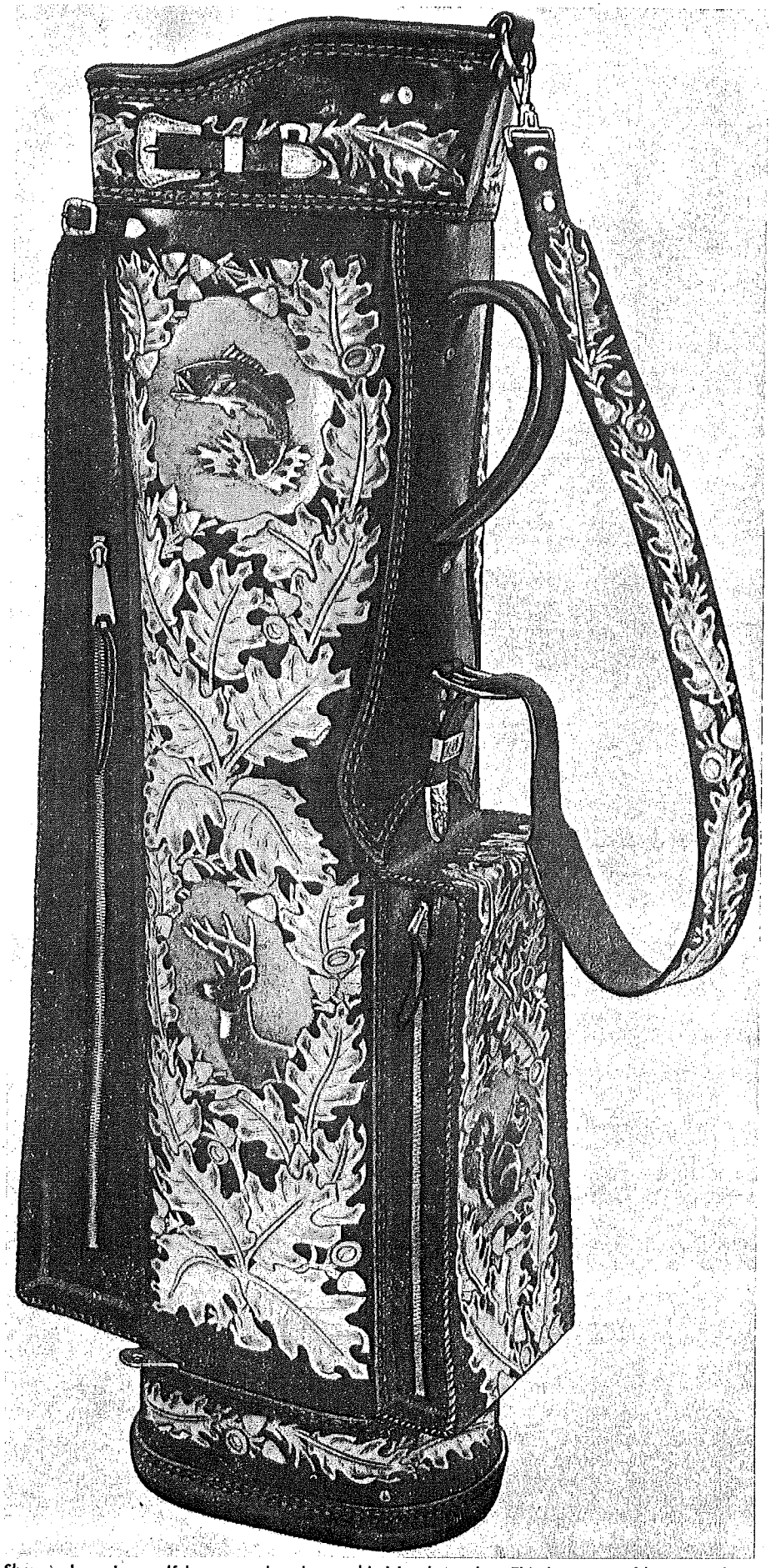
By Jerry Killinger

Not long ago I was asked by one of my regular customers if I could repair a used golf bag. He was told to bring it in for an appraisal, and I thereby started on a very profitable and highly rewarding field of leathercraft.

While examining this golf bag, which had a hole in one side, I mentally figured the cost of material and was amazed at the final sum. The bag could be completely rebuilt, with hand carving on all the leather and assembled at a cost of about $25.00. I was not only surprised at my arithmetic but also at how simple the assembly would be. It had been my impression that golf bags were pretty complicated, but such is not the case.

Not counting the time involved in drawing the carving pattern, this rebuilding job was completed in ten days by working four to five hours each evening. I asked only $45.00 for the work because I was grateful for the customer's getting me started in this line. I have been repaid many times by his free advertising, and he has since brought me three more golf bags that I could rebuild and sell. He also told me that a sporting goods store had valued his bag at $175, and that he had never owned anything that had received so many favorable comments. Many of his friends had offered him $100 for the bag, but he refused them all.

This convinced me that the manufacturer of deluxe, handmade golf bags could be very profitable as well as rewarding in the way of prestige. Since I had used the plastic bottom



Shown above is a golf bag carved and assembled by the author. This bag was sold to a semi-pro golfer for $125.

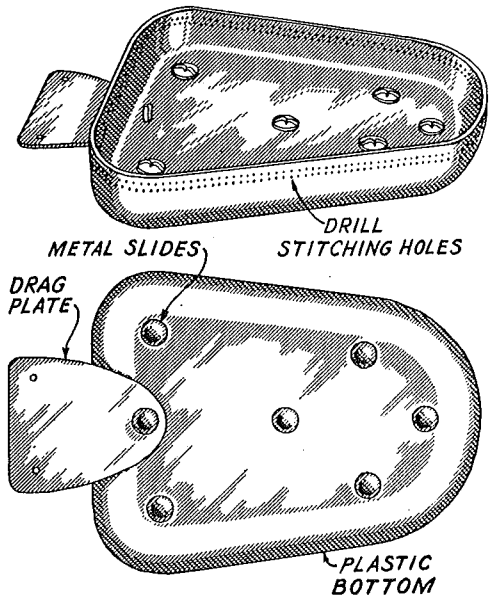


Fig. 1—Attaching metal slides and drag plate.

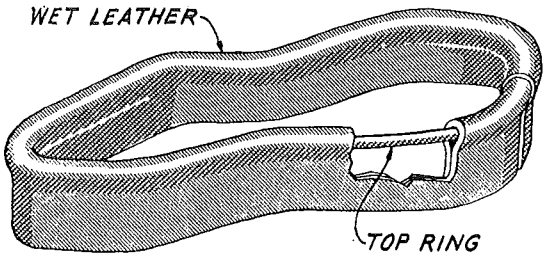


Fig. 3—Covering top ring with leather.

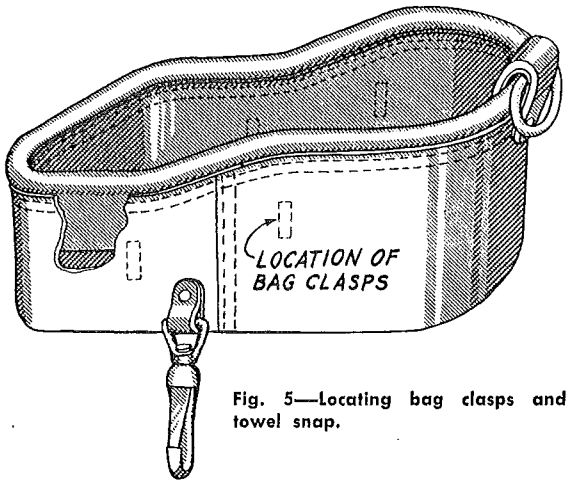
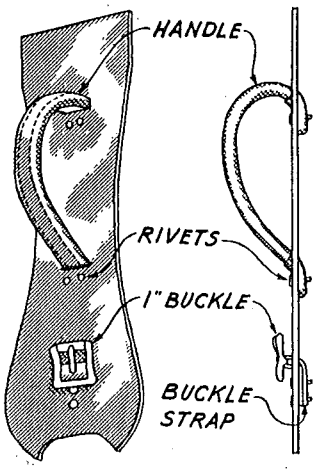


Fig. 5—Locating bag clasps and towel snap.



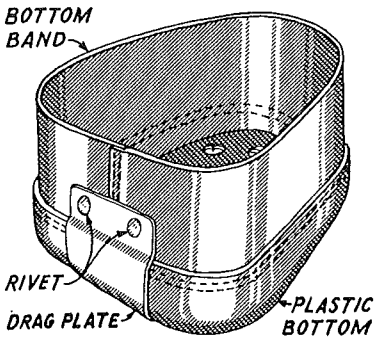


Fig. 2—Installing bottom band.

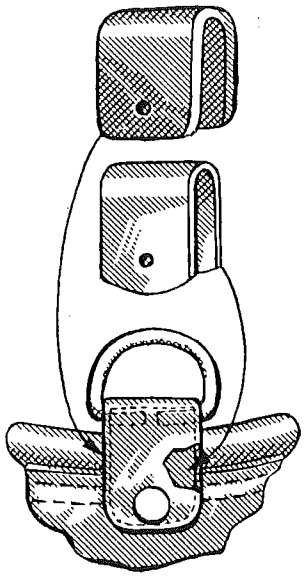


Fig. 4—Rivetting shoulder strap dee ring and support.

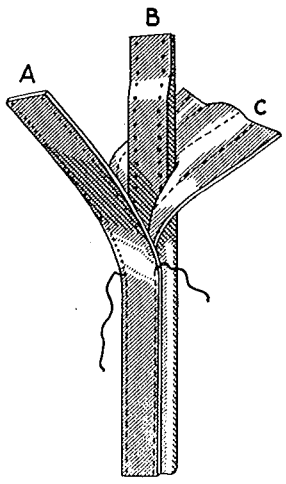


Fig. 6 (above)—Construction of handle.

Fig. 7 (left)—Installing handle to handle panel.

and the steel top ring from my customer's old bag, I proceeded to see if these two items could be secured from the manufacturer. The A. G. Spalding and Brothers Company made some available to me for just a small charge to cover the cost of manufacture. You can see from the accompanying pictures that these bags turned out rather well.

Carving the Pattern

The carving pattern for this bag was adapted from Al Stohlman's book, *How to Carve Leather,* with some juggling of his acorn purse pattern. The dog's head, fish, and squirrel were obtained from the same book; the horses' heads came from a *Doodle Page* (Series 5, page 1); and the deer head was taken from an issue of the *Ohio Conservation Bulletin.* A suggested sequence for the use of carving tools follows.

After tracing the carving pattern on the piece to be carved, cut all the lines of the oak leaves. I have found that the swivel tip works faster on such short, curved lines. The regular swivel knife requires too much turning of the leather. With the swivel tip, it is possible to cut an entire oak leaf without turning the leather once.

Bevel most of the lines around the leaves and stems with a #198 checked beveler. A #936 checked beveler will get all the tight places that cannot be beveled with the #198.

The #212 checked pear shader is used on the tips of the leaves only, and the #195 checked pear shader gets into the tight places not reached by the #212.

Use a #971 checked beveler to bevel the stems running up through the leaves and also to make the veins running off these stems. A few decorative swivel knife cuts will complete these veins.

With a #199 or #204 lined beveler, scratch lines on all the stems. The point of the swivel knife is used to create the illusion of pits on the stems.

The acorns and hulls can be stamped with Craftools #554 and #562. However, you can make your own by tracing, cutting, and beveling. Bevel the lines between the hulls and nuts with a #895 smooth beveler. The crossed lines on the hulls are cut with a swivel knife, and three cuts on the tip of the nuts are added for more realism.

I shall give a few, brief instructions on carving the figures. For a complete description of carving and dyeing, you cannot beat Al Stohlman's book, *How to Carve Leather.* It costs only $3.50, and it is worth ten times that amount.

With a ¼ inch angle blade in your swivel knife, carefully cut all the solid lines. Now use the #895 and #896 smooth bevelers to form the muscle contours on the figures (these are indicated by dotted lines). The moisture content of the leather

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should be high when making these contours in order to prevent burnishing. By tilting the smooth bevelers back on their heels, you will avoid a choppy appearance. Hold these tools forward but tilted to one side or the other to indicate hair lines in ears. The #3 modeling spoon is used to smooth out the muscle contours and to give expression to the faces.

Bevel around the outside of the figures with #198 and #936 and then use the #3 modeling spoon to round off these beveled edges to give a third dimension to your figures. The small #890 beveler is used to bevel eyes and nostrils.

Hair on the figures can be indicated by short, uneven strokes with either a #199 or #204 lined beveler. Scales on the fish are made with a #708 veiner, the body hair on the squirrel is made with a #425 camouflage, and the tail hair on the squirrel is made with a #366 camouflage.

Hair ends appearing in the matted background area are made prominent by dividing the ends with #902 or #976 tools. The matted area around the figures is done with #898 and #899. For backgrounding I prefer the #104 stamp.

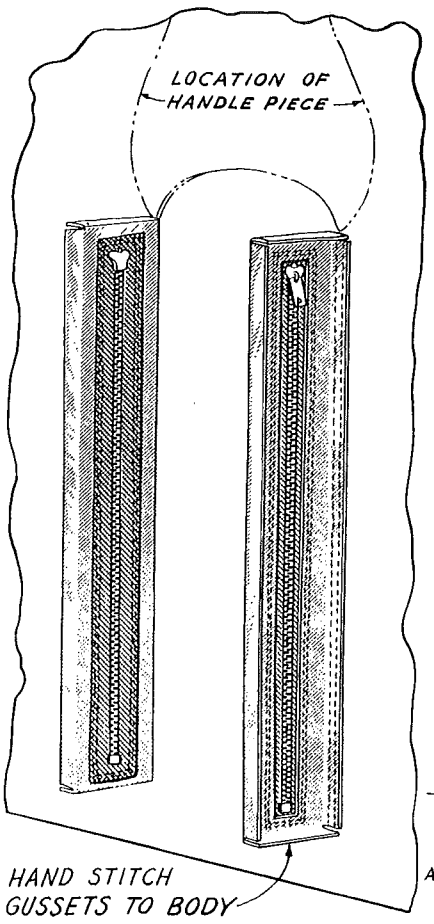

Fig. 8—Stitching ball pocket gussets to body.

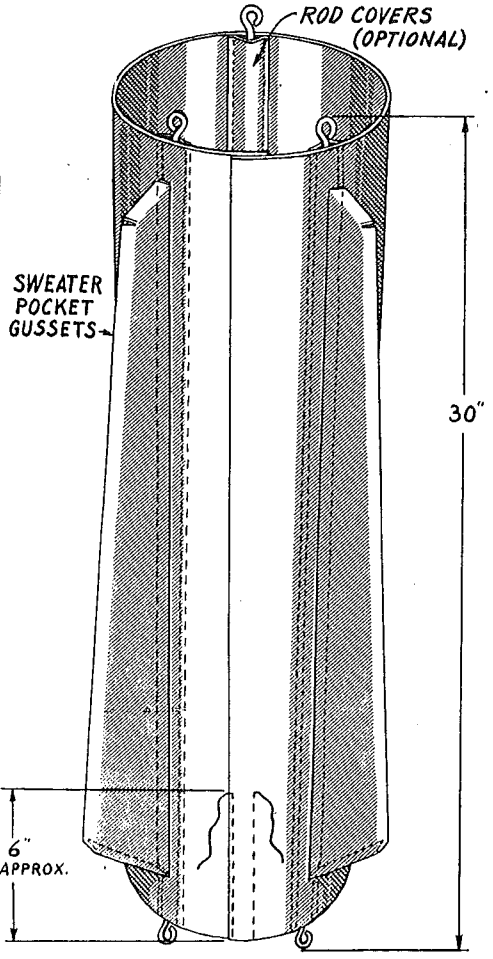

Fig. 9—Stitching sweater pocket gussets and rod covers to body.

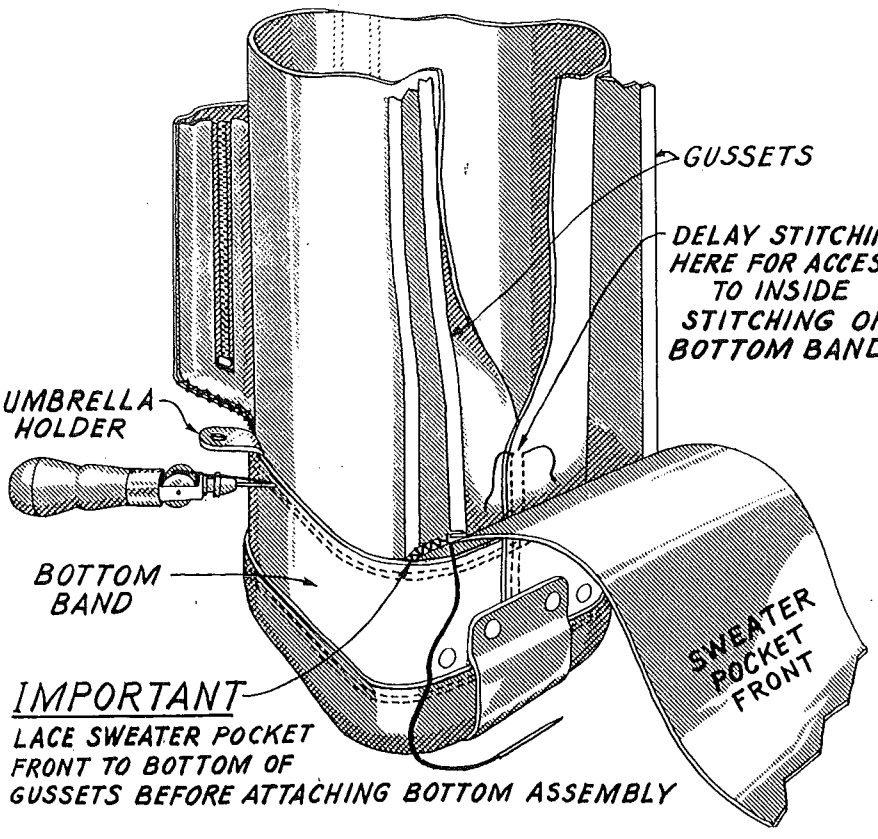

Fig. 10—Stitching body of bag to bottom band.

After all the carving is done, clean smudges and finger prints from the leather with a mild solution of oxalic acid. For inlay dye work on my bag, I used a well pointed, #3 red sable brush and Omega black dye. However, you can use any dye of your choice. If you wish to dye your figures as I have, follow the instructions in *How to Carve Leather.*

Now that your leather is thoroughly clean and dry, apply one coat of your favorite waterproofing leather finish. This will keep the leather clean during the process of assembly. The final coat(s) of finish will be applied after the bag is completely assembled.

Most of the leather used in this bag is 4-5 ounce Live Oak, with the handle piece, bottom band, and shoulder strap being made of 8-9 ounce strap leather. The supplies needed to assemble this bag are as follows:

About 16 square feet of 4-5 ounce, B grade side

About 1½ square feet of 8-9 ounce, B grade strap leather

One plain 1 or 1½ inch belt strip

Two size 5, 18 inch zippers with tab pulls

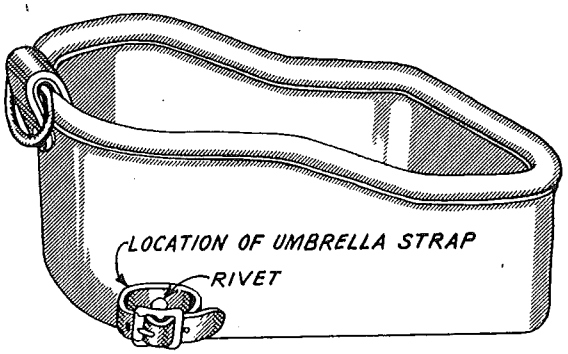

Fig. 11—Rivetting umbrella strap to top band.

Two size 5, 12 inch zippers with tab pulls

One 1 inch, heavy duty cast nickel buckle

One 1 inch nickel dee

One 1 inch-eye chap snap

One light nickel swivel

Two ½ inch buckles

Four #39 bag clasps

Two dozen ½ inch tubular or split rivets (or ½ inch permanent fasteners)

Three skeins of AWL for All thread

One square foot of foam rubber to pad bottom

Ten ½ inch metal slides with ½ inch split rivet shafts

The cost of these items will come to about $21.00, to which you will have to add the cost of your dye, leather finish, and about 35 yards of lace.

Tools needed to assemble this bag are as follows: AWL for ALL, stabbing awl, #6 or #7 overstitch, revolving punch, skife, leather gouge, rivet setter, edger, edge slicker, lacing punch, wing dividers or compass, a sharp knife, and the ordinary shop tools, such as hammer, brace and bit, pliers, etc.

Changes in the above list can be made to use supplies of your own choice. You could use 3-4 ounce leather in place of the 4-5 ounce, but anything lighter would be too flimsy. Using the 4-5 ounce weight as I did, the completed bag weighs only seven pounds. This is considerably lighter than leather bags manufactured commercially.

Assembling the Bag

Step #1

Cut three metal rods of ⅛ inch diameter (about #9 wire) 32 inches long. I used pieces of an old clothes line. After heating the end of each rod, bend a loop in the end with a pair of alligator-nosed pliers. Use care to be sure these rods are 30 inches long from loop to loop, measuring outside the loop. Heating the ends over a flame makes it easier to form these loops and prevents the wire from breaking. The hole in the loop need only be big enough to accommodate a rivet.

Step #2

Using a #6 overstitch, mark two rows of stitching holes around the top of the molded plastic bottom. I left a ⅛ inch space between the edge and the first row of stitches and another ⅛ inch between the rows of stitches. By using any one of the many drilling devices available and the #8 needle from an Awl for All as a bit, drill these stitching holes through the plastic bottom. Also drill the holes in the bottom for the metal slides. The slides come in many shapes and styles, so check the size of the shaft on yours before drilling the holes. These slides are located symmetrically around the bottom and their number can vary from six to ten. While you are at it, you may as well drill the rivet holes in the drag plate and the dee ring support plate.

Now hand stitch the 8-9 ounce bottom leather band onto the plastic bottom with the Awl for All. This band is stitched in place prior to installing the metal slides in order to prevent the thread from getting caught on the slides while stitching. You can now fasten the slides to the bottom. However, if you are going to use a drag plate on your bag, the middle slide in the front is the one that holds this plate to the bottom (See Fig. 1).

The drag plate is then bent up over the front of this bottom piece to which the top of the plate will later be fastened with rivets. Your entire bottom assembly should now look like the one in Fig. 2.

You should cut some form of padding and glue it into this bottom assembly. It will prevent the ends of the golf clubs from bouncing on the rivet ends. Foam rubber, sheep wool, or leather will do the trick.

Step #3

Cut a piece of 3 ounce leather to 2½ inches by 27½ inches and thoroughly soak it in water. Now mold it evenly over the top ring, letting the ends overlap slightly. The end seam should be in the center of the narrow end of the top ring. It will be covered later by the shoulder strap dee ring support. Spring-type clothes pins work nicely for holding

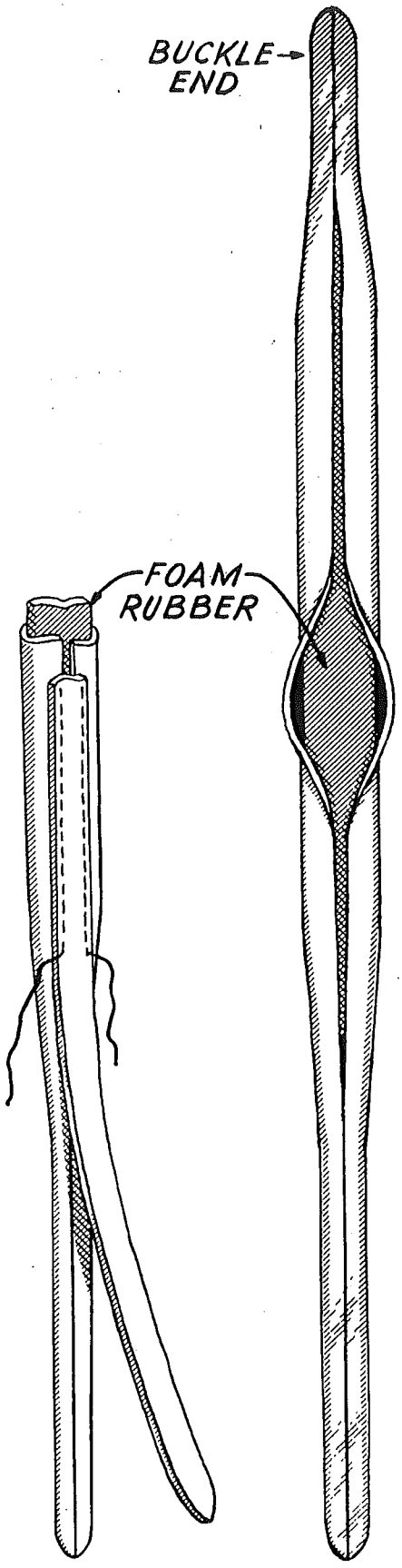

Fig. 12—Assembling shoulder strap.

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this leather in position while it is drying (See Fig. 3).

Take your #6 overstitcher again and mark two rows of stitching holes along each side of the two contour pieces. After the leather on the top ring dries, glue these two contour-shaped top pieces around the top ring. The carved one naturally goes on the outside and the plain one goes on the inside. The end seam for these two pieces will be on the right hand side of the bag. Do not stitch this end seam yet.

Using the Awl for All, stitch these pieces together around the top just under the leather-covered top ring. Remember, do not stitch the end seam. By using the Awl for All, it is not necessary to punch these holes before stitching.

You are now ready to attach the shoulder strap dee assembly. How to do this is best shown in Fig. 4. Your entire top piece should now look like the one in Fig. 5, not counting the towel snap.

Step #4

Cut three pieces of leather for the handle as shown in the cutting patterns and skive the ends of piece B. Assembly of this handle is illustrated in Fig. 6.

Insert the ends of the completed handle into the slots made in the handle panel, mark and punch the rivet holes (two on each end), and rivet the handle in place. The buckle for the shoulder strap is also installed now in the slot shown in the handle panel. It, too, should have two rivets.

If you do not have the punches for making these rivet holes and slots, you can accomplish the job by taking a tube from your revolving punch and striking it with a hammer. Remember to place a wooden block under the leather so as to avoid damaging the tube. Your entire handle assembly should now look like that in Fig. 7.

Two views of the finished bag showing ball and sweater pockets and details of carving.

Step #5

You are now ready to prepare the gussets for the pockets and the first step is to sew the zippers in place. This can be done on an ordinary household sewing machine if you are careful and take it easy. I put zippers on both sides of each pocket so the golfer will have ready access to the pockets regardless of the position of the bag.

After the zippers have been sewed in place, moisten and fold the edges of the gussets. Gouge a channel for these folds if the leather proves difficult. While the gussets are drying, glue the three rod covers in place as shown in the cutting patterns. These rod covers are attached to the flesh side of the large body piece. Glue your gussets in place as shown in the cutting pattern and in Fig. 8. Mark your stitching holes and stitch the gussets to the large body piece.

If you are fortunate enough to have access to a heavy duty sewing machine, you can save yourself a lot of hand stitching here. A local shoe repair shop should be able to do the job quickly and easily. Only one row of stitching goes on each side of the rod covers, but it takes a double row on the gussets. The same stitches that attach the gussets of the long sweater pocket also attach one side each of the two front rod covers.

Step #6

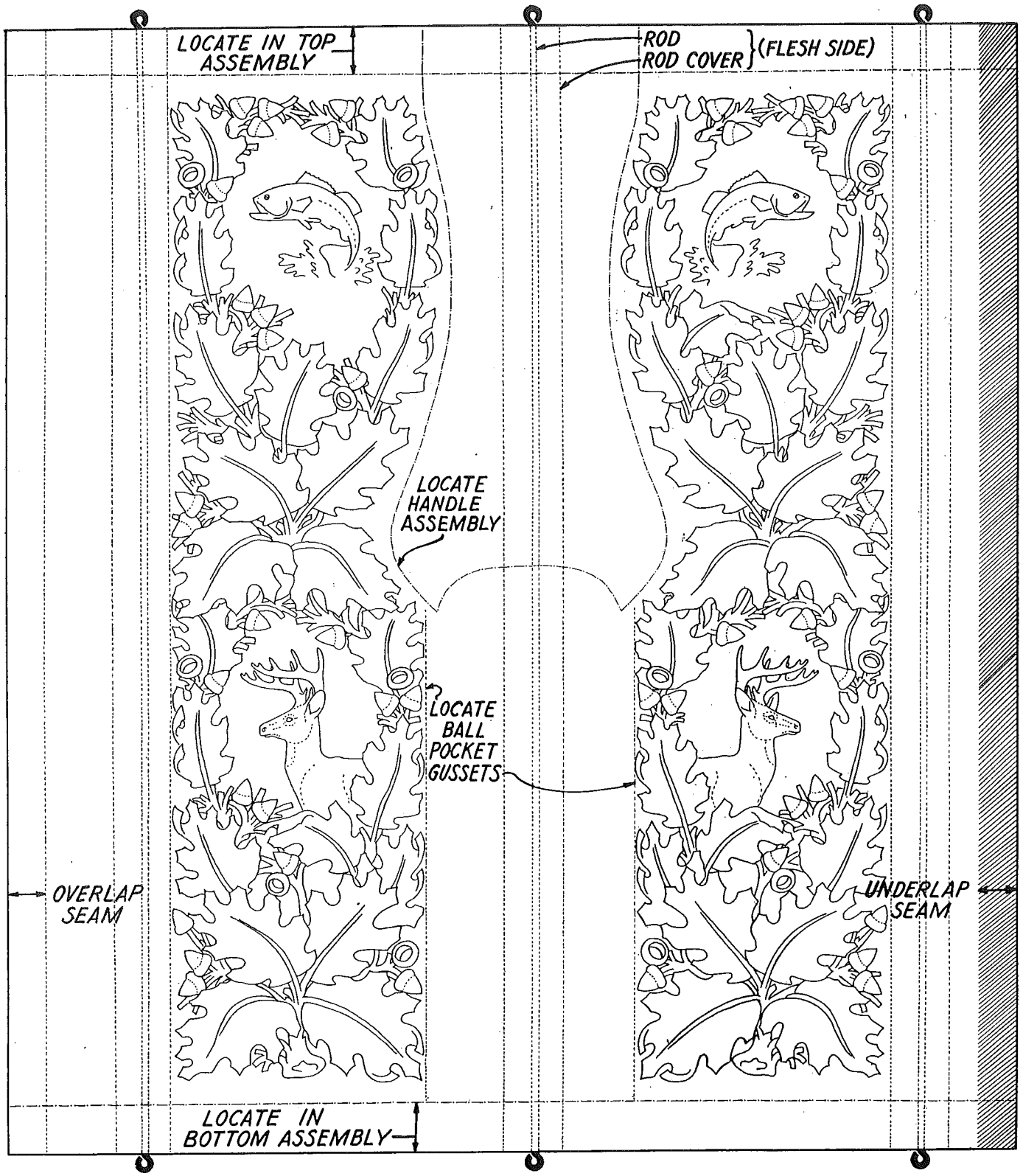
Fold and glue the small ball pocket in place on the body and lace it to its gussets. Extend your lacing beyond the gussets on both ends so that the bottom band and the handle assembly will cover the ends of the lace.

Step #7

Mark double rows of stitching holes around the handle panel with the #6 overstitch and then glue this panel to the body of the bag just above the ball pocket, as shown in the cutting pattern. Now insert the back rod into its cover and stitch the handle panel to the body.

Step #8

Fold the body around to form a cylinder and, beginning at the bottom, stitch the seam for about six or eight inches and stop (See Fig. 9).



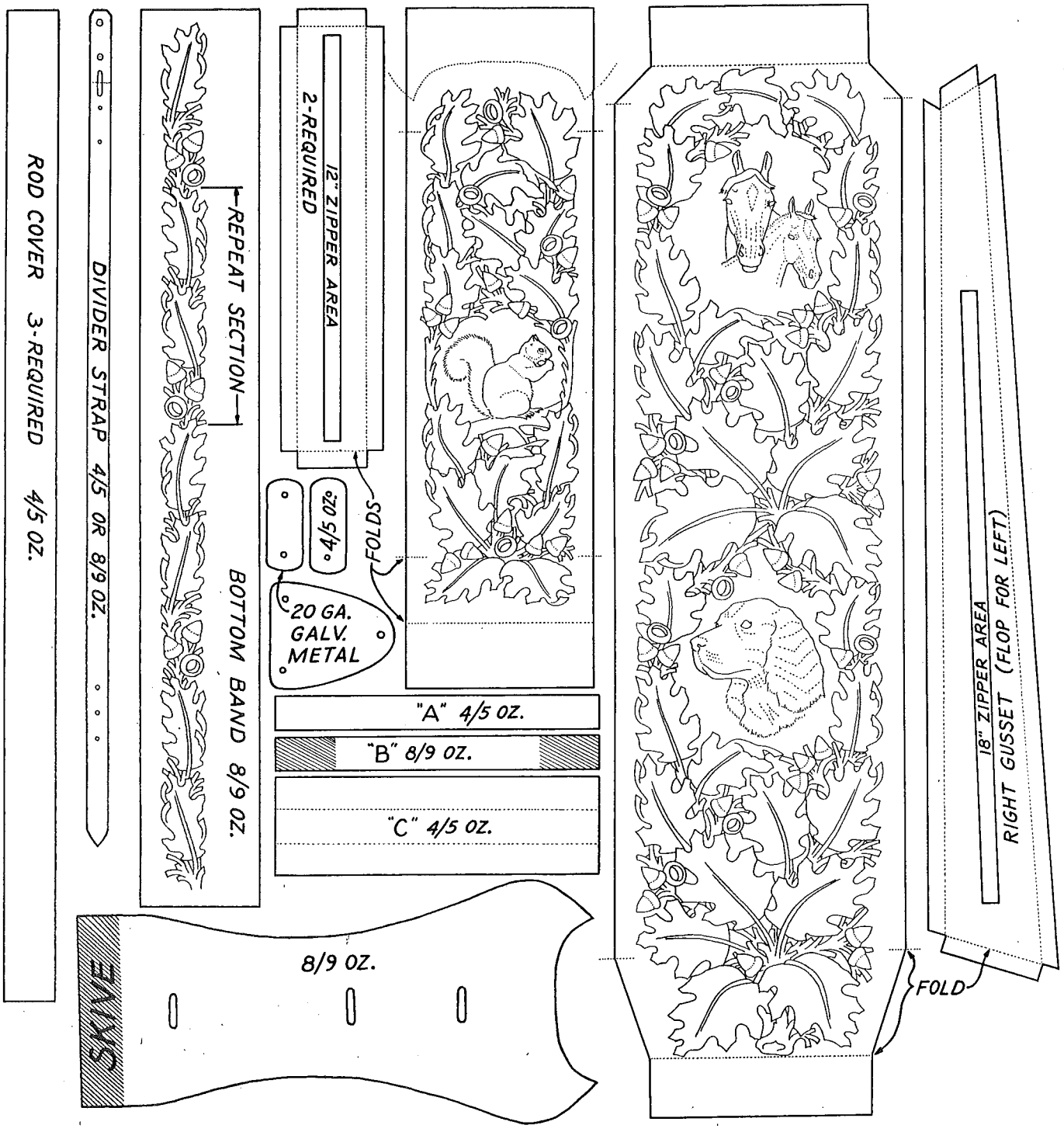
Cutting diagram and carving pattern for the golf bag body is shown above. A limited number of full-scale plans for this bag are available (see notice on page 19).

Glue the bottom of the sweater pocket in place and lace both sides for about six or eight inches, beginning at the bottom. By stitching and lacing this far, the sweater pocket will fall down so you can get your arm inside the cylinder when stitching the bottom to the cylinder (See Fig. 10).

Step #9

Insert the cylinder into the bottom, being careful to line it up evenly as indicated by the dotted line in the cutting pattern. With a scratch awl, reach inside the cylinder and mark the rivet holes through the loop, cylinder, and bottom band with one stab. Mark the rivet holes for the base plate, too. Now remove the cylinder and punch the rivet holes. Re-insert the cylinder into the bottom, line up the holes, and install the rivets. You are now ready to stitch the cylinder to the bottom with a double row of stitches. Don't forget to install the umbrella holder when sewing these stitches (See Fig. 10).

When the above is completed, finish sewing the body seam all the way to the top of the bag and lace the sweater pocket all the way up.



Cutting and carving patterns for pockets and gussets, panels, and straps of the golf bag.

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Step #10

The top piece is installed by inserting the cylinder between the two contour top pieces. It is important that this top piece be lined up evenly, as indicated by the dotted line in the cutting pattern. After installing the rivets, stitch this top piece in place with a double row of stitches. The end seam of the top piece is also stitched now.

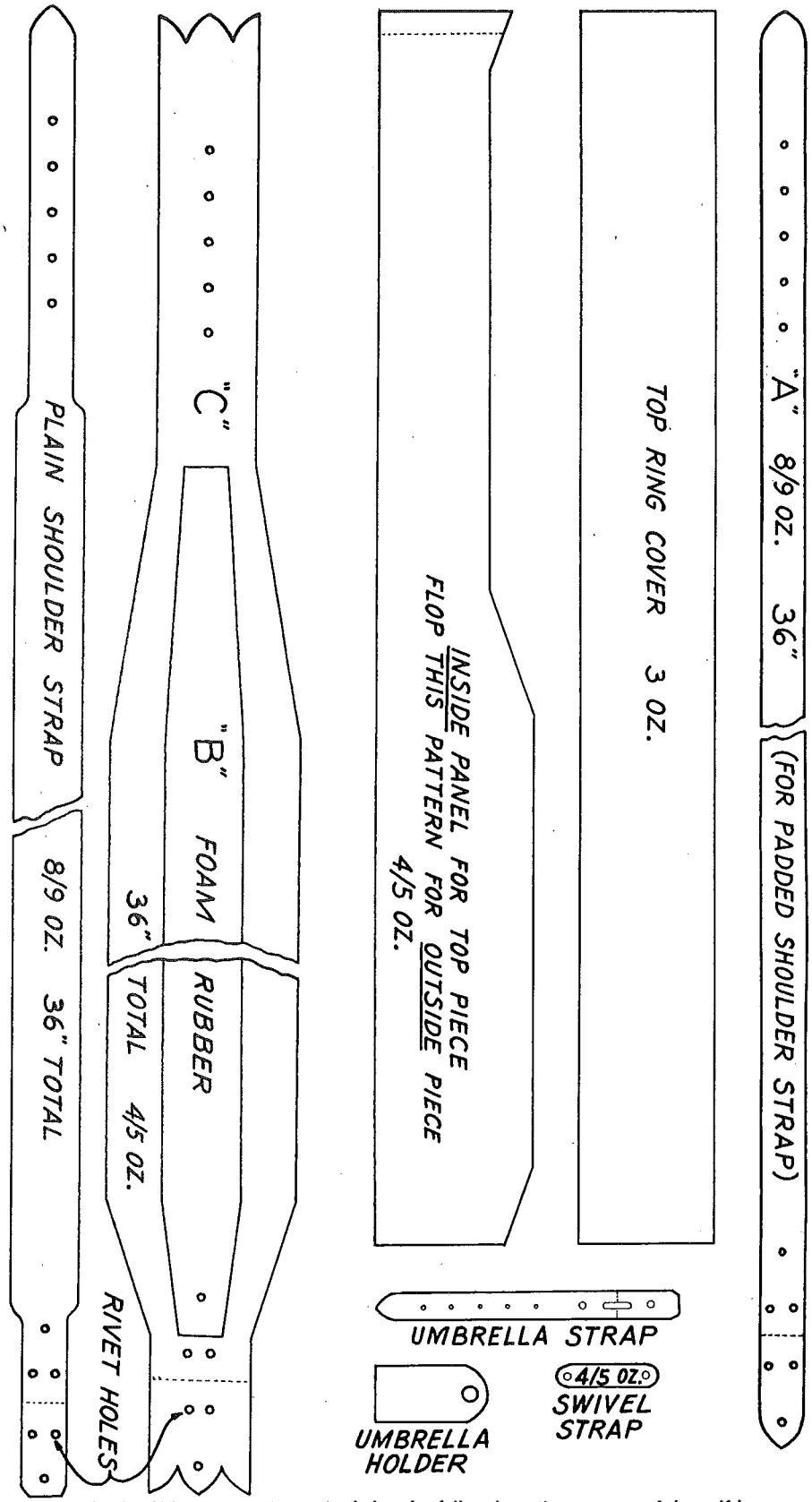
Mark and cut out the holes for the bag clasps, as shown in Fig. 5, and install the clasps. These bag clasps are to accommodate the short belt that divides the bag into compartments.

Consult Fig. 11 for location of the umbrella strap and Fig. 5 for that of the swivel snap. These are secured by one rivet each.

Step #11

The shoulder strap illustrated on my bag is nothing more than a tapered belt. The carving pattern is the same as that on the bottom band and top piece. I made this shoulder strap plain because my customer uses a golf cart and therefore does not need a shoulder strap.

If your customer is going to carry his golf bag or even hire a caddy, you should make a padded shoulder strap. For this you will need an extra piece of foam rubber or sheep wool and a little extra leather, such as that used in the construction of the bag. This strap is assembled just like the handle and is illustrated in Fig. 12. Do not use Durable Dots or Seg-



Details of golf bag straps. See notice below for full-scale cutting patterns of the golf bag.

ma Snaps on the end of this strap. Use rivets.

If you are unable or unwilling to do the carving on this bag, you might consider using such leathers as mission grain kip, Hornback 'Gator steer, or any of the chrome-tanned leathers in the proper weight. I should also like to see this bag done with the new style of silhouette carving.

There are many changes and alterations that can be done with this construction pattern if you use a little ingenuity. One change that will make assembly easier for you is elimination of the rod covers. The two front rods could also be located on the inside of the sweater pocket, close to the gussets. This method would put the rods out of sight and eliminate at least two of the rod covers.

The accompanying cutting pattern can be used for rebuilding worn out golf bags. In this case, the plastic bottom and the top ring of the old bag, usually in good shape, can be used again. You may have to make some minor changes in the wrap-around, top contour piece or change the width of the sweater pocket, but this is usually enough.

The rebuilding procedure will eliminate Federal Excise Tax, too, because it is really a repair job. Worn out bags are easily secured by inquiring at any golf course, where they can be obtained for the asking. You can get many ideas by examining the construction of worn out bags when you take them apart. Once the word gets out that you are doing this work, you will be surprised at the number of old bags that will be put in your possession.

You should experience no trouble in selling your completed bags, but here are some suggestions just the same. Any decent golf course has a pro-shop which sells golfing supplies Sometimes these shops are operated by a professional golfer assigned as an instructor to the course. If you take your completed bag to this shop, you will be in business.

You might also talk to your local sporting goods dealer. I would be willing to bet that you will have your bags sold before you can get them together. The bag shown in the photos was sold to a semi-pro golfer in New York for $125, and he wants any more I make. I was fortunate in not having to contact anyone because the word spread when I did the first rebuilding job. Since then the customers have come to me.