

54-40 or Fight - October BOM

Sarah Childress Polk, wife to 11th President James K. Polk, had a sharp mind and astute social skills. She met James at school when she was 12, became engaged at 19, and was married at 20. James was 28 and already laying down the foundation for his political career.

This month's block reflects his presidential campaign slogan, 54-40 or Fight. The phrase had to do with the dispute over the northern border of the Oregon Territory. 54 degrees 40 minutes (which crosses British Columbia) was the latitude over which the U.S. was fighting Britain. Polk won the election with his slogan but lost the boundary line battle. It was finally settled at 49 degrees, the northern US border.



Nancy Cabot introduced this block in the Chicago Tribune in 1933. She mentions that women of the period (1844) "had no effective outlet for their political opinions". That did not deter Sarah ! As Nancy Cabot continues, this block is the "spontaneous expression of patriotic American women."

- * Graduate of one of the few higher-learning institutions for women
- * A devout Presbyterian, she was nick-named "Sahara Sarah" for banning card games, dancing, theater, & hard liquor at the White House.
- * Oversaw the installation of gas lighting in the White House
- * Hosted the first official American Thanksgiving dinner
- * Was childless at a time when motherhood was the only acceptable career. No lady would admit to a political role of her own, but Sarah Polk found many opportunities for her astute mind and social skills.
- * Constantly, but privately, helped James by reading & highlighting newspaper reports & writing his speeches and correspondence.

Let's Sew !

A traditional 54-40 block uses 3 colors and is made up of 2 units;
4-Patches & Triangle Squares. I will be using red, white, & blue in our example.

Step 1 - 4-Patch Units

For the corner 4-patches, cut:

1 blue strip 2.5" x 21"

1 white strip 2.5" x 21"

Center - 4-Patch or Square

For center, decide if you want the same colors as corners, different colors, or a solid square (See examples above)

For a 4-patch, cut a strip of each center color that is 2.5" x 6"

For a solid center, cut a 4.5" square.

Step 2

Sew 21" blue & white strips together. Press carefully towards the blue, keeping strips in a straight line.

Cut strips into eight sections, 2.5" wide.

Repeat process with center colors, cutting 2 units that are 2.5" wide.



Step 3

Sew sections together into 4-patches.

Seams will nest nicely.

Trim if needed to 4.5" square.

Step 4 - Triangle in a Square Units

This unit is also called a V-Block or Peaky & Spike. There lots of ways to make it: Paper piece, plastic templates, specialty rulers. If you have a favorite way, go for it. These directions will use paper piecing. I like it for the accuracy and ease of trimming. You will be making 4 units. (See template at end of directions)

For center white triangles, cut 4 white squares, 6" x 6".

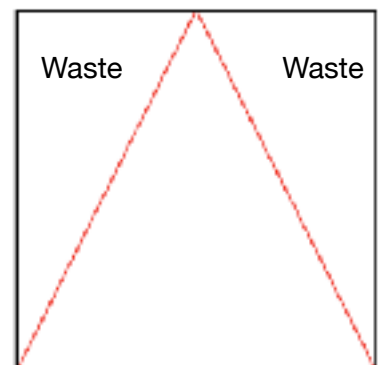
Mark the center of the top side of the square.

Cut fabric from center top mark to lower left corner.

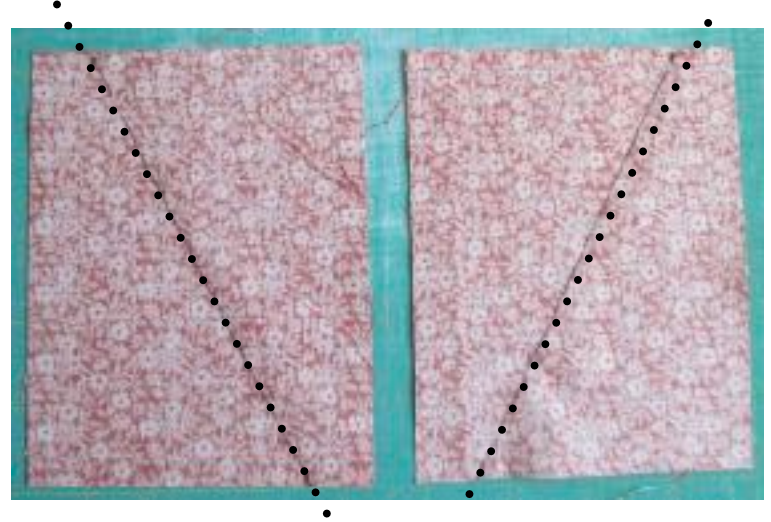
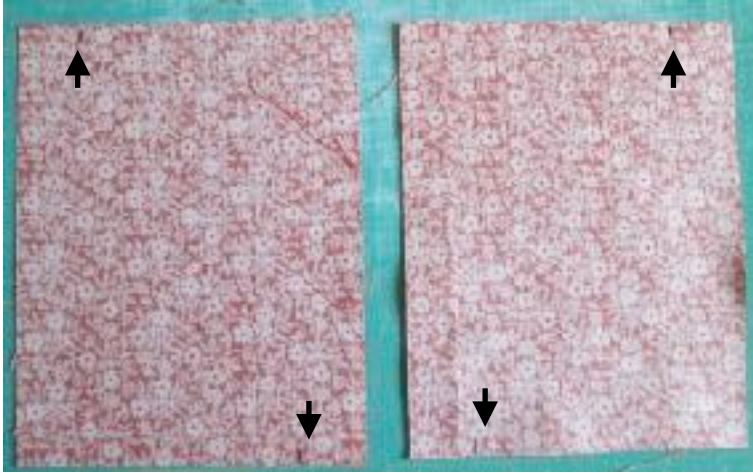
Repeat from top center mark to lower right corner.

This will give you 4 oversized triangles for centers.

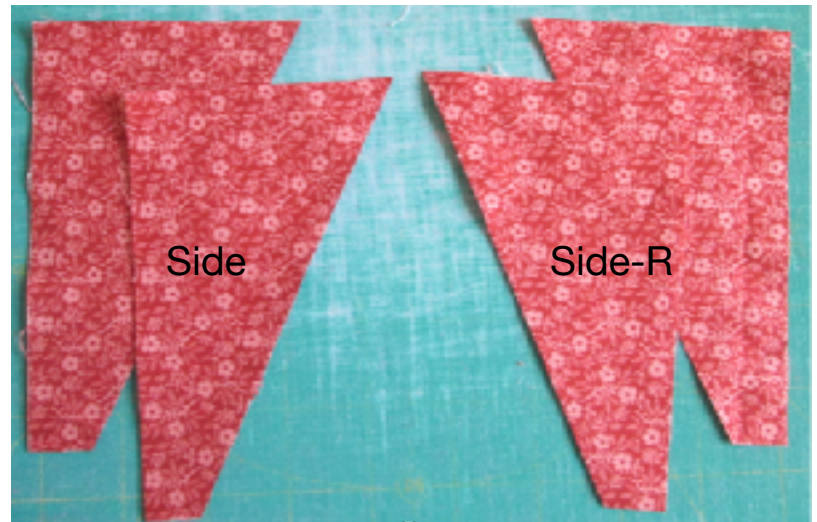
Yes, there will be some fabric waste but it is the most efficient time-wise.



Cut 4 red rectangles, 4.5" x 5.5" These will be the side triangles. Measure 3/4 of an inch from the corners on the wrong side as shown. Mark diagonals and cut CAREFULLY on the line. You will cut 2 rectangles from upper left to lower right and 2 rectangles from upper right to lower left.



This will give you the needed mirror image side triangles.



It helps to mark these as "Side" and "Side-R".

Refresh your memory by rereading the general directions for Paper Piecing in the August Block. This unit has only 3 sections: Center, Side, and Side R(reverse).



Step 5

On non-printed side of paper, place the white triangle, right side up, so its side is along the **Left DOTTED** line of triangle. (Hold up to the light to see lines.) Center it as best you can on that line. Top point and base of triangle will extend past paper. Use a dab of glue stick or a pin to hold in place.

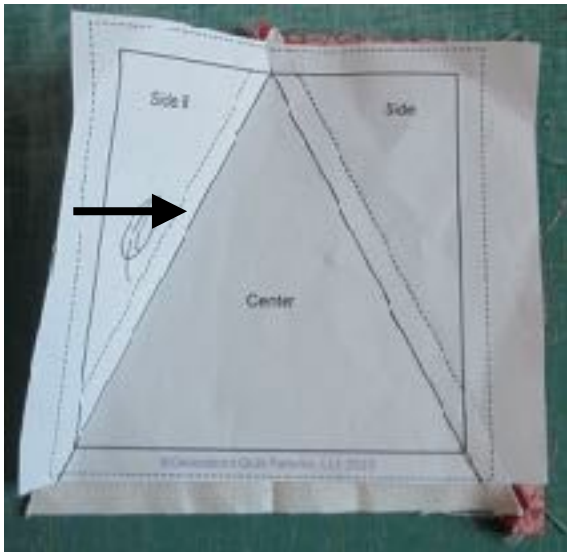
*** Remember to shorten machine ***
*** stitch length.***



Take a red Side Triangle and place it, right side up, so it looks as shown. Fold it over the white triangle so the right sides are now together, lining up along the diagonal line.

Pin in place, flip over, and sew **ON THE SOLID LINE**. Press.

From printed side of paper, fold back on **SOLID SEAM LINE** between Center & Side-R. White fabric extends past fold. Trim 1/4 inch beyond the folded line .

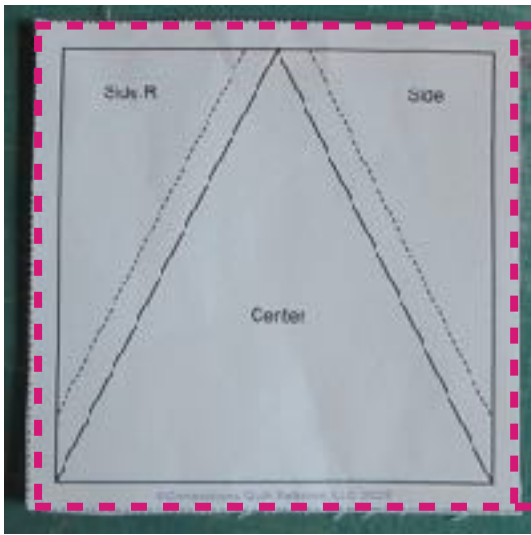


Step 6

Flip back to fabric side & set Side-R triangle fabric RS up, as it would look when finished. Fold over white triangle so RS are together. Pin in place.

On Printed side, sew on **SOLID LINE** between Center and Side-R. Press fabric flat.





Trim unit to 4.5 inches, along **outer dotted line**.

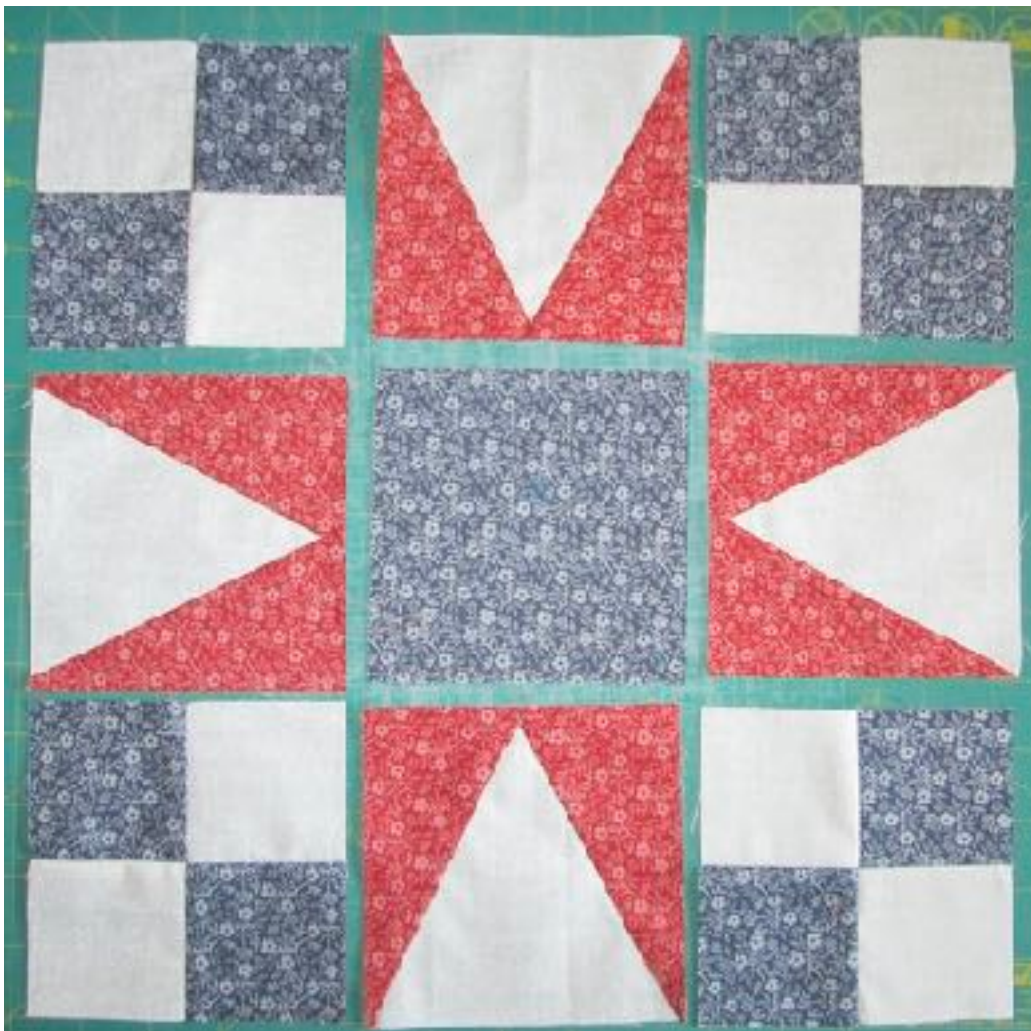
Remember, the solid line is the "Sew" line. The dotted line is the "Cut" lines.

You will make 4 of these units.

You can remove paper at this point.

Step 7 - Assembly

Layout units as shown below. Feel free to play with the directions of the 4-patches (see examples at start of directions). I opted to delay my decision about center until I had the outer pieces done. With the baticks, I went with a 4-patch. With the Americana colors, I used a solid center. Once you find a lay-out you like, sew units together in rows. Press top and bottom rows out towards the 4-patches. Press middle row in towards the center.



And that's it ! This is a VERY versatile block, lending itself well to the quilter's own creative ideas. Lots of subtle differences that take on new perspectives when multiple blocks are put together.

Mix it together with a Shoo-fly block and you get a Tennessee Waltz quilt.

Want to see how color placement plays a huge role in the block's name? Scroll down to bottom of this link to "Variations on 54-40 or Fight block" . Exact same pieces, just different color placement.

<https://www.generations-quilt-patterns.com/54-40-or-fight-quilt-block.html>



Triangle in a Square 4" finished unit

Technique: Paper piecing

For instructions to make this block, visit:

<https://www.generations-quilt-patterns.com/triangle-in-a-square-quilt-block.html>

When printed correctly this square measures 1"x1"

