

# 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Co. B., Inc.

## Caring For Your Equipment

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By John Braden

(as it appeared in the *Camp Chase Gazette*)

The original equipment used by the Civil War soldier didn't have to last more than four years, and in most cases didn't even last that long. This means that, if you don't want to have to replace your equipment every two or three years, you will have to spend some time maintaining it. Here are some tips on how to do it.

**Steel-Rifle barrel & Bayonet-** Moisture plus steel equals rust. To keep moisture away from your steel items, apply a liberal coat of oil (e.g., 3-in1 oil) to all steel parts when not in use. Although, because of evaporation, oil has to be renewed more often than grease. Grease is harder to clean off when you're ready to use the item, and has a tendency to trap abrasive dirt.

When oiling your rifle, don't neglect the inside of the barrel, the lockplate, and the steel barrel bands (if so equipped). Don't overlook blued steel, it too will rust if not protected.

At an event, protect your rifle from dew by wrapping it in a blanket at night. If it gets rained on be sure to dry it promptly.

Moisture plus gunpowder (which contains salt) plus steel equals even more rust. So always clean your rifle (including hammer, lockplate, nipple and bolster) promptly after a shooting session.

Despite you best efforts, rust will form on your steel parts sooner or later. For bare steel, fine steel wool or emery cloth can be used to remove it. For blued steel, you'll need something softer (like a rough rag and a fingernail), since you don't want to rub the bluing off.

**Wood-**Left untreated, wood dries out, grows brittle, and cracks. The treatment necessary to slow this process depends on the finish your stock already has. If you have a linseed oil finish, simply rubbing some more linseed oil into it will renew the finish. Otherwise, paste wax can be used. Unfortunately, paste wax does eventually

evaporate, requiring annual treatments. And paste wax will rust any steel parts of the rifle if not wiped off.

**Leather**-Belt, Cartridge Box, Cap Pouch, Scabbard & Shoes left untreated, leather will also dry out and crack. The ideal leather treatment:

- soaks deep into the leather to moisturize it
- doesn't evaporate easily
- seals the leather to keep water out
- doesn't stain clothing

Unfortunately, there is no one leather treatment that satisfies all these criteria. Neetsfoot oil, for instance, satisfies only the first criterion. Pecard dressing satisfies all but the first criterion.

I therefore use both on my leather shoes. First I soak them thoroughly with neetsfoot oil (especially the leather soles). Then I liberally apply Pecard dressing (it goes on easier if you melt it first). The result is leather which will repel moisture yet remain soft and pliable for an entire reenacting season.

Since the outer leather items do not get as much abuse as shoes, and you do not want them discolored and oily (which neetsfoot oil would do), I use only Pecard dressing on them.

**Wool**-Uniform, blanket-The main concern with wool is shrinkage. Everyone knows you don't wash wool in hot water, lest it shrink up. If the weave is loose, you can wash wool in cold water without any appreciable shrinkage. However, if the weave is tight, even washing in cold water will cause shrinkage. So if you have a tightly woven wool outfit, you'll have to have it dry-cleaned, or forego cleaning it altogether.

**Cotton**-Shirt, pokes, drawers-Although cotton will shrink the first time you wash it, once you've got all the shrink out of it, you can wash it even in hot water without further shrinkage.

**Brass**-Buckle, buttons-The nice thing about brass is that it really doesn't require any maintenance. Although untreated brass will tarnish, that doesn't hurt anything. If you insist on keeping your brass shiny, a little rubbing compound, a buffing pad and some elbow grease will do the trick.

## **Miscellaneous Items**

A) Canteen-Metal canteens are notorious for gathering rust. The problem is moisture left inside. After every event, use very hot water to wash the inside of the canteen. The hotter the water, the more the water left inside will evaporate. Then hang the canteen upside down to drain, with a wick of paper toweling to absorb moisture left inside. As the wick gets damp, replace it with another until there is no more moisture to absorb.

B) Tin Cups-The cups are not really tin, but galvanized steel. Because of this, you should avoid polishing or scrubbing them. If you rub off the tin galvanizing, you will expose the underlying steel to rust. The best way to clean the inside of the cup (more effective than scrubbing or soap) is simply to boil some coffee in it. As for the outside, simply let go. Soot on the outside of a cup from hanging it over a fire actually protects the surface.

C) Tentage & bedding- Even if it doesn't rain at an event, dew can dampen your tentage and bedding. If you pack them up damp, mildew will result. After the sun has dried my tent, I usually spread my quilt or blanket over the tent until it is also bone dry. If it is too wet at the event to do this, I stretch the damp items out in my garage on arriving home and make sure they're fully dry before packing them up.

D) Haversack- If the tarred finish wears off your haversack or oilcloth, you can renew it by repainting the area with a thin coat of black oil base paint.

E) Rubber Blanket and Poncho- Rubber items will eventually crack, especially if exposed to the sun. To forestall this process, apply some "rubber lube" every couple of years.