

Canteens

Canteens should be the new reenactor's first purchase. This is the only piece of safety equipment we carry and it's essential that it be in working order at every event. This being said, there are many more options out there that many mainstream reenactors never take the time to explore.

Most canteens used during the WBTS were manufactured in the country. Some were imported from Europe and will be dealt with later as a separate category. As you decide which type of canteen, (or types of canteens) you will be using, take a look at what you intend to achieve. If you do any galvanizing, it's a very good idea to make your first (or only purchase) a canteen with Federal origins. With few exceptions, (early war or Georgia militia) the two main types of Federal canteens (smoothside and bullseye) will both be acceptable for Confederate as well. If you do Confederate only, or intend to acquire a canteen for each impression, then take a look at the Confederate section as well. There are a plethora of canteens to look at as options. Whatever you decide, take a look at used equipment sources such as the selling forums of www.cwreenactors.com or www.authentic-campaigner.com. Used equipment saves money and it looks broke in from the get go. Following the categories are sections dealing with proper hydration, canteen hints, and canteen care.

FEDERAL CANTEENS

The two most prominent types of canteens during the WBTS are commonly labeled as follows. If you are in the market for a brand new canteen that you don't have to do any work on, go to <http://www.regutm.com/progressive/progressive.html>. Other vendors will have them in from time to time but Regt. Quartermaster carries them year round, covered the right way, with the right attachments. If you have one of these patterns and you would like to make it more authentic, they also sell recovering kits for \$13. It comes with a sling stamped with the inspectors marks and everything. http://www.angelfire.com/ma4/j_mayo/uscanteen.html has some great pictures of originals.

-Smoothside: This type of canteen was first manufactured in the 1850's for the Regular army. It was issued in large quantities until it was supplanted in manufacturing volume by the 1862 "Bullseye." As a general rule, most were covered the cheapest type of material available, which was usually brown or gray jean cloth. Some were covered in 100% wool, but the majority of surviving originals bear out the documented practice of covering them cheaply. (Remember, it's the Federal Government). Some of these canteens had leather slings while many had cloth slings. Some had jack chains attaching the corks while many had hemp twine attachments.

-Bullseye: In 1862 the existing canteen design was changed to include a series of impressed rings in the sides, ostensibly to make them stronger. The same principle of covering them cheaply with jean cloth seems to have remained the rule until after the war ended. For a Federal impression here in Georgia, a Bullseye will probably be the best option as they seem to be the most common type issued to the western armies that fought here. If you have a bullseye, try to get it covered with some type of jean cloth, and replace the chain with hemp twine. (Jack chains were only found on canteens manufactured at 1 of 4 depots.) If it's not covered with jean, and you don't feel like re-covering it, just take the cloth off. In a lot of pictures, nekkid canteens are pretty prevalent. My personal theory is that the covers got used for patches. (No documentation, just a hunch.) Cloth straps are the best choice for bullseyes, but some leather straps are ok. Don Cofer (Obediah Prophet) makes a great one for cheap.

CONFEDERATE CANTEENS

Confederate canteens took many forms, including tin, wood, even converted gourds and glass bottles wrapped in wicker. While the latter two are great for militia impressions, that is a specialized impression that is probably out of the scope of this article. Robby Mitchell would be a good person to ask regarding these types.

http://www.angelfire.com/ma4/j_mayo/cscanteen.html is a great website showcasing some original canteens.

Tin canteens were a various amalgamation of styles and patterns. I won't go into an extensive discussion on these, but plain tin drums seem to be the most prevalent. I went with an inexpensive tin drum from Regimental QM, (EA 30 <http://www.regqm.com/equipment.htm>) which was only \$19. It came with a cheap linen sling, and a cork tied on with what looked like kite twine, so I replaced the sling with a leather one from Obediahs for \$12. I took the cork and ran some hemp twine through it instead of the kite string and voila, a decent canteen for \$31. There are plenty of other sources out there.

IMPORTED CANTEENS

I know that the south imported several styles of canteens from abroad including "French filter" type, English wood canteens, and others. If you want to go with a style like this, make sure it's well documented, and that whoever's making it is true to the source, and not just making novelties that he can charge double for. For the most part, they weren't prevalent in each theater, which makes them less useful if you need to cross theater lines.

HYDRATION

Dehydration and its attendant heat-related illnesses are the biggest source of health problems in reenacting. They were a huge problem back then as well, oftentimes killing off the equivalents of companies of men. They can be prevented with common sense. Drink PLENTY of water. NCO's are the best tool in the arsenal, as they need to be ensuring the men follow the following steps:

1. Hydrate BEFORE an event, even the cold ones. Try to drink several full glasses of water a day in the three days before an event.

2. Hydrate AT the event. Keep your canteen on you everywhere, sutlers, porto-potties, camp, etc. Get in the habit of taking frequent sips.

3. You don't have to avoid alcohol all together, but remember it's a diuretic, it takes water out of your body. For every 12 oz beer, your body will piss out 18 oz. For every 2 oz shot of liquor, your body will piss out 12 oz. of water.

4. Hydrate during the battles. It's too late for that water to help during the battle, but it will help re-hydrate for the next day, and will prevent headaches which come with dehydration. (Like hangovers) Going back to camp with water in your canteen is a waste.

CANTEEN HINTS/CANTEEN CARE

1. If you've worried about the cover on your Federal canteen, just take it off. If it's stainless steel, then you might want to re-cover it with a jean cloth cover.

2. Shorten the sling to the point that the canteen rides at or above your waistbelt. Most period pictures support this practice. It helps prevent the canteen from banging into your legs during marches, and helps keep it more accessible. Same thing with haversacks. Never put your canteen or haversack under your belt. They need to be accessible.

3. If you like whittling, consider making a cedar stopper for your confederate canteen.

4. Avoid painting designs or unit designations on canteens. Most originals with this had the designs added after the war when the owners were going to veterans reunions.

5. If the inside of your canteen gets rusty, leave it overnight filled with either orange juice or ketchup/hot water. The acid will eat away the rust and old wax. Then run boiling water through it until all of the residual wax is out. While the canteen is still hot, take melted beeswax (about 1/4 cup) and pour it inside. Cork and shake until the inside is coated. Don't uncork until completely cool.

6. Stay away from gatorade in your canteens. It does something with the tin that can make you sick.