

How to Convert a Modern US Army Arctic Canteen to a Civil War Style Canteen

By Lew Zervas, June 13, 2004



This article tells you how the author converted several U.S. Army Arctic canteens (available at several surplus stores) to look somewhat like a Civil War era canteen (upper right in photo).

The advantages are the Arctic canteen is made of stainless steel and is insulated (bare canteen on left in photo). It holds about 28 ounces. The disadvantage is the looks and shape. The arctic canteen is smaller in diameter and thicker. However, with the proper makeover, this is not that noticeable.

The end product (dark blue, middle of photo) should cost about \$15 or half that of a reproduction canteen.

Description of assembly:

The cover pieces (material) is made up of four pieces, two sides, edge material (goes around circumference) and an inner edge material (which adds strength to the edge material), which are bonded together using Heat Bond (iron on). Using this method avoids the need for the three belt loops for the strap. If you wish to weld or epoxy loops, modify the instructions below.

Materials needed:

- One U.S. Army Arctic Canteen (no cover or cup) – about \$8 to 10. Military surplus store.
- Material (wool) cover; about 1/3 yard. Fabric store.
- Matching thread for cover material. Fabric store.
- Duck cloth, heavy cotton. Enough for a 2" X 24" (unfinished) piece. Fabric store.
- Web belting, about one inch wide, natural cotton. About \$4 for two yards. Fabric store.
- Matching heavy thread for web belt. Fabric store.
- Heat Bond. \$2.29 per yard. Buy smallest piece available. JoAnn Fabrics.
- Brass chain, small link. About 50 cents for one foot. Home Depot.
- Brass hose cap. About \$1.20 Ace Hardware store.
- Brass cotter pin, 1/8" by 1-1/4" long. About 25 cents. Ace Hardware store.
- Brass washer, Hardware store
- Cork stopper, size 13/16". About 20 cents. Ace Hardware store.

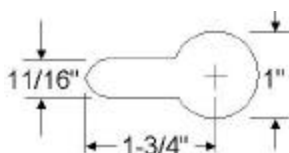
Prepare Canteen:

Remove stopper and rubber insert from canteen. Remove stopper rope leaving ring attached to canteen. Wash and let dry.

Prepare Materials:

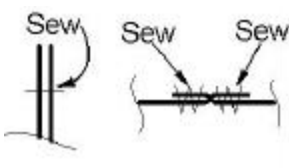
Cut two pieces of wool for sides. This will be 7-3/8" diameter, which includes a 1/2" seam allowance all around. You should also mark the 6-3/8" diameter (for sewing) on the "back" sides. Use pinking shears to avoid a mess.

Cut one piece of wool about 4" by 24" for edge piece.



Cut one piece of duck cloth to 1-1/2" by 21" long. Cut a pattern in the middle of this piece to the exact pattern of the neck of the canteen (see drawing at left). (It will stretch/distort some slipping down over the top.)

This makes the Inner Edge, which gives the carry strap support.



Carry Strap (belt material) should be 72" long (approximate). Lay the belt material so the ends are aligned to each other (no twist in the belt). Using matching heavy thread, sew straight across. Next fold the ends down and sew. You should now have a closed circle.

Making the Cover:

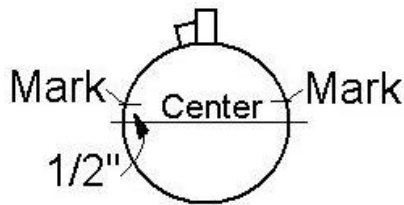
Lay Inner Edge material (duck cloth) flat on the ironing board. Cut a piece of Heat Bond to be the same size, minus 1/2" each end and cutout to match cutout in duck cloth. Iron on the Heat Bond. Cool, then remove the paper backing. Place this on the "back" side of the wool material. Iron so the Heat Bond adheres both materials together. Mark a 1/2" seam allowance (away from duck cloth) around wool. Cut with pinking shears.

Cut some slits in the middle of the wool Edge Material where the opening in the duck cloth is, and fold the material down through the duck cloth and over the opposite side. Sew completely around this fold over like sewing a buttonhole.

Insert canteen neck through hole and check for fit. Pull remainder of Edge Material around the canteen and mark where they meet. (This should be a tight fit.) Remove material and sew ends together as in the photo at the right. Use plenty of thread and as you get to the middle one inch of the seam, sew back from the seam about 1/8" for added strength.



Place the material back on the canteen, visualize an imaginary line horizontally through the center of the canteen. Go to the edge material and mark it about 1/2" above this point on both sides. (This is so the canteen will stay upright when suspended by the strap.) Remove from the canteen.



Align the Carry Strap (belt material) to the center of the Edge Material. This should be done so the Strap's join seam is not on top of Edge Material's joint seam (offset about 1" for added strength).

Sew the Strap to the Edge Material Along both edges of the Strap from mark to mark per the figure at the left. Use additional stitches where the Strap leaves the Edge Material (at the marks).



Turn the Edge/strap material inside out. Determine if your side material stretches more in one direction than the other. If so, the direction with the least stretch should be across, between the straps (to hold the straps to the canteen better).

Sew the Side material (good side in) to the Edge Material, starting from where the Strap and Edge Material are no longer sewn (mark) together, going across to top (neck opening) over to the other side where the Strap is once again sewn to the Edge (other mark). The Side should now be sewn a little less than 180 degrees.

Turn assembly over and sew the other Side the same way.



Turn the assembly right side out. Slip Cover over canteen. This should be a tight fit.

Slip stitch each side, neatly folding the seam allowance under the Sides.

This concludes the Canteen Cover. Everything should be tight, and all seams nice and even.

Making the Cap:



Drill a hole (size to fit the cotter pin) through the brass cap and the cork (separately).

Cut the chain to 6" length. Put end link of chain through loop in cotter pin.

Insert cotter pin through cap and cork, then the flat washer.

Making sure everything is snug (not too tight as to break the cork), bend the cotter pin legs 90 degrees out and flatten out. Trim legs to length so they are not past edge of cork.

Insert other end of chain into the ring on the canteen.

Finished Canteen:

