

UNIFORM & EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

*Tips to keep the "Cat in the Bag" for the British Private Soldier**

WEAPON: Your most important possession!

Stock - Polish the wooden stock of your musket with paste wax. The paste wax made by Min-Wax is good, as is Johnson & Johnson's Floor Wax- If you should ever need to refinish your stock, use Min-Wax's *Colonial Dark Oak* stain.

Barrel - Flush with cold water as soon as practicable following any firing exercise. This will remove the majority of the fouled black powder. Use a brass pump or a "worm" on the ramrod with some Tow to agitate the water in the barrel and empty. Repeat this process until the water that drains from the barrel is clear. Immediately after the water treatment, run dry Tow linen (or small patches of linen, muslin, or flannel attached to the worm) down the barrel to remove any remaining water residue and/or powder. Repeat this procedure until the cloth patch is clean when it emerges from the barrel. At the same time insure that the touchhole in the barrel is clear and unobstructed by fouled powder. Finally, swab the inside of the barrel with a light coat of oil to prevent rust. Polish the outside of the barrel with emery paper cut into 1 inch x 2 inch rectangles. In this size, you can run the paper up & down the barrel w/o touching the wood finish of the stock. On those occasions when you completely remove the barrel from the stock, you can cut the emery paper into 3 inch wide by 10 or 12 inch rectangles and roll them back & forth across the barrel while someone else holds it, shoe-shine style. This really gives a shine! Contemporary accounts note the highly visible barrels of British muskets on the march. As with other metals requiring polish, the period correct way is brick dust applied with an oily rag. The weapon is then dried off with whatever clean rag can be had. Use emery paper when no one is watching. Another technique recommended by some of the old soldiers is to apply a coat of a good car wax to the barrel. This enhances the shine and provides some protection against rust if the weapon is used in damp conditions. If you can find someone who will mark your barrel with proof marks and Bureau of Ordnance acceptance mark, so much the better, but in the meantime it improves authenticity to carefully file away the "Dixie" or Pedersoli brand names at the breech end of the barrel. Leave the serial number alone as this is important for identification purposes and when traveling overseas.

Lock - As with the barrel thoroughly clean as soon as practicable following firing exercises. As a minimum, wipe all fouled powder from exposed surface areas (cock, hammer, springs, etc.). This will prevent the pitting and discoloration of the metal from the corrosive effects of black powder. As time permits, remove the lock mechanism from the stock and clean more thoroughly with hot (boiling) water, using a short stiff bristle brush (or a 21st Century toothbrush) to clean the mechanism, both front and back. Immediately after this procedure, coat the entire assembly with a light coat of penetrating gun oil (or 3-in-1 oil)

to prevent rust. There are some fine commercial cleaning products available when giving the weapon a final cleaning, at fort home (Black Powder Solvent, Gun Oil, Bore Brushes, Patches, etc.). However, with or without these, Guards ensure a thorough cleaning of weapons between events. Proper maintenance results in line-breaking volleys from the Guards, not the occasional pop, pop, pfissst, noises that occur in other units. - *Throughout the cleaning process, try to keep oil and water away from the fiizzen also called the hanmer. Keeping this dry helps keep its temper. If it losses temper through moisture, your weapon will not fire reliably.*

Sling - Our slings are generally for show only. Keep them white with white Hoffco brand shoe polish. Occasionally you will need to remove the accumulated shoe polish. You may do this with a new sheet of very fine sandpaper (NOT EMERY CLOTH). Use new sandpaper to ensure that no dirt or residue from whatever was sanded last gets on a sling you are trying to keep white. Then start over with the white shoe polish. The 4th Company has always used the Brand "Hoffco" polish to whiten white leather gear.

ARMS

Bayonet - Polish with fine steel wool. Handle this as little as possible. The more you put your salty sweaty hands on the metal the more rusted it will get. Wipe with a light grade of oil after steel wooling (0000 grade), and after each handling. Polish the little knob on the bottom of the bayonet scabbard and well as the brass retainer on the side of the scabbard each morning. Polish the front of the scabbard with black shoe polish as needed. Do not polish the side that rubs against your coat!

Light Infantry Axe - Keep it clean. Sharpen it on the cutting edge with a file and sharpening stone so that it is shiny metal for about ½ inch along the arc of the cutting edge. Keep it oriented rearward and under the carriage strap when wearing it in uniform. If the axe head becomes loose, soak it, on the axe, in water overnight, before an event. The swelling of the wood will tighten the fit to some degree.

Short Sword - (when issued) Keep people's fingers off the blade. It does not take long for the acid from human skin to etch a carbon steel blade. Polish the brass parts DAILY.

CARTRIDGE POUCH - Keep the badge polished. It should reflect the hot colonial sun. Be careful to keep polish off the red felt backing. Keep the black leather black, it need not be very shiny, but should not appear gray. Blacken the white stitches that hold the box together with shoe polish. The wooden cartridge block inside should have some type of finish applied to it but not high gloss. A few good coats of floor polish or bowling alley wax is good. This preserves and protects the wood in a natural way AND helps the block slide in and out easily.

Note: Do NOT polish the back of the pouch as this will rub and stain your coat!

BRASS - Obviously you polish it every day. But to bring it up "as good as gold" here is the hint. Make sure the surface is absolutely flat and smooth. Any pits, dents, etc should be sanded out if they are not too deep. In our period brass insignia may have been cast in wet sand so it will be full of pits. Soldiers sometimes rubbed these on cobblestones to get a smoother finish and then went onto the brick dust treatment. Use what ever you like to get the surface smooth and then finish it off with the finest grade of emery paper you can get. Then many, many polishing with brass & flannel will make it shine "as good as gold".

CANTEEN - Step One: do not fall on it when you are wounded or killed in battle. Most inconsiderate to the next sod who inherits it from you! This can be polished with any metal cleaner to keep it clean. Because it carries water, at least in theory, it will rust easily, so to prevent this keep it dry and polished. The old soldiers put a light coat of car wax on it after each polishing and then buff it up. That really does wonders to protect it from rust. The cord suspending it must not contain any synthetic material. Sisal hemp or maybe linen cord but nothing else may be used. If you are really clever, get rid of the cork stopper and buy a real wooden one for a dollar. The cork ones do not stand up to rugged field use.

HAVERSACK - This was used to carry your mess plate, spoon, fork and knife if you had one plus your issued rations. Your haversack should be kept reasonably clean. A gentle wash once per year should do it. After all you put your food in it don't you?

KNAPSACK - This also requires maintenance because you are in the British Army. The goat hair should be brushed gently straight toward the ground. You can spray gently with some odorless hair setting spray. A few trainings like this will make the pack look like the ones in contemporary prints. When you are satisfied all the hair is aligned straight down, carefully trim the hair at the bottom of the pack straight across. The pack straps need not be whitened as this is field equipment and was unlikely to have been polished as for a parade. Your blanket is carried inside the pack, having been folded in quarters along the long axis, with the ends that extend beyond the length of the pack tucked back up into the pack and under the cross straps inside the pack.

BLANKET - There are many period references to soldiers blankets as fairly prized possessions. Punishment for losing same was more severe than with other odd bits of equipage. Of course your blanket may be dry cleaned, but machine washing on "gentle" with Wool-lite works well enough and is cheaper. Dry it on a clothes line ... some things never change.

HAT - Brush it off occasionally. Watch where you pack it. Remove the feathers if they will get crushed. Replace them if they do. Make a small stitch or two to hold the black cockade in place underneath the white "V" shaped ribbon.

HAIR - A very difficult item to maintain just as it was in the 1780's! See the Corporal, Sergeant, or Captain for an instruction sheet on how to fix your hair according to Regimental Regulations. Guards and Royal Artillery wore "clubbed" hair.

COAT - Your regimental coat sets you apart from the "line". The white lacing around the lapels and other edges identify you as a Guardsman as well as our unique button arrangement. It is not necessary to dry clean it too often, perhaps about once every 3 or so years. In hot weather air it out very frequently. Our standard operating procedure in camp is to turn it inside out and hang it over a tent ridge pole as was done in every camp and is shown in contemporary etchings. Inspect it for missing and loose buttons and replace them immediately if they are found wanting. Brush out dirt if you can or try light Wool-lite and cold water. If your buttons become very dull they too can be brightened with Brasso, just put something behind them to ensure no polish gets near your coat. All Brass polish will bleach wool to yellow, like a dog pee'd on you after a hard night in the tavern, so have a care. The two hooks that close the coat near the throat should be made of stout brass wire, if you need this see the corporal. No stainless steel! Not invented yet.

TROWZERS - Machine wash in cold water. Remove the leather instep straps before washing. Use a button on the inside of the leg cuff to re-secure the strap. Keep that strap polished or waxed or use mink oil on it to preserve durability. From the knee down your trowzers should fit quite close to the leg. Remember in the 18th century a man's sex appeal was judged by the turn of his calf. Hence the expression "put your best foot forward." Guards should excel in this area as with all others.

SHOES - When caring for your shoes, think about re-enacting the Battle Road events where we marched 12 or so miles in those shoes. Take care of them and they will take care of you. A guardsman's shoes should be rough leather side showing out. Polish the buckle as instructed above if you are wearing a uniform where it will show. Apply one good coat of "mink oil" to assist in making the shoes waterproof in the winter. Store the shoes on shoetrees. This helps preserve their shape and fit. Polish the shoes with black or neutral shoe polish after each wearing. This will make an expensive item last much longer. During our historical period, soldiers blacked their shoes with a "black ball." It was a dirty and nearly thankless job. The "black ball" was made of wax, charcoal soot, various types of oil and some times even gunpowder. R. Najecki sells a good enough replica today. Replica or otherwise, a black ball should not be stored in the sunlight and not even carried on summer days lest more than shoes get black! Hobnails should be put into the heel in the shape of a letter "u" with an additional line of nails up the center of the "u". The hobnails reduce wear on the leather heels and again contribute to longer life for the shoes. Hobnails should be the ones sold by Colonial Williamsburg or other suttlers that are about ¼ inch wide on their head, not unlike some of the recruits we've been sent lately.

** This old expression actually comes from a soldier's effort to avoid punishment by flogging with a whip composed of leather thongs beaded with lead pellets every few inches. This was called "the cat of nine tails" It was carried in an easily identifiable bag, often by the senior drummer in Infantry Regiments. When the "cat was out of the bag" it meant someone was in for trouble and would be flogged. So the bottom end of the rank structure wanted to keep misdeeds a secret so as to keep the "cat in the bag."*