

# Canteen Research for the RNR

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Here are some of the results of my research into a historically accurate canteen for members of the unit. I discuss the following canteen characteristics:

- Pattern
- Markings
- Colour
- Size

I also include a number of images of original canteens, and for comparison some images of reproduction canteens.

## Pattern

The standard British Army canteen for the American Revolutionary War was tin-plated, curved, and suspended by a cord. This was replaced around 1800 by a small blue-painted wooden cask, suspended by a leather strap.<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Henderson both models were still in use during our period.<sup>2</sup> Which model is more accurate for the RNR?



Canteens and haversacks were not used by troops in garrison. Rather, they were classified as camp equipage and only issued to units when they went into the field. They remained Crown property (were usually so marked), and were supposed to be returned to the Commissary General (or Army QM if overseas) stores when the unit returned from the field.<sup>3</sup>

The RNR was posted in Quebec City from September 1807 to May 1812, after which date detachments from the regiment were sent to various naval and army stations.<sup>4</sup> Quebec was the capitol, and location of the main army quartermaster stores for Canada. It's five-year posting to the capitol strongly suggests that the RNR had access to regulation gear during this period; by the end of the yearly resupply cycle the regiment would have been provided with current-pattern army clothing.<sup>5</sup>

The same should apply to canteens. It appears that much clothing and equipment was made locally under contract, following patterns or models retained in the Commissary General department.<sup>6</sup> It appears that these patterns came over to Canada from Britain fairly quickly once adopted.<sup>7</sup> New canteens made under contract would have been modeled on the current army wooden pattern canteen. Thus, while the older pattern tin canteen could have been issued from stores, as the many canteens made to meet the war's demand were the wooden ones, ***it is more likely that the newer model wood canteen was prevalent.***

## Marking

↑  
C R The “broad arrow” has been used since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century to mark Crown property, especially ordnance and other military items. Wooden canteens were marked by branding (presumably so they could not be painted out).

What mark, if any, should be on canteens used by the RNR? The main options are:

- “GR” under the broad arrow (*Georgius Rex*) signifies Crown property made in the reign of George III, so is good until 1820.
- After 1808 the Storekeeper-General department of the Treasury contracted for camp equipage (and distributed it in the British Isles; the Quartermaster Department of the Army distributed overseas), so you might have “SG” under the broad arrow after this date (although I am unaware of any originals so marked).
- The Ordnance Board did not take over this function until 1822, so *no canteens made for the Army during our period would be marked with “BO” under the broad arrow.*<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, most images of 1812-period canteens that I found show the canteens branded with the letters “GR” under the broad arrow. The Victorian-era canteens (Crimean War period) are branded “BO” under the broad arrow, and also tend to be branded with the year of manufacture, often “1854”.<sup>9</sup>



GR brands: Niagara Historical Society, Franklin, Packer canteens

BO+1854 brand: Canadian War Museum, NC museum canteens

**No painted unit markings** seems to be the rule. Apparently the majority of surviving original canteens are unmarked.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, although aggregate numbers of camp equipage were tracked for a unit, there seems to have been no general system in place prior to 1811 for keeping track of individual canteens and haversacks issued or returned—hence little need to mark them.<sup>11</sup> (The big exception to this was units in the Peninsula, where units retained camp equipage for an extended period while on campaign.<sup>12</sup>)

**So, safest—and accurate—would be no brand. If a brand is desired, “GR” under the broad arrow reproduces known examples. No regimental marking should be painted onto the canteen.**

## Colour

I have not been able to precisely determine one original canteen colour. “Uniformity” may have had a more relative sense in this period. Under the period procurement system, whereby items were produced under contract to conform to an approved sample (“pattern”), conformity was most likely approximate, not exact. As this is the case with respect to canteen size, it seems reasonable to suspect that slight variations in the original colour shades of canteen paint occurred as well. I suspect that it is unlikely that the paint of the 2,000 canteens made for the Commissary General in Quebec in 1812 (see footnote 6) exactly matched the paint of canteens made in Britain. Original artifacts do not resolve the issue either, for after 200 years the colour shades of surviving original canteens vary considerably.

That said, evidence of period artifacts and images consistently indicates that canteens were painted a grey-blue colour. Rod Silverson, a maker of reproduction canteens, was provided with a paint colour chip by Canadian War Museum staff, matched to originals in the museum collection. Here are two paint colours that approximate that shade.<sup>13</sup>



Behr 540 F-5 “Smoky Blue”



Behr 5640 “Colonial Blue”

## Pictures of original and reproduction canteens

Below are some pictures of original canteens. Nine are from the 1812 period, five of which are branded with “GR” under the broad arrow. Eleven are from the Victorian period, branded with either “BO” or “WD”, the broad arrow, and the year “1854”, “1856” or “1861”.<sup>14</sup> These are followed by pictures of four quality reproductions of the British wooden canteen. Third is a scan of pages 10 and 11 from Pierre Turner’s book, which illustrates other original canteens.

## Original British 1812-era canteens



1. GR brand, Niagara Historical Society



2. GR brand, (NMM, UK)



3. 1812 canteen, BO stamp, Canadian War Museum



4 GR brand.



5. Brussels Army Museum



6. SG brand  
Private collection



7. 1812 canteen excavated  
Bath, ON



8. 1812 canteen, no stamp



9. GR brand  
Bob Yuil collection

### Original Crimean-era canteens



10. 1812 GR adjacent to BO 1854  
Bob Yuil collection



11. BO, 1854 brand, NC museum



12. BO, 1854 brand, Canadian War Museum



13. WD 1861



14. WD 1856



15. Crimean canteen, British Swiss Legion [BO 1854]



16. British wooden drum canteen (1859) at Jefferson Barracks. St. Louis, MO.



17. BO 185x  
Bob Yuil collection



18. Unknown marked.



19. Unidentified marked  
Salisbury Wardrobe



20. WD 1854  
Salisbury Wardrobe



21. WD 1861 Middlebrook collection

## Some of the better reproductions



22. Original (GR) and repro (BO). Kochlan & Phillips Historic Textiles



23 Jim Keller reproduction



24. The Discriminating General reproduction



25. Len the Cooper GR reproduction

## Size

Below are pages illustrating the 1812 and 1854 canteens from Pierre Turner's book on British army accoutrements.



Turner's drawings and measurements are taken from original items. He shows 4 from our period, and provides measurements for 2: 7-1/4" x 3-3/4", and 7" x 4". So we can see that dimensions varied slightly, while overall proportions remained the same.

I've also included his page on the later, BO-branded version. It appears that the dimensions of the pattern did not change. The one he illustrates is approximately 7" x 3 3/4". Note that the strap on the 1812 is 68", while the 1854 is 64"; iron buckle for 1812, brass roller buckle for 1854, with different stitching for the keeper on each. Turner quotes Frank Packer's research to show that the 1810 BGO strap specs are 68" x 1".

Here is a table that combines the measurements for these various canteens.

Canteen	Diameter	Stave	Strap	Buckle
Turner 1812 a	7 1/4"	3 1/4"	68"	iron
Turner 1812 b KGL	7"	4"		
1812 Niagara GR (1)	7"	3 7/8"		
NMM GR (2)	7 1/4"	4"		
Turner 1854 BO	7"	3 3/4"	64"	brass
NC 1854 BO (10)	7 1/4"	3 3/4"		
CWM 1812 BO (3)	7"	4 1/4"		
CWM 1854 BO (11)	7"	3 7/8"		
WD 1856 (13)	7 1/4"			

Note that although no two of these canteens are the same size, *all* of them are within 1/4" of 7" x 4".

### Conclusion

The standard British infantry canteen carried by the RNR would have been as follows:

- *of the oak drum pattern, approximately 7" in diameter and 4" deep*
- *marked by a broad arrow GR brand*
- *painted grey blue, without any regimental markings, and*
- *featuring a 68" strap of unstained leather with an iron buckle.*

Our reproductions should adhere to the same specifications.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pierre Turner, *Soldiers' Accoutrements of the British Army 1750-1900* (Crowood Press, 2006), p. 10, the first contemporary image portraying a British soldier with the wooden canteen is dated 1794. He also quotes an 1813 contract for "20,000 wooden canteens to contain three pints...the timber to be the best Riga oak." *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Robert Henderson, "British Army Wooden Canteen 1793-1861" (<http://www.militaryheritage.com/canteen.htm>).

*The wooden canteen was first officially sanctioned in 1793. Trotter and Sons, the main manufacturer, were recorded making over 200,000 of them by 1803. That said there was still a mixture of tin and wooden canteens available to the troops throughout the Napoleonic Wars as shown in military store records.*

<sup>3</sup> For example see *Notes on War of 1812 Tents and Camp Equipage* by Keith Raynor (<http://www.warof1812.ca/tents.htm>). Item #2, "Return of Camp Equipage remaining in Store at Quebec", dated October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1811, shows 5,760 canteens 33½ bales of haversacks, and 3 bales of knapsacks (among other items). Item #3, "Field Equipment Return of the 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. 88<sup>th</sup> Regiment", Quebec Harbour, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1815, shows an effective strength of 930 men, and returns of exactly 930 each of canteens, haversacks, and blankets (among other items).

<sup>4</sup>Rodney T. Lee, *A Directory of the Officers & Men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 1795-1816* (Canada: Self-published, 2011), p. 154. The letters of Capt. Tom Nairne of the RNR mention the regiment's posting to Quebec City during this period. Discussed in George M. Wrong, *A Canadian Manor and its Seigneurs: The Story of a Hundred Years, 1761-1861* (Toronto: The Bryant Press, 1908) pp. 124ff. Electronic copy: (<http://www.xklsv.net/xklsvbook.php?bookid=4532>).

<sup>5</sup> Most items of clothing were replaced yearly; caps and greatcoats (in Canada) every two years. See Table IX, Table of Necessaries in I. Ross Bartlett, "Treasure in a Trunk: Records of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment in Canada, 1836" (<http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/viewArticle/11495>). As a fencible regiment, the RNR was uniformed and equipped as regular infantry. See discussion of the 1812 RNR uniform and equipment in Jack L. Summers and Rene Chartrand, *Military Uniforms in Canada, 1665-1970* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1981); reproduced as *History and Uniform of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry* ([http://www.warof1812.ca/r\\_newfld.htm](http://www.warof1812.ca/r_newfld.htm)).

<sup>6</sup> See the compilation by Rene Chartrand, *Uniform and Militia References in Canadian Newspapers during the War of 1812* (<http://www.warof1812.ca/newspapr.htm>) for the range of military items contracted for locally. Especially:

*GOVERNMENT CONTRACT. Wanted for the use of His Majesty's troops, two thousand CANTEENS, agreeable to a pattern to be seen at this office [Commissary General's]...on or before 1st March next - ... Quebec Gazette, 31 December 1812 (also in Quebec Mercury, 29 December 1812)*

<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation Peter Twist, 24 January 2011. Although the significant lead time required to get items to North America (completed for inspection in February in order to be issued on December 25) could delay dissemination of a new pattern up to at least a year. See the discussion in Rene Chartrand, *A Scarlet Coaat: Uniforms, Flags and Equipment of the British in the War of 1812* (Ottawa: Service Publications, 2011), 52-3.

<sup>8</sup> See the extensive information provided by Frank Packer in the discussion thread on "BO" markings, found on the 2/95<sup>th</sup> Rifles Forum ([http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/B\\_O\\_\\_about293.html](http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/B_O__about293.html)). E.g.:

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*...prior to 1787 camp equipment might be purchased by the regiment, by the Army, or by the Treasury; but the ultimate owner was still the regiment as they were paid for out of their funds. Between 1787 and 1806, canteens and haversacks would be ordered by the Army, and either remained Army property 'on loan' to units until returned, or owned by the unit outright (both events seem to have happened). After 1808, and until 1822, canteens and haversacks were purchased by the Treasury, issued by the SGD (Treasury) or Quartermaster (Army), and on loan to units (that is, expected to be returned or accounted for).*

And,

*It is possible that GR markings would be used up until 1830 as has already been noted in this thread, although I would expect equipment for Army use (as opposed to militia equipment) to have the SG markings from 1808 to 1821. I have never found equipment of Commissariat provenance, but following the pattern I would expect it to be a C with broad arrow. From 1825 on the BO marking would take over, depending on the type of equipment (Ordnance had been issuing some types of tents as early as 1803), with WD being used after 1855.*



**SG brand**



**WD + 1856 brand**

<sup>9</sup> According to Henderson, *op.cit.*,

*The hundreds of thousands of canteens made in the Napoleonic Wars seem to have meet the needs of the British Army all the way up to 1854 when a new run of canteens was ordered to meet the possible increase in demand because of the Crimean War.*

<sup>10</sup> Turner, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Board of General Officers, Miscellaneous Reports, 29th June 1811. NA PRO WO7/56,p.100. Quoted in Packer, *op. cit.* Packer observes:

*This seems to suggest that from 1808 to at least 1811, there is no system in place to keep track of or account for the canteens and haversacks given out to the men; and presumably no process for returning these items nor inspecting them on return, as no one seems to know who has what or in what condition it is. There would be little point in the issuing department marking them under these circumstances, and this appears to agree with the large numbers of unmarked canteens which you have noted.*

<sup>12</sup> Henderson, *op. cit.* And:

*During the War of 1812 British regiments and the Canadian militia were issued canteens out of Commissariat stores that were not regimentally marked because they were expected to be returned. The same was the case for regiments stationed in Great Britain.*

*However British troops serving in the Peninsular War, because of the lack of depots, had their canteens purchased by their regiment from the Commissariat and therefore were regimentally marked with white lead paint to show this new ownership.*

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*For the later Waterloo campaign, because many of the regiments were coming directly from home service in Great Britain, the majority of the canteens there would not have been regimentally marked. This is supported by an 1815 oil sketch by G. Jones of two Foot Guardsmen which shows a canteen front-and-centre with no regimental markings.*

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Rod Silverson, July 2012. I also asked maker Jim Keller about the paint colour that he uses on his reproduction canteens:

*Oil base, Tremclad colonial blue rust paint is what I use but I put soapstone dust (mineral talc) in the paint to flatten it so it is not glossy. I went to their site [www.rustoleum.com](http://www.rustoleum.com) and doing a colour match came up with the following digital code:*

*R=99  
G=135  
B=167*

I was unable to find this specific colour in the current Tremclad line. Using Jim's code, I came up with the Colonial Blue shade in the readily-available Behr line. Jim also has access to the CWM canteens; note how close his colour is to that used by Rod Silverson.

<sup>14</sup> Online sources for these images are:

**1. GR brand, Niagara Historical Society**

*War of 1812 Soldier's Water Canteen*, Niagara Historical Society Museum (<http://images.ourontario.ca/niagarahs/71283/data>); also (<http://images.ourontario.ca/1812/71283/data>).

**2. GR brand, (NMM, UK)**

Canteen (AAA2271), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. (<http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/explore/object.cfm?ID=AAA2271>).

A relic of Sir John Franklin's last expedition 1845-48, found in an Inuit cache at Cape Maria Louisa by the Schwatka Search Expedition 1878-79.

**3. 1812 canteen, BO stamp**

19760351-002 Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Ontario (<http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/explore/collections/artifact-catalogue/artifact-catalogue>).

Despite the "BO" brand, the museum states this is an Army canteen from the 1795-1805 period. Robert Henderson told me that the Army provenance for this canteen is clear. His research into military store records shows that when necessary Ordnance supplies were utilized by Army quartermasters, and paid for later. He speculates this may account for how some Army canteens have Ordnance brands. (Conversation, 26 February 2011.) In other words, this may have been a canteen made for the Royal Artillery, say, but requisitioned from Ordnance stores by the Army QM. Unfortunately, this highly atypical canteen has been widely reproduced as a typical Army canteen.

**4. GR brand.** Posted by Frank Packer.

([http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o.\\_o\\_t\\_t\\_293.html](http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o._o_t_t_293.html)).

**5. Brussels Army Museum**

From the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History, Brussels, Belgium ([www.klm-mra.be](http://www.klm-mra.be)). Posted (<http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/ftopic210-15.php>).

**6. SG brand, Private collection**

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**7. 1812 canteen excavated Bath, ON**

([http://lennox-addington.on.ca/e-history/virtual\\_exhibits/2\\_borders\\_and\\_frontiers/canteen.html](http://lennox-addington.on.ca/e-history/virtual_exhibits/2_borders_and_frontiers/canteen.html)).

**8. 1812 canteen, no stamp.** Civil War Antiques online catalogue

(<http://www.angelfire.com/oh3/civilwarantiques/110802WebCat.html>).

**9. GR brand Bob Yuil collection,** posted

(<http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/ftopic210-0-asc-0.php>)

**10. GR next to BO1854. Bob Yuil collection,** posted

(<http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/ftopic210-0-asc-0.php>).

**11. BO, 1854 brand, NC museum** [CANTEEN H.19XX.326.86.](http://collections.ncdcr.gov/dcr/ProficioScript.aspx?IDCFile=PAGE.IDC) North Carolina Museum of History

(<http://collections.ncdcr.gov/dcr/ProficioScript.aspx?IDCFile=PAGE.IDC>).

A surplus canteen purchased by the Confederacy during the American Civil War.

**12. BO.1854 brand, Canadian War Museum.** No longer online.

**13. WD 1861**

(<http://www.historicalimagebank.com/gallery/main.php/v/album02/album23/E52d-+British+Wooden+Canteen+copy.jpg.html>).

**14. WD 1856** 7 ¼" diameter

([http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/11570115\\_civil-war-era-british-wood-canteen](http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/11570115_civil-war-era-british-wood-canteen)).

**15. Crimean canteen, British Swiss Legion [BO 1854]**

(<http://www.victorianwars.com/viewtopic.php?f=19&t=5726>)

**16. British wooden drum canteen (1859) at Jefferson Barracks. St. Louis, MO.**

Photo by [Jim Steinhart](#) © 2012, all rights reserved. (Ref: MOLX349)

<http://travelphotobase.com/v/USMO/MOLX349.HTM>

**17 BO 185x Bob Yuil collection,** posted

<http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/ftopic210-0-asc-0.php>

**18. Unknown marked.**

Posted: [http://www.napoleon-series.org/cgi-bin/forum/archive2006\\_config.pl?md=read;id=64948](http://www.napoleon-series.org/cgi-bin/forum/archive2006_config.pl?md=read;id=64948)

**19. Unidentified marked, Salisbury Wardrobe.** The military museum of the Berkshire and Wiltshire regiments, The Wardrobe, Salisbury, England.

([http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o.\\_\\_o\\_t\\_t\\_293.html](http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o.__o_t_t_293.html)).

**20. WD 1854, Salisbury Wardrobe.,** The military museum of the Berkshire and Wiltshire regiments, The Wardrobe, Salisbury, England.

([http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o.\\_\\_o\\_t\\_t\\_293.html](http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/archive/b.o.__o_t_t_293.html)).

**21. WD 1861 Middlebrook collection.** British military canteen, manufactured in 1861, used at the Battle of Gate Pa in April of 1864, Sam Middlebrook collection.

<http://www.coastandcountrynews.co.nz/news/68365-exhibition-of-pioneers-collection.html>

**22. Original (GR) and repro (BO). Kochlan & Phillips Historic Textiles**

([http://www.historicaltextiles.com/Other\\_Products.html](http://www.historicaltextiles.com/Other_Products.html))

Can be purchased with either GR or BO brand.

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**23 Jim Keller reproduction**

(<http://www.jgkeller.ca/Reenactment.html>)

Can be purchased without BO brand.

**24 The Discriminating General reproduction**

(<http://www.militaryheritage.com/canteen.htm>)

This appears to be a copy of the atypical canteen in the Canadian War Museum (number **3** above).

**25 Len the Cooper reproduction**

([lheidebrecht@gmail.com](mailto:lheidebrecht@gmail.com))

Len Heidebrecht interpreted cooperage at Black Creek Pioneer Village for ten years. GR or BO brand available.

Enlarge the images of the canteens on the websites for a clear view of the branded markings.

Toronto

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