

REVISED: The Canteens and Haversacks of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

by

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In 1985, work by Mark Reitz uncovered several references to the initial issue of the regiment, in terms of uniform. These references, coupled with the image of Arthur J. Robinson from the cover of his post-war booklet Memorandum and Anecdotes of the Civil War, provided clues as to the appearance of the men from the original Thirty-third Wisconsin Infantry in Autumn, 1862.

A series of research inquiries began in 1991, which examined virtually every item of use and issue to the Western Federal Soldier—especially those of the Thirty-third Wisconsin. More recently, unfolding historical information has indicated that the Thirty-third Wisconsin refocus on two common items of issue: the canteen and the haversack.

THE CANTEEN.

Two significant pieces of information have surfaced that force us to rethink my 1885 reasoning regarding the canteen for the 33rd Wisconsin and recommendations for reenactors. These include: the Military Collector and Historian article by Earl J. Coats entitled “The Civil War Issue Canteens: Patterns of 1858 and 1862,” and the emergence of an original canteen issued to Private Edwin Oates of Company G, Thirty-third Wisconsin, from the Jeff Alderson collection.

Mr. Coats’ information indicates that two significant historical facts have a direct impact on the canteens used by current ACW reenactors: 1) Apparently, only canteens issued from the New York Depot had their corks attached with a jack-chain; and 2) Corrugated canteens were apparently the sole product of the Philadelphia Depot. Mr. William Brewster, curator of collection at the Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum reasoned that the depot located in Milwaukee furnished the uniforms and equipment for the Thirty-third while at Camp Utley. Therefore, it would seem more likely than not that in the Fall of 1862, the equipment would be requisitioned and sent from western depots to the Milwaukee depot. This assumption reduces the likelihood that depots like New York or Philadelphia shipped equipment in general, and canteens in particular, to Milwaukee. There remains, of course, the possibility that these items were, in fact shipped from eastern sources. The reason for this assertion is found in several canteens used by Wisconsin soldiers in the collection of the Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum that have jack chained stoppers. Such canteens have recently been associated with the New York Depot and only that depot. The kind of canteen initially issued to the regiment remains unclear— although most investigators agree that it was probably NOT the corrugated canteen variant.

Several images of soldiers of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Infantry Regiment were taken while the unit was training at Camp Utley, Racine during the fall of 1862. One of these was a full length photograph of Private Tollef Leversen, Company E. The picture shows the subject clad in standard infantry uniform, armed with a Pattern of 1853 Tower Enfield rifle-musket with bayonet, and with a canteen strap and haversack strap crossed over the chest. No leather accouterment is pictured. This indicates that the image was taken sometime between October 26, 1862 (when Enfields, overcoats, haversacks, knapsacks and canteens were issued) and November 10, 1862 (when leather accouterment, including gun slings, were issued.) The

Leverson image, from the Howard V. Garrison collection, was for many years the only known image of a Thirty-third soldier wearing the canteen and the haversack. More on the haversack later.

The barest hint of the canteen may be seen under Leversen's arm. Visible features include: one strap keeper loop, the spout, and a hint of the canteen covering, which is lighter in shade than Leversen's sky-blue kersey trousers. Although it is difficult to identify color from a black and white photograph, I have inferred that the color could be either light brown or gray. The ability to actually infer colors from the black and white photographic process is generally unreliable.

Leversen's sewn cloth canteen strap is also consistent with straps known to have been provided by depots (or secured from contractors, in the case of the New York Depot) after August, 1862. At that time, the Philadelphia Depot had stopped completely the practice of manufacturing and providing occasional leather canteen straps with its cloth straps. By September 7, the depot has switched over to one-inch white cotton herringbone webbing for canteen straps. Other federal depots soon followed suit. Mr. Coats, p. 102, pointed out that "there is no solid evidence to suggest that either the St. Louis or Cincinnati used anything but sewn cotton (or linen) straps, and three documented Cincinnati Depot examples do retain sewn cloth straps." Unfortunately, one can infer little more from the image beyond these facts.

Enter the Edwin Oates canteen. The canteen is a smoothside oblate spheroid, consistent with many depot-produced or procured canteens. The cover is a grayish brown coarse cotton and wool diagonal weave material consistent with surviving canteens with New York or Cincinnati Depot provenance. The sewn cotton or linen strap is knotted in several places. The construction of the strap compares favorably to straps issued from the Cincinnati Depot and elsewhere. The canteen shows usage beyond its fare as a post-war child's plaything, as the sides bear modest dark staining consistent with rubbing against a "tarred" haversack. Several canteens in the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum bear this peculiar staining. Further, the canteen bears a tin spout with a distinct side seam, comparable to tin spouts seen on canteens associated with Cincinnati Depot specimens. While the canteen is missing its cork stopper, there is no hole punched into a strap keeper for a jack-chain, as is seen on canteens bearing New York Depot provenance.

Private Oates probably drew his canteen later in his military service, as opposed to the canteen worn by Tollef Leversen. This guess is born out by several observations: 1) the comparatively good condition of the artifact; 2) the strap, covering (a weft-faced, cotton and wool diagonal weave material—not jean), and rolled lip and soldered seam tin spout construction, which is virtually identical to an artifact manufactured by O. Holden & Co. and distributed through the Cincinnati Depot. O. Holden and Co. received a contract on August 11, 1863 for 83,100 canteens. Since Holden stamped his maker's mark on the strap as opposed to the spout, only a further examination of the Oates strap could confirm the actual maker. A second canteen identified to the maker Geo. D. Mitchell, Marsh & Co. bore construction features similar to that of the Oates canteen. There were several opportunities for Oates to draw this canteen later in the war, twice (in early October 1864 and again a month later) from St. Louis, itself. [This does not mean the canteen was issued from the St. Louis Depot. I have made this point merely to demonstrate the close proximity of the regiment to the St. Louis Depot during two specific instances during the Thirty-third's service.]

The Oates canteen bears manufacturing and finished features similar to those attributed to the Cincinnati depot, and possibly the St. Louis Depot. It does not bear the corrugated features of one of the models issued by the Philadelphia Depot, nor does it bear the jack chain features associated with New York Depot issues. Clearly, the proximity of the Thirty-third to both St. Louis and the Mississippi River during its final nine months of service makes reissues from western depots the most likely scenario.

Conclusion: While the initial issue canteen of the Thirty-third Regiment remains, for now, unknown, it is reasonable to conclude that the canteen was a smoothside version. Unquestioningly, the later issues of canteens to the men are reflected in the artifact Oates canteen.

THE HAVERSACK.

Despite the lack of photographic evidence, there seems little doubt the Thirty-third Wisconsin was issued and re-issued the standard federal pattern haversack with black coating. However, this thinking may require modest modification in light the Tollef Leversen image and the newly discovered Richard Flora image.

As stated earlier, Leversen was pictured in an infantry dress coat, trimmed dress hat, sky-blue trousers. Further, he wore a canteen strap and haversack strap crossed over the chest. This indicates that the image was taken sometime between October 26, 1862 (when Enfields, overcoats, haversacks, knapsacks and canteens were issued) and November 10, 1862 (when leather accouterment, including gun slings, were issued.) The crossed haversack and canteen strap gave Leversen a martial appearance reminiscent of the antebellum militia days of early Wisconsin. This is so because the haversack strap is white.

Only the strap is visible. It shows a strap of perhaps 1 ½ inch wide, with the seam sewn the length of the strap placed away from the wearer, but visible to the viewer. The strap appeared to be too narrow and lacking in blue woven lines to be a Wisconsin state issue haversack. Upon initial review, the most reasonable explanation was that the haversack worn by Tollef Leversen was an unpainted haversack of



white drilling, similar to the Dickinson and Cope haversacks as seen in Echoes of Glory: The Arms and Equipment of the Union, p. 211.

Enter the Richard Flora image, provided through the kind permission of Susan Packard. This image clearly shows, among other excellent details, that Flora wore the Wisconsin State issue haversack. The narrow strap with the double lines of blue woven length-wise into the strap is apparent under magnification, as is the shiny painted bag of the haversack itself. When examined against the Leversen image, the straps bear similar features. Both these photographic examples compare favorably to the original state-issue haversack issued to a member of the First Wisconsin Cavalry, and displayed at the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum, Madison.

Conclusion: Members of Companies "A" and "E" and possibly most or all of the Thirty-third Regiment received haversacks whose features clearly reflect those issued by the State of Wisconsin as part of its initial issue at Camp Utley. While it seems unlikely that state issue equipment would still

have been made in late Autumn, 1862, the photographic evidence seems compelling. When these first haversacks wore out, we may conclude presumptively that Federal pattern haversacks of painted drilling were almost certainly drawn by Regimental Quartermaster John Nichols and issued to the men.