

# *Canteen Cook System, Modifications that WORK*

By Gert Grohmann



**Kit contents and required tools.**

If you've ever watched a war movie, you have probably encountered a scene with a battle weary soldier leaning back in his foxhole, gratefully wrapping his hands around a steaming metal cup of coffee that he heated up on his canteen cooking system. You can see GI canteen cups and cooking systems carried by Clint Eastwood in Heartbreak Ridge, used by Tom Hanks in Saving Private Ryan, and put to a variety of other uses by the Duke in many WWII movies.

Gert Grohmann has been involved with the Midwest Native Skills Institute <http://www.survivalschool.com> for 5 years and also serves as the Scoutmaster for the Mequon/Thiensville Boy Scout troop 852 where he has earned a reputation through his fire making and shelter building demonstrations. One of his greatest joys is sharing his knowledge of woodsmanship with the next generation through scouting. He is also a firefighter/EMT and a father and husband. He camps, hunts and backpacks all over Wisconsin whenever he can find time away.



**Marking the canteen to cut**

For a growing group of savvy outdoorsmen, the GI canteen cup and its cooking system have become an inexpensive, reasonably lightweight alternative to the increasingly expensive cooking sets marketed by many high end manufacturers. In fact, in one form or another, this cup has been the cook system of choice for thousands of troops and, later, civilians for almost 100 years. Any GIs worth their salt modified and changed this system to better meet their needs. Some modifications work well and others don't, but here are two modifications and two new products that have served me well.

### **Making your own canteen storage system**

One of my needs was for a simple, compact way to carry my cook kit, including my stove, spork, fuel, eating bowl, lighter, canteen cup and stove stand. Well, I found a solution while searching



**Cutting the canteen**



**The canteen storage system with the top removed**

YouTube one day and I wanted to share it with you here.

First you start with a standard USGI plastic canteen, canteen cup, canteen cup stove stand and canteen pouch.

Next, take the canteen, insert it into the canteen cup, and draw a line with a permanent marker around the outside of the canteen at the the top of the cup.

Now remove the canteen from the canteen cup and use a utility razor knife to make a horizontal cut through the plastic canteen about ½ inch below your marker line. Cutting ½ inch below the top of the cup makes the assembled system more stable.

You can cut the top off of the canteen using a utility knife, but I found that a pair of trauma shears



**Kit in pouch top off**



**Kit in pouch top on**

or tin snips are much easier to use, once you have enough room to get the blade into the canteen. Cut as neatly as possible around the entire perimeter of the canteen until you have completely separated the top and bottom portions. Clean up any rough or ragged edges and you are done.

It is just that simple. Now you have a great storage container that is just under fifty-eight cubic inches in size for your soda can stove, four ounce



**Pre-filtering water using the canteen top and a coffee filter**



**Cup Stove with grill in front**

bottle of fuel, lighter, some coffee or tea packets and perhaps some coffee filters to pre-filter water. I even keep several packets of USGI gel fuel, in case I run out of the Heet (gas line antifreeze) fuel that I use for my stove.

Now just pack your kit into the Molle canteen pouch. The boil lid goes in first and rests upside down on the bottom of the pouch. Next nest the canteen cup stove stand around the canteen cup and place it in the pouch. Put your stove, fuel, lighter, spork and filters into the bottom of the canteen and place that into the canteen cup. Place the top of the canteen over the items in the canteen cup. Roll up the pouch cover and tuck it behind the canteen cup. Place the strap over the canteen neck, buckle it, and you are set. The webbing and buckle hold the top of the canteen in place.



**Cup stove with grill installed**



**Grill with canteen cup in place**



**Boil lid in cup**

The bottom of the canteen serves as a great eating bowl, and can also be used as a mixing bowl or used to hold hot drinks or foods from the canteen cup while the metal cup is too hot to drink or eat from comfortably.

The top of the canteen can be used as a funnel to pour water into a small mouth container or to hold coffee filters for pre-filtering cloudy or muddy water that needs to be cleaned.

Once you have assembled the kit in its canteen pouch, it is virtually impossible differentiate from a standard canteen kit. To make it easier to tell my water canteen from my cook set, I use my USGI canteen for the cook kit and I use one of the Nalgene see-through canteens for carrying water.

The beauty of this kit is twofold. First, you can assemble this kit, including everything you need to cook and eat from for under sixty dollars. (You can spend significantly more than that on a titanium pot alone) and, if you shop around, you can get everything for under forty dollars. Second, if you use the Molle canteen pouch/utility pocket, you can carry this kit on your belt, strap it to your pack, or even carry it on a paracord shoulder strap. This kit fits so neatly on your belt, you don't need to take up room in your pack. I carry this kit on the waist belt



**Canteen shop stove stand**



**Boil lid sideways**

of my backpack on one side and my Nalgene canteen in a pouch on the other side.

### Improving the USGI Canteen Cup Stove Stand

The GI Canteen Cup was intended to serve as more than just a drinking mug. It was also designed to act as a cooking pot. Just put whatever you want to heat up in the cup and put the cup on a set of coals. The trouble with this arrangement is that coals and flame will blacken the cup and soot can get on your clothes, cover, hands, etc. Besides that, the cup and handles can get too hot to touch with your bare hands.

Enter the GI canteen cup stove stand. Basically, it is a light piece of sheet aluminum that fits neatly over the canteen cup for carry and storage. When removed and inverted, it serves as a heating platform where the Canteen Cup sits on top with a couple of ventilation holes and an opening for adding a solid fuel tablet or twigs for fuel. Does this system work? Yes it does, but it can be unstable if you don't seat the cup into the stove securely. Also, when a hot cup is seated securely, it can be tough to separate the stove when you want to use the cup. Fortunately, it is really easy to dramatically improve this stove with the help of a couple of pieces of bent coat hanger.

Bend two seven inch pieces of coat hanger as shown and snap the bent wires over your canteen cup stove stand. This simple trick significantly improves the stability of the cup when on the stove stand. An additional benefit is that it also makes the stove more efficient because the stove now gets more oxygen and the flames can lick up the sides of your cup to heat the contents faster.

The Canteen Shop has also developed a version of this stove stand that works really well, right out of the box without modification and is built like a tank.

### Boil lid

Another item lacking in the standard issue cooking system was a lid. Lids make heating food or drink much more efficient, can help strain off excess water after cooking, and they help keep your food and drink warmer for a longer period of time. I have used everything from aluminum foil to thirty-six gage tooling foil to try to make my own cover. But now that isn't necessary because Heavy Cover Inc. has come out with a great stainless steel boil lid that I have made a part of my permanent kit. It fits perfectly in the Molle pouch right under my canteen

cup when I assemble the kit.

All told, the standard issue USGI canteen cooking system still performs its intended duty admirably. Considering that it's been around for 100 years, I'd say that it was a testament to good design. Is it perfect? No, but with the easy modifications described above, it can serve your needs almost as well as kits that cost four or five times as much.

Let's put it this way... I have had a number of cooking systems over the years and I do own some high-end pots and stoves from companies such as MSR, GSI, and Jetboil. But I still find there are times when the USGI Canteen Cup cook system with a soda can stove is the only cooking gear that I carry. There is a history there that still intrigues me and the bottom line is, IT WORKS!!



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