



How to Polish Boots



What you will need:

- 1 Black tin of shoe polish (Kiwi® brand) [70g tins available from 12 Squadron Canteen/Kit Shop]
- 1 Kiwi® cloth (a plain white cotton cloth can be used alternatively) [authentic Kiwi® cloths available from 12 Sqn Canteen/Kit Shop]
- 1 old toothbrush
- water (in a dish or a spray-bottle)
- nylon cloth

Step 1 – Applying the polish

The first thing you have got to do when you get a brand-new pair of boots is apply a base coat of polish. This will give future polishing a good foundation to work on. Apply a thick layer of polish to your boot with your Kiwi® cloth, completely covering all the surface area that you're going to be polishing. Let your boot dry for at least 10 minutes.

You don't need to do this every time you start polishing your boot, only until there is a good build up of polish (you'll know that you have a good build-up when your shine starts to develop quickly while polishing).

-- Welts --

Before you start buffing, you need to blacken your welts. A lot of dust and dirt gets trapped down there, and you need to clean it out before you start polishing. You can do this by taking an old toothbrush, getting a good amount of polish onto it, and brushing GENTLY inside the rim of your boots (where the sole meets the upper shoe leather) until they are completely black. If there is a lot of dust, clean it out first with a damp cloth before you apply any polish. DO NOT use your toothbrush to apply polish to any other part of your boot – the bristles are too rough and will ruin your boot and your shine.

Always do your welts BEFORE you start to polish. Otherwise you will have a shiny boot with a thick dull rim.

Step 2 – Buffing

Wrap your Kiwi® cloth around your index finger and hold the rest of it wadded in your palm. Make sure the cloth surface on your finger is smooth and pulled taut. Dip the cloth-covered tip of your finger lightly into water, then gently scrap it over the polish to get just the tiniest bit on your cloth. Simply rub the polish onto your boot in small quick circular motions, while applying a moderate amount of pressure. Rub all the polish in before you start on the next layer, and continue doing this until you have created a sufficient shine. Use minimal amounts of polish to build up the shine - if you use too much polish, the solvent in the polish you are applying will dissolve the base you have already built up, and you will have to start all over again.

Make sure to add more water if your cloth begins to feel dry while buffing. The cloth will absorb less polish when it is wet (polish, being wax-based, doesn't mix with water), and therefore you will get a better shine. If your cloth begins to become saturated in polish or looks worn out, move your finger over to a clean spot and continue polishing. Go over the boot section by section, making sure to cover the entire surface-area evenly. You can hold the boot under a light to see if you have missed any spots. Don't forget to do the tongue, the area between your laces, the side panel of your heel beneath your boot, and the thick rim below your welts!

What you're doing by buffing is creating friction heat to melt the polish onto your boot, and applying pressure to flatten it - thus creating a shine. The process of buffing requires two things to happen:

1. The polish has to be compressed onto a smooth surface, and
2. The polish actually has to remain on the boot. By increasing the amount of force you exert while polishing, you can create a thinner (and thus smoother) surface, which will be glossier. So use a lot of pressure and you'll get good results.

You're going to need to spend at least 45 minutes buffing each boot to get a good shine. Don't get discouraged if you don't see any shine at first – when you first start polishing you will experience a grayish “haze” that is a bit tough to polish. This is a good sign, it means you're on your way to a super spit-shine. Keep polishing at this point, don't stop or you'll lose the friction heat that's melting the polish into your boot.

Step 3 – Finishing

At this point, the job is pretty much done. However, there is an extra step that can improve even a superior polishing job. A second buffing with a piece of nylon will often give a pair of boots an even more mirror-like finish. I suspect it has to do with the nylon being even less prone to absorb polish than cotton cloth.

Stick your hand into a nylon stocking and pull it taut. Go over the entire boot with a firm buffing motion. The shine should now appear subtly stronger.

After you finish polishing, you may want to use a hairdryer (set on hot) on your boots while buffing with water, it helps create a better shine. Be sure to not to have the hairdryer on your boots for too long, it may burn the polish or melt the polish off your boots.

How to Strip the Polish off your Boots

The safest way to strip the polish off your boots is to hold them over a boiling kettle to let the hot steam loosen the polish. You can then gently rub the polish off using a cloth. An alternative method would be to run your boots under hot water.

Stripping the polish off your boots however, isn't really necessary, and it can be a hassle to get your shine back up from scratch. The only time you'd ever need to strip your boots would be if the base layer of polish became cracked. It's best just to get a new pair of boots up from supply if your boots are in that poor condition.

Expert Tips

- Cut your Kiwi® cloth into four quarters – it's easier to hold while in small pieces.
- Keep an old copper penny (dated before 1982) in your shoe polish. For some reason, copper helps shoe polish from drying up and cracking as quickly.
- Do not use a polyester cloth to buff as will strip off the polish.
- If your shoe polish is very old and dried out, replace it. Old polish is not as effective as new polish.
- Breathing occasionally on your boots helps bring out a shine. Your breath is warm and can help "melt" the polish to a better shine... but just like polish, do this in moderation.
- You should use a little bit of neutral polish after you have buffed for a while with regular black polish. Neutral polish works well, but use it sparingly. Because it has no color, if you use it too much your boot will become tinted grey. Always be sure to finish your polishing session with a coat of regular black polish.
- Parade gloss polish is sometimes hard to find, but can do wonders for your boot. Like neutral polish, use it sparingly, and mix it in with layers of regular black polish.
- Cover your boots with a smooth cloth to keep off the dust while storing them.

Things NEVER to do to your Boots:

- **NEVER Burn shining.** This is taking a lighter to your boots to heat up the polish. DO NOT DO THIS. It will completely ruin your boots and you might light your boot on fire or do significant damage to the boot. Friction heat is a slower process, but in the long run it does a whole lot better for your boots. Also, do not light your shoe polish on fire to fill in the cracks. If your shoe polish is cracked that means it is dried out...and time to get new shoe polish.
- **NEVER USE Other substances.** Never, EVER use any other substance other than boot polish on your boot! Black nail polish, craft gloss, floor polish, paint, dye, grease, markers, etc. will completely RUIN your polishing job and wreck your boots permanently.
- **NEVER Quick shine.** Kiwi® makes products for shining shoes such as "Instant Shine Wax", and other quick-job products. You shouldn't get used to using these because even though they do work somewhat, they don't create a shine up to 12 Squadron standards. Also, polishing with regular polish may become difficult after using these products.
- **NEVER Spit on them.** C'mon guys, that's just gross. Your saliva contains grease, acids and often bits of food which you most defiantly do not want rubbed into your boot. For the best possible shine, and also concerning hygienic reasons...use water while polishing your boots only.
- **NEVER Get your parents to do it.** Your boots are YOURS and only yours to take care of. Chances are your parents don't have a clue how to polish properly anyways. Besides, they have better things to do, like feed and clothe you.

So there you have it. Now you know how to polish your boots like a pro. Remember: Always wash your hands after a good long session of polishing your boots.

I have one more thing to add – Believe it or not, boot polishing can be TOTALLY FUN! You can polish your boots while watching TV, listening to music, talking on the phone...you can even invite some of your cadet buddies over for a boot-polishing party! (Hey, it's a good excuse for ordering pizza.)