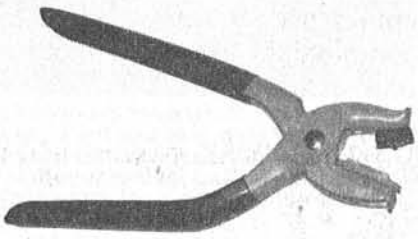
Installing Snaps on Fabric or Leather

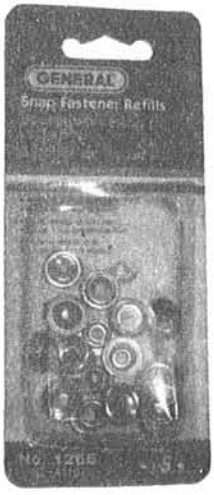
by Paul Carey

I recently had to replace some canvas covers on my truck bed. I was at a loss as how to begin – the snaps and grommets on the old canvas were professionally installed, and I couldn't figure out a way, short of having the covers professionally made, of installing the snaps onto the canvas.

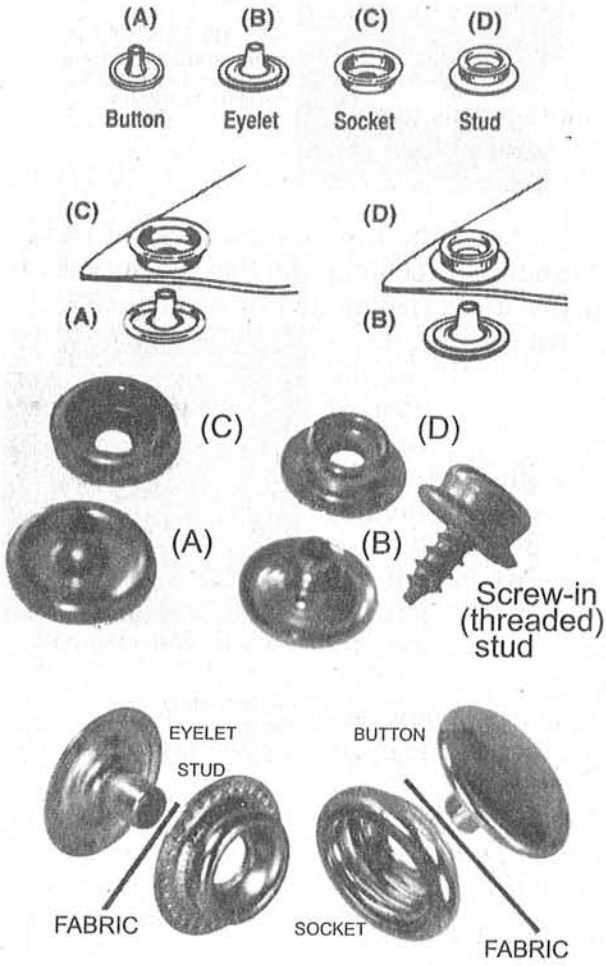
My mother-in-law came to the rescue. When I mentioned my problem, she laughed, took me up to her sewing room and showed me a variety of tools for installing snaps and grommets. When I asked where she got them, she told me that the local fabric store, or even a place like Walmart or Target would probably have them. I wanted the tools for my own shop, so I bought my own rather than borrow hers.

I bought two tools – one is designed to install grommets, and the other designed to install both halves of a snap onto two pieces of fabric/canvas/leather which will be fastened to each other. If the stud is to be affixed to a piece of metal or wood, a special stud with a threaded shaft should be used. Each installation tool cost me about $15. They are not professional quality by any means, but at the price, and for the few times that I am going to use them, I think that they will be more than adequate. The snap plier tool that I purchased is made by Dritz and sold in larger fabric stores in what they call the notions section. They also sell snaps and grommets, but I found better quality at an Ace hardware store and Tandy leather.



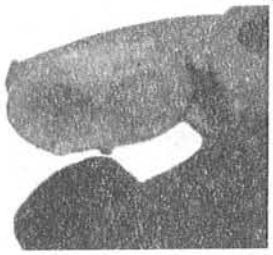


Snaps, when installed, are two part: the socket and the stud. Each of the two parts has two parts of its own – the front and the back. The socket has a backing plate which we will refer to as a button. It is a slightly round finished disc. The stud's backing plate we will call the eyelet. (Those are the names used on the package of hardware which I purchased at Ace hardware.) Normally the button is the part that shows on the face of the canvas. If you are using a stud with a threaded shaft, there will be no backing plate (eyelet).



The installation plier that I purchased is Dritz model #16P. It is designed for light and medium weight fabrics, and snaps 7/16" diameter. I did find a heavy duty snap plier listed online as model #24P designed for 5/8" & 9/16" snaps.

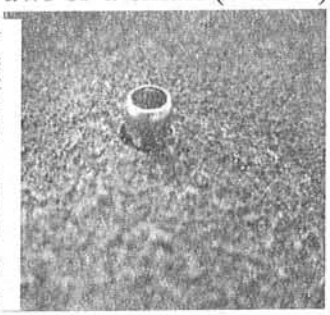
The installation plier has a fixed fitting on one half of the jaw with a point steel shaft in the center and a rotating fitting on the other half. If you look very carefully at the rotating anvil, you will notice that one section is nothing but a smooth, shallow dish. This is designed to hold the button (the backing plate for the socket). The other jaw applies pressure which will spread the post of the button, locking it to the socket and to the fabric.



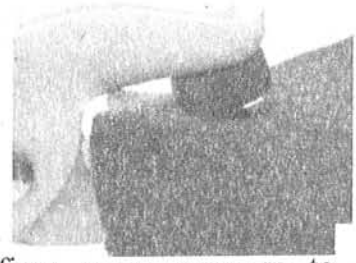
ABOVE: One jaw has a steel point.

BELOW LEFT: A rotating white nylon fitting is designed to hold the button or eyelet.

Mark the face of the canvas or leather at exactly the center point that the button will be installed. Use an awl or a small (0.160") punch to create a hole exactly at the center. The post of the button will pass through this hole, with the rounded face of the button on the FRONT of the canvas (the part that shows). Place the socket over the exposed post and rest the face of the eyelet in the shallow dish mentioned above, and the socket on the anvil on the facing jaw of the plier (there is a steel point that is designed to spread the post of the eyelet locking it firmly to the socket). Use firm, even pressure to squeeze the handles, spreading the post and securing it to the socket.

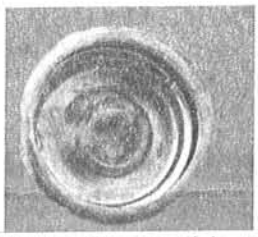


The post of the button passes through the leather, with the finished side of the button on the face of the material. Photo shows the back (wrong) side of the material.

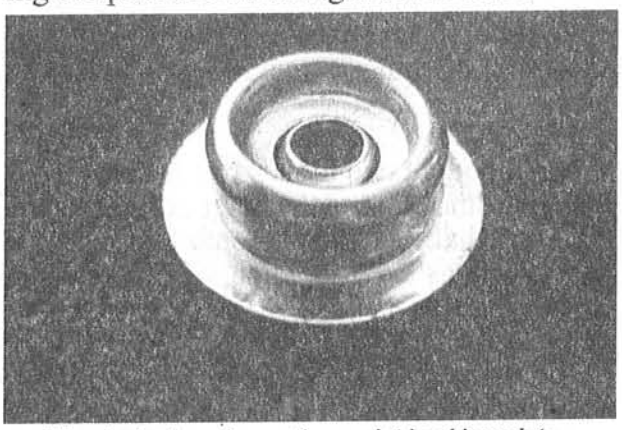


LEFT: Use firm, even pressure with the plier to squeeze the post.

BELOW: With the post squeezed the socket, eyelet and fabric are locked together.



If a snap is to be attached to two pieces of fabric, the stud has to be installed on the piece opposite the socket. Again, mark the exact point of the center of the stud, punch a hole and put the eyelet through the hole from the back. The other half of the rotating anvil on the plier's jaw has a raised center section to hold the eyelet. Place the stud over the exposed post and place the center of the steel point on the opposite plier jaw to the center of the post. Again use firm, even pressure to squeeze the handles, spreading the post and securing it to the stud.



The stud, placed over the eyelet backing plate. The next step is to use the snap installation plier to squeeze the center post and lock the stud, eyelet and leather together. Photo is before the button post was squeezed and locked.

S.K.

Next month we will look at the companion tool - the Grommet Installation Plier, along with instructions on how to install a grommet.