

An Accidental Hand Stamp Guide, Version 3.0

By **R. G. Sparber**

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When it comes to using hand stamps freehand, I have no skill. You can read the resulting letters but, except for the absolute worst executed project, the letters do not improve the look.

Today I decided to try and improve myself. Could I get the imprinted letters at the same depth, not have double strikes, and have them all come out in a straight line?

 These letters are 1/8 inch tall. Obviously, the more I enlarge them, the worse they look. Still, this is a big improvement over my usual mangling. So what did I learn?



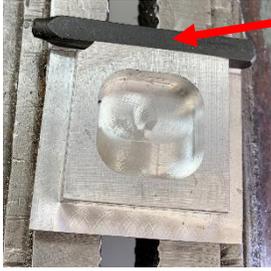
1. Using some scrap of the material you want to stamp, practice making imprints. With this 6061 aluminum, a firm but gentle tap was about right. Hit it too hard and the stamp would tilt and sometimes jump. F. D. Windisch suggested using a light touch with a heavy hammer. This did help. Nelson Collar suggested hitting the stamp a bit harder and this also helped.



2. Use a guide. I was fishing around in my scrap drawer and found this machined block. Turned out to work well. Hence my accidental guide. More on this later.

3. Decide on a letter spacing and stick to it. I think variable space between letters looks great but only if done right. Instead, I went with a constant spacing. It looks a lot better than random which is what I ended up with while trying to get to “great”.

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To use the guide, I lay the stamp along one of the recesses.

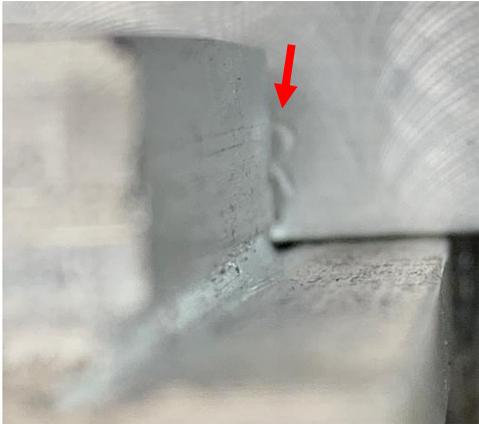
At first it did not fit flush. A few passes with a hacksaw relieved the inside corner and all was well.



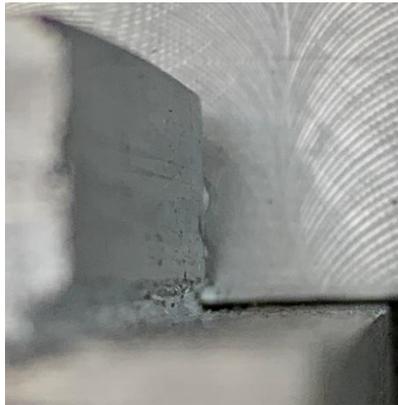
Holding the punch against the guide and plate to be stamped turned out to be rather easy.



The "R" came out fairly even and square.

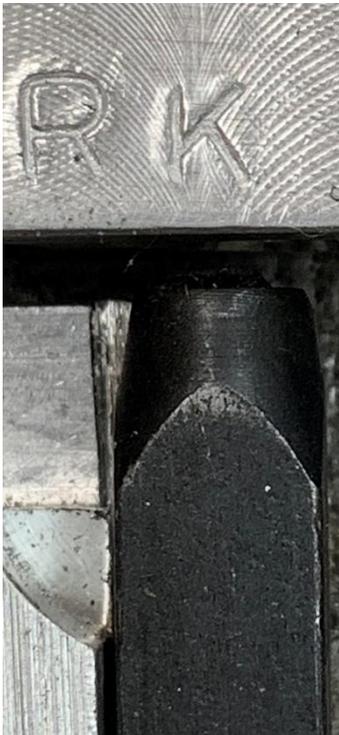


Before sliding in the next stamp, I sighted down the guide. Here you see a little of the "R" exposed.



I moved over until it barely showed.

Then I loaded in the "K" stamp.



So far so good. Repeated for the "W" and got



To improve contrast, I ran a permanent marker over the stamped area and waited a few seconds.



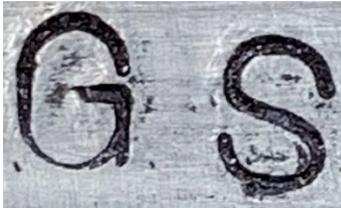
Then I wiped it off with my finger to get



If you were very observant, you might wonder why I did not stamp my initials “RGS”. The answer has to do with the quality of my stamp set. It is an import and the letters are not all square with the stamp body. I came to this conclusion by repeatedly using an aligned stamp and then a misaligned stamp. No amount of care rotated the bad stamp into the correct angular position. Each time I used a good stamp, the result was square.



The “G” was hit a little high. Note the line thickness at the top of the letter versus the bottom.



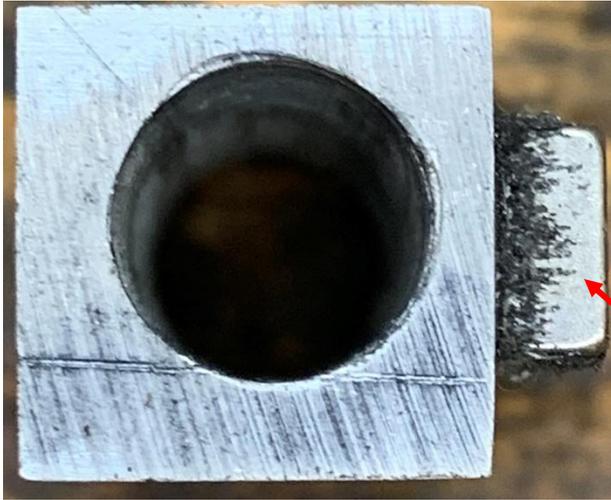
The “S” is clearly rotated and lower than the “G”. It is also up-side-down now that I take a closer look.

Right Side Up!



A recurring problem with my use of these stamps is that I occasionally have them up-side-down. To solve this problem I brought out my favorite marker – red nail polish. As long as the red dot is facing forward, the stamp is correctly oriented.

Removing Letter Rotation

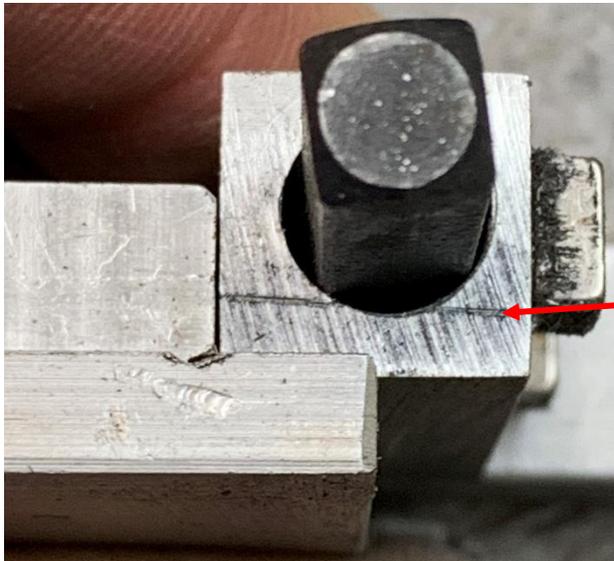


I thought up many hard ways to correct for letter rotation relative to the shank before arriving at this solution. You are looking at the end of a $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times 1$ inch block of aluminum. A $\frac{21}{64}$ inch hole is drilled through, a little off center.

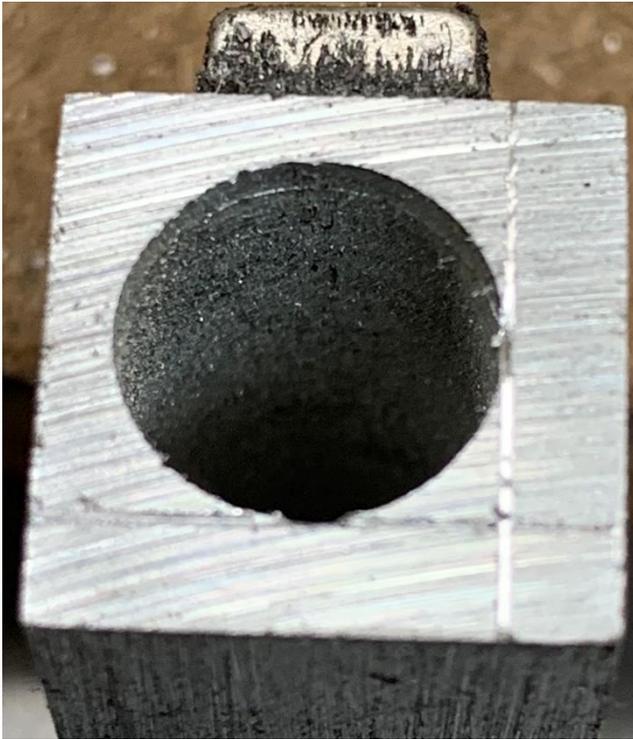
On the side with the thinnest wall, I glued two $\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{1}{4} \times \frac{1}{4}$ neodymium magnets. The glue is called Go2Glue and was recommended by my friend, John Herrmann. It is every bit as versatile and easy to use as he said.



One magnet is near the top and the other is near the bottom. They gently pull on the stamp and prevent rotation due to small vibrations caused by handling. I can smoothly rotate the stamp and it will stay put.



You can see my poor attempt at scribing a reference line. I will file this off and do it correctly on a reference plate.



I simply placed my scribing knife on a piece of 1/8 inch thick stock and used my surface plate as my reference surface. Sliding the block across the raised knife gave these nicely placed lines.

Ah, much better placement of the lines. And all it took was a better technique.



Next I used each letter stamp on a block of aluminum so I could see what rotation corrections were needed.



You can also clearly see that my ability to get consistent imprints is in need of further practice.



Here are my initials without rotation correction. Note how the “S” tilts slightly clockwise. To my surprise, all three imprints are uniform.



By turning the stamp slightly counterclockwise by eye, I made the “S” almost vertical. This time all three imprints are bottom heavy. Oh well...

Wizard69 wrote:

My biggest problem with stamping parts is that I'm almost never stamping on a straight edge! Often the surface isn't even flat. As a result I've gotten fairly good at double strikes that don't look like double strikes.

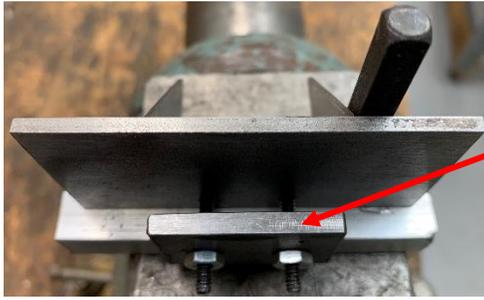
In any event I don't have a lot of suggestions, someone already covered using a big heavy hammer. I do make a point to cut a recess when the part allows. The recess does not have to be extremely deep either, just enough to give you a line to align the stamps on. Funny thing is people will think you made the recess to look

fancy or protect the stamped area when in reality you just wanted a reference to reduce the crooked print.

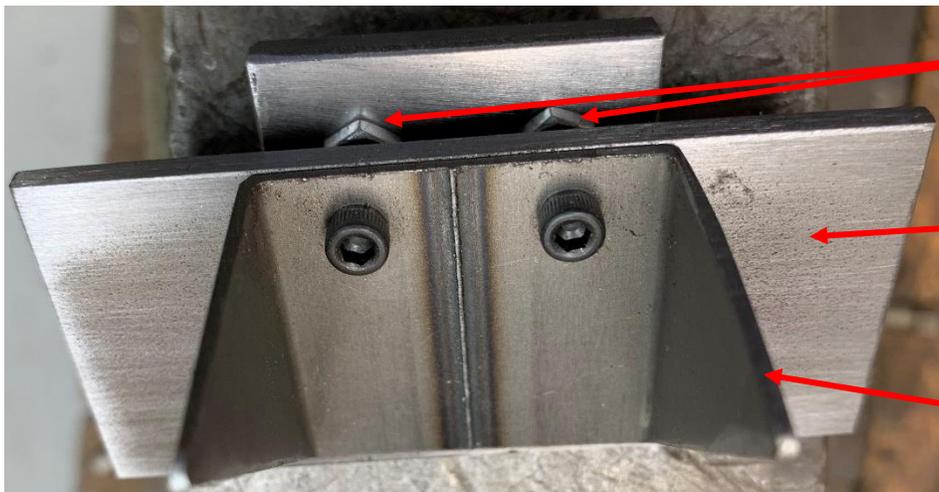
A Second Generation Fixture



This version was assembled from scraps out of my junk draw.



It operates the same as the first fixture except I now have an adjustable stop to set the distance from the edge of the plate to the stamp location.



I use a pair of nuts on each side of the stop to set this distance.

The main plate is drilled and tapped 6-32 so the two screws and channel are held tight as I adjust the screws.

All holes were “match drilled” -

I drilled the first hole with my 6-32 tap drill through the channel. Then I placed the channel on the main plate and drilled through. Next the main plate was tapped 6-32 followed by enlarging the hole in the channel to clear the screw. A short screw was then secured in the hole. Then I drilled the second tap hole through the channel and main plate. Again, the main plate was tapped and the channel hole enlarged. And finally, the second hole in the main plate was tapped. In this way, both screws must perfectly align without measuring anything.

Once the channel was secured to the main plate, I used my belt sander to make the bottom edges of these two parts flush.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to F. D. Windisch and Nelson Collar for their suggestions on how to hit the stamp and with what. Thanks to John Herrmann for recommending Go2Glue. Thanks to Wizard69 for his ideas.

If you wish to be contacted each time I publish an article, email me with just "Article Alias" in the subject line.

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