

TWENTY-SIXTH
NORTH CAROLINA

COOKING ON
CAMPAIGN



SUFFICIENTLY VARIABLE RATIONS & RECIPES FOR THE CIVIL WAR LIVING HISTORIAN

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General August V. Kautz wrote in his 1865 manual *Customs of service for Non-commissioned Officers and Soldiers*, “The ration allowed the soldier is large enough, and its component parts are sufficiently variable to admit of a great variety of very palatable dishes.” While most soldiers in the Civil War would have disagreed with this statement it can not be argued that both Federal and Confederate governments expended considerable resources to ensure that their armies in the field were well fed. Nor can it be argued that the single biggest day to day concern for any soldier during the war was his next meal and there are hundreds of written accounts documenting what Civil War soldiers ate and how they prepared it.

As living historians the wealth of information surrounding the everyday life of soldiers in the Civil War is invaluable. Far too often, living historians become too wrapped up in tactics, weapons, equipment or uniforms, but the knowledge and evidence of what these men ate is as valuable in portraying and honoring them as the uniforms they wore or the weapons that were in their hands. As Kevin O'Beirne of the Columbia Rifles states, “Rations are a terribly important component of your living history impression, and can either add greatly to your experience or detract from it.” Receiving an issue of authentic rations and preparing them with historical methods with your pals around a fire is one of the greatest bonding experiences imaginable. Songs, stories, and laughs will be exchanged and you will grow even closer to these men whom you eat, sleep and campaign with. You take care of each other and become brothers in the process. The boys of 61-65 experienced this and you can too if you only give it a try. However, on the opposite side of the this aspect of living history, nothing will kill such a wonderful experience quicker than a plastic wrapper or Bennie-Weenie can pulled out of a haversack. This not only kills your historical experience (weather you know it or not) but also the experience of everyone else around you, including spectators and visitors.

Why would someone do such a thing? More often than not it is due to a lack of knowledge about what to buy for authentic rations and how to safely store, transport and prepare them.

RATIONS:

The Rations in Johnny Reb's and Billy Yank's haversacks were the end result of a complex and long process of procurement, transportation and distribution maintained by both Federal and Confederate governments, both of which maintained nearly identical systems. The process began with the Commissary General and Subsistence Department. This department was responsible for establishing what made up the Army ration and the specifications for them. This information was then provided to private contractors who placed bids for various ration components. The Subsistence Department picked a bidder (usually the lowest) who procured or produced the items, packaged them and shipped them to the Subsistence Department for inspection. Once approved, the rations



Throughout the war The Confederate Army had two Commissary Generals. Col L.B. Northrup (LEFT) and Col L.M. St. John (CENTER). The US Army maintained Gen J.P. Taylor (RIGHT) as its Commissary General throughout the entire war.

were provided to the Quartermaster Department and subsequently to forward army supply depots and then to the Corp, Division and Brigade supplies. The individual soldier usually received his ration from the Brigade level through his Regimental Commissary who was responsible for collecting the allotted rations and distributing them by Company for issue to individual soldiers. As is evident, this supply chain is long and complex and most recorded instances of lack of, or poor quality rations can be directly traced back to a break down of the system.

The rations issued to both armies in the Civil War were virtually the same and varied only due to availability and logistics. According to the 1861 US Army Regulations each soldier was to draw two types of rations, one while in camp or garrison and one while on the march or on active campaign.

GARRISON RATIONS:

To Every Individual:

Meat: 12 ounces of salt pork or bacon, or 1 pound 4 ounces of salt or fresh beef

Bread: 1 pound 6 ounces of soft bread or flour, or 1 pound hard bread (hardtack), or 1 pound 4 ounces of corn meal

To every 100 rations (Company) these additional items were issued.

15 pounds of dried beans or peas

10 pounds of rice or hominy

10 pounds of green coffee or 8 pounds of roasted coffee, or 1 pound 8 ounces of tea

15 pounds of sugar

4 quarts of vinegar

1 pound 4 ounces of candles

4 pounds of soap

3 pounds 12 ounces of salt

4 ounces of pepper

30 pounds of potatoes
1 quart of molasses

By the later half of the war Federal soldiers were often issued desiccated compressed mixed vegetables in substitution to beans, peas, rice, hominy or fresh potatoes. These “Desecrated” vegetables, as soldiers called them, were universally disliked and were prepared by dropping the dried block into a kettle of boiling water to yield a thin vegetable soup.

MARCHING RATIONS:

To Every Individual:

Meat: 12 ounces of salt pork or bacon, or 1 pound 4 ounces of salt or fresh beef

Bread: 1 pound 6 ounces of soft bread or flour, or 1 pound hard bread (hardtack), or 1 pound 4 ounces of corn meal

To every 100 rations (Company) these additional items were issued.

10 pounds of coffee
15 pounds of sugar
3 pounds 12 ounces of salt

The marching ration was easily transported by individual soldiers and, with the exception of fresh beef (which was usually prepared immediately upon receipt), would last for three days in terms of quality and quantity. Hence the phrase “Three Days Rations.”

SUPPLEMENTS:

As a supplement to the regulation Army ration just described soldiers could augment the variety of their fare in several ways.

SUTLERS:

Sutlers were frequently seen about static army camps selling a variety of wares including foodstuffs. Sutlers would apply to the Regimental commander to do business and were not members of the Army, nor were they authorized as suppliers by the Quartermaster or Commissary General. The nobility of their cause was money and money alone and during the war they made a lot of it at the expense of soldiers’ pocketbooks. Sutler prices were high to exorbitant and many a soldier



found a great portion of his \$11-\$14 monthly pay in the hands of a sutler in exchange for some small comfort or needed relief from monotonous Army Fare. As a result of the high prices and low pay most soldiers did without sutler items viewing them mainly as a luxury.

FORAGING:

Foraging was done either officially (ordered by the Army and invoiced) or unofficially (soldiers undertaking foraging operations of their own). Contrary to popular belief, foraging was not that common during the war in either capacity. However, it did happen on numerous occasions. Foraged items were not limited and could be very diverse, but on average they consisted of items that were in the open or readily accessible such as vegetables, poultry, meat, eggs and fruit.

BOXES FROM HOME:

A more ubiquitous item that supplemented a soldier's dinner plate was boxes and packages from home. Loved ones would frequently send packages to soldiers in the field, usually at the soldier's request. These boxes provided soldiers with a great many food items ranging from meats and pies to jams, jellies and relishes. As Joyce Dematteis of the Atlantic Guard Soldier's Aid Society writes, "By far the most anticipated items were 'good eatables.' Food was almost always requested: coffee, apples, apple butter, fresh pork, dried fruit, milk, eggs, risen bread, cakes, preserves or jelly, pickles, egg nog, sugar, bicarbonate of soda, salt, fresh butter, roast beef, ham and turkey."

STORING AND PREPARING RATIONS:

Regardless of how a soldier received food, his next challenge was how to store and cook it. The only allocation the Army provided for Food storage was the haversack. This piece of equipment was designed for the storage and transportation of food and food only. Re-enactors mistakenly carry numerous items in their haversacks that do not belong there. If an authentic haversack is filled with authentic standard issue rations then one will quickly see that there is no room for pocket combs or a deck of cards. Haversacks ranged from tarred versions with liners to simple linen or canvas ones. No matter what kind of haversack a soldier carried they were universally described as dirty, smelly and begrimed. But, their contents were vital to a soldier. Often to help store his rations soldiers would fashion small bags with drawstrings, if they were capable of doing so. If a soldier could not sew then simple pieces of cloth, sometimes from an old worn shirt, served to wrap up rations for storage. Aside from the haversack the soldier's mess kit did not extend beyond a simple cup or boiler, tin plate and basic utensils (spoon, fork, and knife). Camp kettles and pots were sometimes available but these were usually assigned to a Company and thus kept on baggage trains for use when the Army was more static. This meant that most of the time, especially while on the march, soldiers were left with the simple items just described and their own ingenuity to cook their rations. Frying pans or "spiders" (a deep frying pan with three legs) could be bought but were expensive





and difficult to carry. Most soldiers opted for a cheaper and more readily available substitute. A stick with a split end could be wedged onto the end of a tin plate to make a suitable frying pan. A better option could be found when the soldier obtained a discarded canteen, melted the solder from it and used one half as a plate and frying pan both. Handles could be fashioned by sticks or even bayonets or forks. An even more simple cooking method utilized was a ramrod, which could be used as spit for roasting meat or dough.

Both armies attempted collective cooking on a company level by assigning two men per company as a company cook. This system, however, never really caught on and by and large soldiers prepared their



food in “messes” of 4-10 men. This system allowed men to collectively prepare food, using combined cooking supplies and rations. These “messes” quickly became something more than a cooking party; they became a social unit through which soldiers shared food, clothing, shelter and camaraderie. Such bonds of love and friendship sustained these soldiers through four years of blood and hardship just as much as the hardtack and coffee in their haversacks.

RATIONS:



As living historians one of the simplest and least expensive ways to improve your impression, as well as your living history experience, is to bring and prepare authentic rations. All of the rations typically issued to soldiers during the war can easily be found today in most grocery stores.

Salt Pork or Bacon: (About 1/2 pound will be good for one event)

Most grocery stores carry side meat or fat back which does not need to be refrigerated and, though not iden-

tical, closely represents Civil War salt pork. Just make sure when buying that the meat was not stored in a refrigerated case or it will otherwise require refrigeration. If it is a salt cured meat picked up from an open aisle display then you will be fine. Bacon must be cured slab bacon, not the stuff you get in the refrigerated case at the grocery store. This kind of bacon is not found everywhere but can be bought through VirginiaTraditions www.vatraditions.com (order the cured slab bacon item # 078B) or Scott's Hams www.scotthams.com (item # 55). Once you have received your slab bacon cut it into 1/2 pound blocks large enough for a weekend. These can be frozen and then quickly pulled out before an event.

Flour: (4-5 cups will be good for one event)

Wheat flour (unbleached) is more accurate but bleached flour will work fine as well if it is more easily available. Just make sure that you get all purpose flour and not self rising.

Corn Meal: (4-5 cups will be good for one event)

Yellow all purpose corn meal can be found in any grocery store. Be sure you do not buy self rising corn meal like you find in the corn bread mix packets. This will not work. You do not typically carry both corn meal and flour so before an event. Be sure you pick one or the other. Corn meal was more frequently seen among Confederate soldiers as flour became quite expensive throughout the war.

Hardtack: (4-5 pieces for one event)

Hardtack can be made with a simple recipe and a hardtack cutter. However, one need only try making it once to

realize the convenience of buying it pre-made. Good hardtack can be purchased at G.H. Bent Cookie Factory out of Massachusetts www.bentscookiefactory.com. Bent was an original purveyor of hardtack for the Federal government during the war and still makes the item. They can be bought in packs of ten, and, if kept in a cool dry place, a couple of boxes will last you all year.

Coffee: (about 1 cup or 8 oz. will be good for one event)

Any brand will be fine just get whole roasted beans

Sugar: (about 4-5 tbsp will be good for one event)

Avoid the white granulated sugar. Sugar cones are the most accurate but are difficult to find. A good substitute is plain brown sugar. Small glass bottle with corks are the best to store sugar, salt and other spices. Just make sure that your bottle closes with a cork rather than a screw on lid. Michaels and A.C Moore craft stores have cheap simple bottles. Dog River Glass Works also sells reproduction glassware www.dogriversglassworks.com

Salt: (about 2 tsp will be good for one event)

Plain iodized salt is good

Dried Beans: (about 1 cup will be good for one person for an event)

Any dried bean will be fine but your best options are black eyed peas, field peas, crowder peas, white beans, and pinto beans. Just remember that these have to soak for several hours before being cooked.

Rice: (about 1 cup will be good for one person for an event)

Regular or instant white or brown rice

Fruits and Vegetables:

These should be typical fruits and vegetables to the mid nineteenth century and should be chosen based upon what is in season for the time frame represented by the event.

Apples: All year

Pears: August – October

Peaches: July – August

Strawberries: May – June

Raspberries: July – September

Blackberries: July – September

Blueberries: July – September

Watermelon: July – October

Potatoes: All year harvested between June - August

Corn: June – September

Peanuts: All year

Onions: June – July

Sweet Potatoes: All Year harvested between August - December

Cabbage: May - June

RECIPES:

Cornbread:

- * Mix about 1/2 cup of corn meal into a tin cup and moisten it with bacon grease thoroughly.
- * Next, add water to the cornmeal until it makes a batter about the consistency of pancake batter
- * Add salt to taste
- * Next, coat your canteen half or frying pan with bacon grease. If you have already fried your bacon or salt port then the drippings left over will be more than adequate.
- * With a spoon, drop some batter into the creased pan and spread it out to about the size of a cookie.
- * After about a minute, or when the bottom is golden brown, flip the fritter with a fork and brown the other side
- * Remove from skillet and eat.

Fried Salt Pork or Bacon:

- * Cut a slab of salt pork, or bacon, into slices about 1/8 of an inch thick, and short enough to fit in your canteen half or skillet.
- * Place into a heated skillet and fry until the fat is crisp and the meat is cooked through.
- * Remove from the skillet and eat

Note: Do not let too much grease build up in the pan as this will cause the salt pork or bacon to take longer to cook and taste scorched. Also, too much grease can quickly catch fire and burn whatever is in the pan.

Note: Salt pork can be soaked or even boiled in water prior to frying it. This will remove some of the salt from the meat and make it more palatable.

Broiled Salt Pork:

- * Place two bayonets on opposite ends of the fire pit at opposite angles to each other..
- * Cut salt pork into quarter inch chunks and skewer them on a ramrod.
- * Place the ramrod on the bayonets in the angle where the socket and elbow meet.
- * Roast the salt pork until it is cooked, turning it frequently to prevent burning.

Note: Cooking salt pork in this fashion does not allow you to save grease for other uses. So, if you broil salt pork save a chunk of fat when cutting it up in order to coat pans or render grease for frying.

Skillygalee:

- * First, break up some hardtack into small chunks in the bottom of a tin cup
- * Soak the hardtack for 10-15 minutes or until soft.
- * While the hardtack is soaking, fry up some salt pork. Once it is done chop it up into smaller pieces

- * Dump the soaked hardtack pieces into your greased skillet or canteen half with the chopped up salt pork.
- * Fry this mixture until heated through
- * Remove and eat.

Cush:

Cush is probably one of the best known Confederate recipes from the war and appears to have been a simple way to deal with leftover meat and cornbread.

- * Cut up some salt pork into small chunks and fry it in a canteen half or frying pan. Remove any excess grease, keeping enough to fry the cornbread batter to be placed on top
- * Mix up some cornbread batter and place it over the cooked salt pork in the pan.
- * Cook further until the corn bread is cooked. The end result should be a tasty cornbread hash.

Cush can also be made from leftover salt pork and cornbread

- * Cut precooked cold salt pork or bacon into small chunks
- * Place them into a greased pan to heat for a few minutes
- * Next, place enough water into the pan and let the meat stew until thoroughly warm.
- * Next, take cornbread and crumble it into the skillet. Heat the entire mixture through until hot and all the water has been absorbed.
- * Remove and eat.

Hardtack Pudding:

This is a tasty little treat that Federal soldiers invented

- * Take 1-2 full pieces of hardtack and wrap it up in a clean cloth
- * Break the hardtack up until it is almost a powder
- * In a canteen half, combine the crushed hardtack, one handful of flour, brown sugar, salt, and enough water to make a dough. This dough may be sticky so use flour on your hands to knead and roll it into a ball.
- * Pat the dough out until it is flat
- * Place on the dough any fruit that you may have in your possession
- * Fold the dough over into a dumpling making sure to pinch the edges shut
- * Wrap the dumpling into a clean cloth and place it, cloth and all, into a tin cup or boiler of water
- * Let the dumpling cook for around 15-20 minutes or until cooked through.
- * Remove from the cloth and eat

Flapjacks:

- * Take about 1 cup of flour, salt, some brown sugar and enough water to make a batter. If the batter is too thick then add more water, if too thin then add more flour. You are looking for the consistency of pancake batter.
- * Grease your canteen half or skillet. You do not want too much grease so do not do this right after frying salt pork. A good way to sufficiently grease your pan is to take a piece of fat from your salt pork and rub it over your pan. Do this between each flapjack you fry up.
- * Place your greased canteen half or skillet on the coals and let it heat. Do not let the pan get too hot. To check,

simply drop some water on the pan. It should dance around for a second or two before it evaporates. If it does not then the pan is too cold. If it evaporates immediately then the pan is too hot.

* When your pan is ready spoon some batter into it and work it into a thin patty with your spoon.

* Let it cook for about a minute or until one side is golden brown, then flip it in the pan with your knife or fork to cook the other side

* Remove from the pan

* If you have an issue of molasses, then pour some on top of your flapjacks and enjoy.

Coffee:

Coffee could very well be considered the life blood of both armies. It was drunk strong, black and by the gallon.

* Take a handful of roasted beans and place them in a clean rag.

* Wrap them up and place them in the bottom of a tin cup

* With the socket end of a bayonet break up and grind the beans as fine as possible. This may take some time so it is best to do it first thing before you begin cooking the rest of your meal.

* Once ground, dump the beans in the bottom of the cup and add enough water to fill the cup about a quarter full.

* Place the cup on the fire and let it come to a rolling boil.

* Remove the cup and add cool water. This will dilute the concentrated coffee and cause any small grounds to settle to the bottom.

* Add sugar if available and drink.