

000066: Rations

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Vietnam

With the large number of troops who rotated through Vietnam, an impression was formed that the C-rations they ate were a follow-on to the K-rations their fathers had been given during WW2. This I know, as I'm not terribly younger than that generation, and spoke to a lot of them about all things Vietnam. There were still a lot of Vietnam War veterans in the military when I was in. In basic training, we were given C-rations as "Meal, Rarely Edible (MREs) didn't exist yet. Side-note: when MREs were introduced, I was given a couple as samples. I took one home. The wife wasn't impressed. Neither was I.

Genesis

Sometimes seen, rarely, are the oblong cans containing a "bread ration" from the WW1 era. Those might be WW1 or might be a bit later. Off the top of my head, 4 of those were accompanied by 1 "meat ration." The 4+1 were to be shared by a small group of troops. I've never seen the meat one.

Even earlier, during the Mexican border troubles, the opposing side had been noted to have what today, we'd call an "energy bar." As with the WW2 Japanese ration of a ball of rice, and a dried fish head, it was an energy dense ration. Easily carried and perhaps flavorful. I'll assume that the Japanese ration was ignored as the QM preferred no flavor to be experienced in an Army ration.

The early 1920s witnessed the development of a "reserve ration." This was truly the genesis of the C ration. The "energy bar" from the border inspired the D ration.

In the late 1930s, the rations received a name change. A, B, C, and D. A and B were garrison rations, off the top of my head, one required refrigeration and the other didn't, with the C being the field ration and the D being the energy bar.

The D ration was developed with participation of the commercial food industry. They, Hershey Chocolate being one, provided help at no charge. The final ration was patented. 2,176,086 filed on March 9, 1938. After that, the changes tended to be in the packaging.

Field Ration



**Sampling the New C Ration during Maneuvers
of the First Army, 1940**

In the training camps, during WW2, three trash cans, with immersion heaters, were used to clean the mess kit and utensils. The first was filled with soapy water. The next two had somewhat clean water. Food was scraped off the kit, then it was dunked in the first can. Followed by a rinse in the next can, and another rinse in the last. To facilitate that, the utensils had holes in the handles, permitting them to be threaded on the meat can handle. The top of which had a ring for the same purpose. The utensils, the M-1926 set, were not put into production until WW2. Clearly visible in the canteen cup above is the earlier, WW1, utensil. The campaign hat, and M-1903 are also noted. Why the good Sergeant has both a rifle and pistol isn't provided.

Combat Ration

With America entering the war, the various bits of the forces started flooding the QM with “special” requests. The Armored forces needed their own uniforms. The Airborne troops did too. As did the Mountain troops. They also required their own combat ration.

It took some time, but the M-1943 uniform ensemble was to be used by all, with the only “specialty” stuff being the Arctic stuff. Earlier than that, the “assault rations” of various types were to be replaced by the K-ration. Not Kennel Ration, although the confusion is understandable.

Group Ration

It’s more efficient, or at least it should be, to provide larger rations, used by small groups, than individual rations. This is true for stoves and such as well. Thus, we end up with four, not counting garrison:

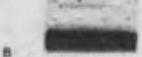
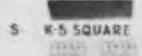
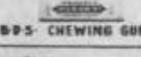
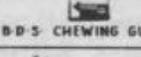
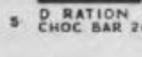
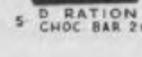
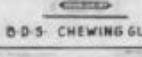
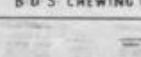
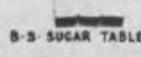
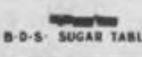
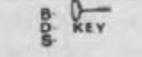
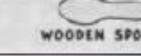
- 1) Energy bar. The D ration.
- 2) Assault ration. The K.
- 3) Field ration. The C.
- 4) Small group ration. The 5-in-1 and 10-in-1 at various times.

Variety

The “meat component” of the K, C, and 10-in-1 were the same. Just larger cans. What variety?

- 1) Meat and Beans.
- 2) Meat and Vegetable Hash
- 3) Meat and Vegetable Stew.

In 1942, they ordered them in the zillions. The warehouses were stuffed.

PARACHUTE RATION AUG. 1941	K RATION DEC. 1941	K RATION APRIL 1942	K RATION AUG. 1942	K RATION 1945
 B-D-S PEMMICA BISCUIT	 B-D-S DEFENSE BISCUIT  B-D-S COMPRESSED GRAHAM BISCUIT	 B-D-S K-1 BISCUIT  B-D-S K-2 BISCUIT	 B-D-S K-1 BISCUIT  B-D-S K-2 BISCUIT	 K-1 B CHOICE OF ONE D CHOICE OF TWO  K-4  S K-5 SQUARE  B PREMIXED CEREAL
 B HAM SPREAD D VEAL LOAF S CERVELAT SAUSAGE	 B VEAL LUNCHEON MEAT D PORK LUNCHEON MEAT S CERVELAT SAUSAGE	 B VEAL & PORK LOAF D AMERICAN CHEESE S PORK LUNCHEON LOAF	 B { MEAT OR D { MEAT S { SUBSTITUTE	 B MEAT AND EGG } D CHEESE PRODUCT } 3 TYPES S MEAT PRODUCT } OF EACH
 B MALT MILK TABS. D DEXTROSE TABS.  D RATION CHOCOLATE BAR 4 OZ.  BPS- CHEWING GUM	 B M MILK-DEXT TABS. D DEXTROSE TABS.  S D RATION CHOC. BAR 2 OZ.  B-D-S CHEWING GUM	 B M MILK-DEXT AND D DEXTROSE TABS.  D FRUIT BAR  D RATION CHOC. BAR 2 OZ.  B-D-S CHEWING GUM	 D M MILK-DEXT AND D DEXTROSE TABS.  B FRUIT BAR  S D RATION CHOC. BAR 2 OZ.  B-D-S CHEWING GUM	 B FRUIT BAR  S SWEET CHOCOLATE BAR  D CARAMEL NOUGATI BAR -OR-  B-D-S CHEWING GUM
 D BOUILLON TUBE B COFFEE TABLET S LEMON POWDER  S SUGAR CUBES	 D BOUILLON TUBE B COFFEE TABLET S LEMON POWDER  B-S SUGAR TABLETS	 S BOUILLON POWDER B COFFEE POWDER D LEMON POWDER  B-D-S SUGAR TABLETS	 S BOUILLON POWDER B COFFEE POWDER D LEMON POWDER  B-D-S SUGAR TABLETS	 S BOUILLON POWDER B COFFEE POWDER D ORANGE OR GRAPE  SUGAR: B TABLETS, D BLOCK, S PACKAGE
		 B-D-S KEY	 B-D-S KEY  B-D-S 4 CIGARETTES	 KEY  CIGARETTES-MATCHES  TOILET PAPER  TABLETS  WOODEN SPOON

That chart is instructive. The columns go from August 1942 right to 1945. Why? Guess. Noted is there are now 3 types of each in the M (meat) unit. Total of 9. Instead of? 3.

- 1) Meat and Beans.
- 2) Meat and Vegetable Hash
- 3) Meat and Vegetable Stew.

Adding one with a rice ball and a dried fish head might have been useful. Given the lack of variety, and flavor, it might have actually been consumed. Tabasco sauce does the trick.

- 1) Beef and Pork Loaf
- 2) Chip Steak
- 3) Chopped Ham and Egg
- 4) Chopped Pork and Egg
- 5) Chop Suey
- 6) Corned Pork Loaf with Carrots and Apple Flakes
- 7) Deviled Meat
- 8) Ham and Egg
- 9) Ham Steaks
- 10) Mortadella
- 11) Pork Steaks
- 12) Solid Pack Chicken

Based on can size, those are the available meat components for the K ration in 1945. How many did the troops see? 3. Want the list again?

There was an exception. POWs. For Christmas 1944, meals were shipped to Germany, through the Swiss Red Cross, to the POWs in Germany. Those had some of those new items. I encountered the "Mortadella" listed as being in those meals. I don't know what Mortadella is, and don't care enough to look it up.

- 1) Beef stew
- 2) Chicken and Vegetables
- 3) Frankfurters and Beans
- 4) Ground Meat and Spaghetti
- 5) Ham and Egg with Potato
- 6) Ham with Lima Beans
- 7) Meat and Beans
- 8) Meat and Noodles
- 9) Meat and Vegetable Stew
- 10) Pork and Rice
- 11) Meat and Corn

Based on can size, those were the final M can components for C rations. They should be quite familiar to anyone that ate a C ration. Myself, I actually liked the Chicken and Vegetables.

Garrison

We've lost track of the garrison ration. The K, C, and 10-in-1 were all field rations. Canned, and shipped, were meat in large cans. If you were sent back to a rest camp, or hospital, there was some variety there as they had kitchens. The big cans of meat and other stuff could be used to provide meals with some variety. Locally sourced, fresh, items could be included. Bacon, Roast Beef, Vienna Sausages, etc., were shipped.

25 Mar. to 18 Apr. 1945

CLASS I—CONSUMPTION RECORD

Day		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Opn'l	Calendar	C Ration	K Ration	10-1 Ration	A Ration	Total Cols 1-4	D Ration	25-1 Ration	5-1 Ration
293	25 Mar	14,160	37,524	13,670	367,710	433,064	336	0	0
294	26	21,220	40,776	29,790	371,381	463,167	0	0	0
295	27	10,368	29,628	19,250	357,903	417,149	2,032	0	0
296	28	11,784	46,452	12,050	308,619	378,905	0	0	0
297	29	24,370	58,058	21,040	383,417	486,885	432	0	0
298	30	33,408	54,876	23,490	304,119	415,893	0	0	0
299	31	38,585	86,218	21,210	352,791	489,804	0	0	0
300	1 Apr	42,984	55,644	29,720	282,304	410,652	1,776	0	0
301	2	25,268	75,086	49,640	382,389	532,383	7,056	0	0
302	3	48,676	55,764	55,330	481,189	640,959	0	0	0
303	4	42,356	64,178	43,000	321,750	471,284	0	0	0

Ration consumption in the 1st Army for the dates listed. On March 25th, 1945, three times as many K rations were issued than C rations. Issued by the QM. Shipped by the QM. "Intended for assaults, not more than 3 days." Yeah, right. Take the 14,160 C rations, add the 37,524 K rations, add the 13,670 10-in-1 rations, first multiplying it by 10 for individual equivalent, and you get 188,384 combat rations for that day. Issued. It'll vary as a tank could draw multiple 10-in-1 rations for the upcoming 2 weeks. 367,710 A rations. Field kitchens in rear areas. Hospitals. Whatever civilians and POWs they needed to feed. Giving POWs K rations would likely violate the laws of war.

The C ration, if they had issued the variety developed, was a good ration. The K ration, with the later varieties, or without, was a bad ration. Poor nutritional value.

Human Behavior

In this era, people who wish to present the appearance of caring, when they don't, for political reasons, target school lunches. The result is a disaster. "We're going to provide a lunch with a balanced nutritional value." Which gets tossed in the garbage can as it's inedible. The kids then go hungry until they get home. Where they eat stuff which would make those political hacks clutch their pearls. Don't look at me: I ate a bag lunch. In High School, I drove to Dairy Queen for lunch. Sometimes the bar, they had food and drinks, but Dairy Queen's triple was a good burger. Lots of calories. The legal drinking age at the time was 18 where I lived. The effective age was "are you tall enough to put the money on the bar?"

The QM, and their hired egg-heads, designed the K ration with a specific calorie count. Which was too low right out of the gate. That calorie count assumed the troops would consume everything in there. That's egg-head thinking. Some of it is going to get tossed right off the bat. As the monotony of those things takes effect, even more is going to get tossed. When the Medical Corps starts noticing that the troop's health was being degraded over time, men low on nutrition begin to have behavioral issues due to the nutritional deficiency affecting their brain, it took a bit to figure out. Military hospitals, most located in England, began retaining infantrymen well after their wounds had healed so they could be fed correctly as they were in woeful health.

"The rations provided the necessary calories and nutrition!" Yeah, clearly that isn't the case. The K rations died. They tried to improve the C ration. Did they understand the human behavioral aspects?

Fielding the MRE makes the answer clear. I'd probably throw it away and eat that rice ball and dried fish head instead.