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Field Rations By Kurt Charles Loewe

Well, we had our first drill and are gearing up for another. It is now February and in a few months the campaign season will be upon us. So I'd like to start looking in that direction. And where better but the food we eat. Now I'm not going to tell you what you can and can't eat at events. That is up to you. But what one eats at events is also one of the simplest ways to improve your impression.

During the war, the army had basically two different types of rations, camp or garrison rations and marching rations. Because most of what we do is portray soldiers in the field (ie; not in camp or garrison), I'm choosing to only deal with the marching ration for right now. And that ration per day was as follows.¹

Meat:	12 ounces of pork or bacon, or 1 pound and 4 ounces of salt or fresh beef
Bread:	1 pound and 6 ounces of soft bread or flour, or 1 pound of hard bread [hardtack] or 1 pound and 4 ounces of corn meal
Coffee*:	1 ½ ounces green coffee or 1 ¼ ounces roasted coffee
Sugar*:	2 ¼ ounces sugar
Salt*:	½ ounce salt

* = approximate measures as these items were issued to every one hundred men in pounds, then divided

The above is what the official ration was. But based on accounts from soldiers, the most common things issued were salt pork, hard tack, roasted coffee and sugar. Definitely not the most exciting food, but you can survive on it. They did for long durations of time. So I know we can for a couple days. Once again for our purposes I am only going to cover the above daily ration based on what the soldiers talked about as the most common food issued.

Meat – ¾ pound of salt pork. You can find salt pork in your local grocery store, but I highly discourage using this. For starters it is not the same as what was issued, just has the same name. The closest thing that has been found to best emulate salt pork, is back bacon. This is not the stuff you normally buy that is sliced. It comes in slabs. Because of the low demand by today's customers, it is not usually available for purchase. But with a little looking around you can find it. My suggestion is to call around to your local meat markets and ask first if they carry back bacon. If not ask if they can either get it or recommend someplace that does carry it. Not always, but in most cases if a place can get it you have to order it in advance (a couple of days). And usually you need to buy a certain amount. If this is the case, my recommendation is to order how much you want. When you go to pick it up ask if they can cut it up into roughly ¾ lbs slabs. When you get home, pack a slab for each day of the event you're attending. Place the rest in the freezer for the next event. *Packing:* a lot of people are worried about raw bacon (or meat in

¹ Feeding Billy Yank, Union rations between 1861 and 1865, McCarley, J. Britt, Quartermaster Professional Bulletin, 1988.

general) not being refrigerated. And that is a good concern. But with back bacon, you need not worry. For starters it is cured and /or smoked not to mentioned filled with salt. So all you need to do is wrap your slabs in a cloth or place in a poke bag in your haversack and they should be fine for the duration of the event. The main thing with meat or any food in your haversack for that matter, is to use common sense. Don't leave your black-painted haversack sitting in the sun all afternoon. If you're going to a national, transport it in a cooler to the event then put in haversack once there. Another option is to cook it all prior to or upon arrival at the event. A lot of men upon receiving their rations cooked all the meat and ate it because it was less weight on their shoulders if it was in their belly. Also they never knew if they were going to get a chance to light fires and cook. If it is cooked right away and placed in the haversack it can be eaten whenever.

Bread – 1 lbs of hard tack. This is roughly ten pieces. There are two ways get a hold of this. Either make it yourself (contact me if you want a recipe) or an even simpler way is to purchase it from Bents Hardtack Company. This is a company that actually made it during the and for some reason still does, which is good for us. It costs \$10 per box (10 pieces) if bought singularly or \$8 per box if bought in quantities of ?? or more. Making it yourself may be cheaper, but I can tell you from experience it takes a long while to make a few pieces. Also rolling out the dough (flower and water) is a pain. If you want hard tack for just one event, this may be a consideration. But if you want it for a few events, I'd recommend getting it from Bents. This would be something that would be a great thing for the unit to do a unit buy and get it at a discount.

Coffee – 1 ¼ oz. This is easy. Go to your local store (or Dunkin Donuts) and buy a pound of unground coffee. Measure out the appropriate amount for the weekend and either place in bottom of haversack or poke bag. There is multiple ways to cook this up and drink it. If you aren't sure don't hesitate to ask. Also, if you save the beans after cooking, they can be used about two more times.

Sugar – 2 ¼ oz. A lady named Virginia Mescher had a three part article published in Food History News that described everything you ever wanted (or didn't want) to know about sugar and it's refining process during the Civil War. Based on her research, there were two main types of sugar during the war, white and brown, both from cane. It was figured that brown was probably the most prevalent for the army. So my recommendation is to obtain either dark brown Muscovado sugar from a specialty store or use your basic light brown sugar. Pack a bunch in a bowl or large cup and let it sit out to harden. Once it's hardened remove it from the container and let sit longer to make sure it's hardened all the way through. Then prior to an event break it and put chunks of roughly the above weight into your haversack. At the event you can either scrape what you need into your coffee with a knife or using your spoon like a shelf, carefully dip the block into coffee.

When you look at the above ration it does not seem like much, but you'd be surprised how much room it actually takes up. If you take two days rations (double above) and place that in your haversack with a plate or canteen half and your silverware. Your haversack will be full. Your cup would have to go in your knapsack (not the best place) or hooked to the outside of your haversack or knapsack. With that in mind it can easily be said that the only accurate definition of a haversack stuffer would be food!