

# LESSON 2: CIVIL WAR RATIONS

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

## Objectives

- Explore Civil War diseases, their causes, and treatment.
- Understand the human body is affected by eating habits and personal hygiene.
- Compare 19<sup>th</sup> century food preservation methods to 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Recognize food borne disease is prevalent today and ways to prevent its spread.
- Correctly multiply and divide ration amounts and convert ounces into pounds.



## INTRODUCTION

During the American Civil War more than 3.5 million soldiers served in the Union and Confederate armies. In order to feed so many troops, both governments established a Commissary Department, in charge of coordinating food procurement, storage, and distribution. Consequently, food rationing became a necessity.

According to army regulations for daily camp rations, a Union soldier was entitled to receive 12 oz of pork or bacon or 1 lb. 4 oz of salt or fresh beef; 1 lb. 6 oz of soft bread or flour or 1 lb. of hard bread (hardtack), or 4 oz of cornmeal. Salting, drying and pickling were

common methods of preserving food in the 19th century. Meat issued to Civil War soldiers was usually salted while fruits and vegetables were dried or canned. When marching, each soldier was responsible for his own food and was ordered to pack three days worth of rations in his haversack. Soldiers supplemented their diets by foraging and purchasing items from a sutler. The Confederate government adopted the official US Army ration at the start of the war, but was forced to reduce it as the war went on.

Many Civil War soldiers suffered both immediate and permanent health problems because their diet

lacked variety and nutritional content. Often the food they ate was spoiled and the water contaminated, contributing to nutritional problems and digestive ailments. A steady diet of hardtack and salt pork, and lack of fresh vegetables and fruits, led to scurvy and diarrhea. Two thirds of the deaths of Civil War soldiers were caused by disease. Unsound hygiene, dietary deficiencies, and battle wounds set the stage for epidemic infection, while inadequate information about the cause of diseases hampered disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Pneumonia, typhoid, diarrhea/dysentery, and malaria were the predominant illnesses.

## Materials

- Primary Documents from the "Civil War Soldiers Kit" (and on this CD)
  - #25 Drawing of steers being butchered
  - #26 Drawing of a company mess/Excerpt from letter of A.S. Hatch, July 30, 1861
  - #27 Marching Ration
  - #28 Soldiers enjoying a meal
  - Reproduction Artifacts found in the "Civil War Soldier Kit" (optional)
- Internet
- 1 set measuring cups
- Pencils and Paper

## Online Resources

Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention

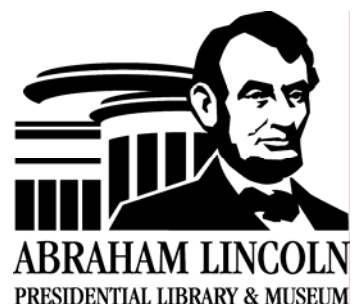
<http://www.cdc.gov/>

Civil War Food, Gettysburg National Military Park

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/gettkidz/hardtack.htm>

Civil War Soldier Life, Gettysburg National Military Park

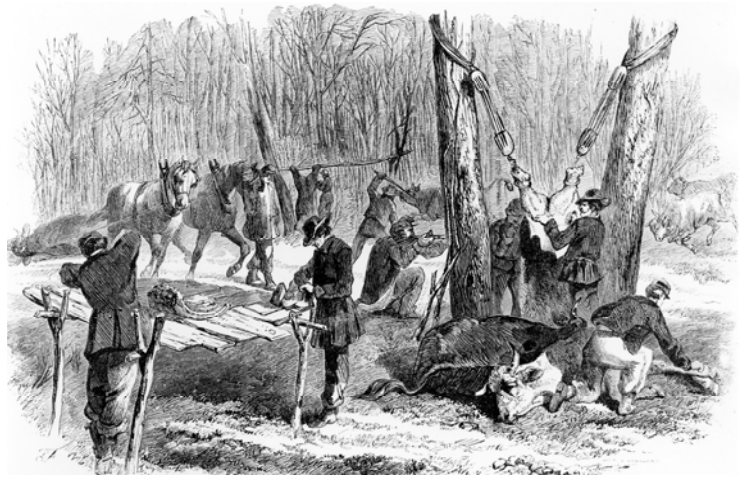
<http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/soldierlife/cwarmy.htm>



## LESSON 2: CIVIL WAR RATIONS

### PROCEDURE

1. Research and discuss vocabulary words associated with this lesson.
2. Have students examine the primary documents and artifacts from the "Civil War Soldier Kit."
3. Read the excerpt of the letter from A.S. Hatch to his cousin Mason, July 30, 1861 aloud to class.
4. Write the rations for 100 soldiers on the blackboard.
5. Students will convert pounds to ounces then divide to determine what ration an individual soldier would receive.
6. Students will multiply that ration by three days to determine what a marching ration consisted of.
7. Have available a set of measuring cups to demonstrate various ration amounts.



### Civil War Rations

For every 100 rations there was issued:

- 1 peck of beans or peas;
- 10 lb. of rice or hominy;
- 10 lb. of green coffee or 8 lb. roasted coffee, or 1 lb. 8 oz of tea;
- 15 lb. of sugar;
- 2 qt. salt;
- 4 qt. vinegar,
- 4 oz. pepper,
- 1/2 bushel potatoes;
- 1 qt of molasses.
- In addition to, or as substitutes for other items, desiccated (dehydrated) vegetables, dried fruit, pickles, or pickled cabbage might be issued.

### DISCUSSION

1. How would eating the same food items day after day affect you? Describe how food rations might have affected soldier morale.
2. What types of social problems could food rationing cause among soldiers?
3. What is scurvy? What causes the disease and how is it treated? Do we still have scurvy outbreaks today?
4. Many people around the world today survive on little food. What kinds of health problems occur from an insufficient diet? How does the daily ration of a Civil War soldier compare with food portions today?
5. When did the health benefits of adequate sanitation and hygiene become common place?
6. What food borne diseases are common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
7. Have there been any outbreaks of food borne diseases recently that you recall?
8. What kinds of procedures does the U.S. government have in place today to prevent the spread of food borne disease?
9. Have you or anyone you know ever had a food borne illness? What were the symptoms? How long did it take to recuperate?

### Vocabulary

- Ration
- Haversack
- Peck
- Desiccated
- Forage
- Hardtack
- Sutler
- food borne
- Scurvy
- Typhoid
- Malaria