

Food for Fighters

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Audio Transcript

Young man 1 (00:25)

I guess I'm in! When do we eat?

Young man 2 (00:26)

Well what's your hurry? All you get from now on is beans.

Narrator (00:31)

Army food is no longer a matter of beans and guess work. Since the last war, nutrition has become a science. And our army quartermaster corp uses that science in planning army meals. Food correctly used means fighting strength for our soldiers and better health for civilians. Scientists at food plants, at universities, and at the quartermaster corp's own subsistence laboratories in Chicago study food for energy. The food weapons of our enemies are investigated. The Japanese are supposed to produce great fighting energy out of a handful of rice. This is the amount of rice one of our soldiers would have to eat to approach the energy in his own rations. But Nazis are supposed to have a superman vitamin pill. The pill story is checked by Dr. Ancil Keys and his staff at the University of Minnesota. Vitamins and pills do not help pull weight, but vitamins do help the body use food. Only after eating actual food can a soldier pull more weight or push a bayonet harder. To discover what foods contain the right vitamins for fighting in various parts of the world, experiments are conducted in rooms where any climate can be imitated.

Young man 3 (02:04)

Holy smokes, they got us in the Sahara desert.

Narrator (02:08)

In this heat, different foods are tried. What's lost in perspiration is measured. The answer to the vitamin question is not pills, but good food in plenty of variety, according to Dr. Keys.

Dr. Keys (02:34)

If vitamins were missing from his food, a soldier might have to take concentrated vitamins. If he had vitamins but no food, he'd still starve. The best thing, naturally, is to supply vitamins in the food.

Narrator (02:48)

It is for this reason that the army uses only vitamin-enriched flour in its bread.

Man 1 (03:06)

Smells good, huh?

Man 2 (03:08)

If you lose your oven, take a couple of barrels, cover them with clay, and bake your bread.

Narrator (03:16)

The quartermaster corp believes in supplying our men everywhere with an abundant variety of fresh food of the kind they like, cooked the way they like it. In this country the job is comparatively simple. All army cooks follow a standard menu prepared by nutritionists in Washington. Vegetables and fruits, milk and eggs, are centrally purchased in vast quantities by army officers and civilian experts.

(03:47) The pick of the country's fresh meat is bought -- nearly a pound a day per soldier. The job of supply gets more difficult as a million men go overseas for the quartermaster corp faces the problem of shipping space, so meat

is de-boned, saving 60% in bulk. Still more space is saved through dehydration. A greater variety of food can now be shipped in this form. Only the water in them is removed to be replaced before cooking. Thus one ship can carry the load of 10. For dehydration, every egg is examined. The yolks are separated from the whites and put through a dryer. Our soldiers on the other side of the world will be provided with breakfast omelets made of this pure yolk powder.

(04:55) Vegetables, such as beets, go through a new process which preserves color, taste, and vitamin content. While these amazing developments in food processing are now used principally for the army, millions of civilians will be benefited after the war. For in the future, no household need be without vitamin-rich vegetables and fruits at any time. Dehydrated food is easy to keep. The quartermaster corp laboratory has established this in exhaustive tests. Only water need be added. When cooked, it is often impossible to detect a difference in taste. And constant tests show practically no difference in vitamin content between the dehydrated and the untreated product.

(05:43) When a soldier is out in the field and away from camp cooks, he must carry his own rations. Pre-cooked meats for emergency rations were developed in the army laboratory for this purpose. Here, too, emphasis is put on taste as well as on the food value of the rations, which consist of a can of meat for each meal, and a second unit containing concentrated soup, hard tack, coffee powder, and candy. Total weight, three and a half pounds for three square meals a day. But specialized troops in mobile warfare need a still more compact ration, so the army has developed the now-famous K ration, the completely streamlined meal. Originally designed for paratroops, K proved ideal for tank busters, commandos, and all isolated units. Each package contains a balanced, vitamin-rich meal. A day's ration weighs about two pounds. K was developed under Colonel Roland A. Isker.

Colonel Isker (06:45)

The object of the K ration is to provide the soldier with food under emergency. This ration with its variations therefore is therefore adapted to all climactic conditions from the tropics to the frigid zones. Each item in K had to be super-nutritious, but also appetizing. So each item was tested by Colonel Isker's guinea pig lunch club. Several recipes, for instance, were tried in picking a soy bean biscuit.

Colonel Isker (07:13)

This biscuit seems to meet specifications.

Man 1 (07:16)

Pretty tasty biscuit.

Colonel Isker (07:19)

You baked this biscuit on existing equipment?

Man 2 (07:19)

Man 3 (07:20)

How much soy is there in these?

Man 4 (07:24)

About one part in seven.

Colonel Isker (07:29)

It's good eating.

Narrator (07:32)

Thus we find ways to use such highly nourishing staples as the soy bean, which is easily produced in great plenty. The energies in this and other hitherto inefficiently used foods are unlocked for the world by chemists, such as Dr. Julian of Illinois, a famous soy expert. Soy flour strengthens wheat flour, eggs, lard in the K ration breakfast biscuit. With this and other items in K, we are in the possession of new foods, new methods of preparation, which make mankind independent of distance and climate. These war foods are also bulwarks against famine and catastrophe. To produce them, we have a new industry. When the army asked its suppliers to build this packaged food industry overnight, they didn't know they were getting K ready for Africa. A chewing gum company flung together a package assembly line out of bicycle chains. This company intends to make K a packaged meal business when peace comes. Millions of K rations, each container has a meat or cheese, the soy and other biscuits, a concentrated chocolate bar, fruit bar, or dextrose candies, coffee, lemon, or soup powder, instantly soluble in cold or hot water, cigarettes, and that American nerve tonic, chewing gum. And this amazing package requires no strategic materials. Tests, such as the bubble test, sometimes uncover imperfections. For K cartons must be air- and water-tight, gas proof, and seaworthy.

(09:08) With science at its service, and the greatest food-producing country in the world backing him up, the American soldier, no matter where he may be, in the jungle, in the Arctic, in the desert, or in his home camp, can rightly consider himself the best-fed soldier in the world. And in the future, the war-born knowledge that has made him so, when spread over the world, can guarantee that no one on earth need suffer from malnutrition or from hunger.

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