

Food for Thought

An Educational Program on the History of what Soldiers Have Had to Eat

MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History

Essential Question

- Why is a healthy diet crucial for soldiers?

Objectives

- Students will observe the change in army rations from the Civil War to present-day.
- Students will understand that in order for soldiers to be active and healthy, they need a healthy diet.
- By using primary photographs, along with both original and reproduction artifacts, students will gain an understanding of how soldiers have carried and prepared their meals.
- Students will learn how the food and water people consume can hurt or harm them.
- Students will be introduced to new vocabulary.

Guiding Questions

- What does it mean to say “an army marches on its stomach?”
- How has the government found ways to feed its soldiers?

Key Terms

- Ration – an amount of food supplied on a regular basis, especially to members of the armed forces during a war.
- Forage – search widely for food or provisions.
- Canteen – a small water bottle, as used by soldiers or campers.
- Calorie – a measure of energy released by food as it is digested by the human body.
- Protein – essential in the diet of animals for growth and for repair of tissues.
- Hydration – To supply water to (a person, for example) in order to restore or maintain fluid balance.
- Nutrition – the process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth.

Program Overview

Napoleon Bonaparte is quoted as saying, “An army marches on its stomach.” For a soldier, regardless of what military conflict he or she served in, whether it be the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam or today - one of the most immediate daily needs is food. Many aspects go into being a soldier and keeping an army in the field with the will to fight. Yes, an army does need to clothe its soldiers, transport them and provide them with the tools necessary to win on the battlefield. But a soldier who is malnourished, sick, and weak will win few if any victories.

“Food for Thought” is an educational program where students are presented information about what the common soldier has typically eaten while serving in combat, from the Civil War to modern times. Using primary photographs, reproduction and original artifacts that soldiers used in food preparation, as well as actual food items, students are presented a timeline of army rations.

Activity

Students will be given a brief introduction to the history of army rations, and what all soldiers have fundamentally been given by the Government to eat while living in the field. Students will learn about the importance of hydration, healthy food options, calories, carbohydrates and the need for a healthy diet in order to maintain physical health and fitness. For liability reasons, student will not be allowed to eat or taste any of the food items on display.

Materials Used

- Primary photographs
- Original artifacts
- Reproduction artifacts
- Food items (i.e. salt pork, hardtack, coffee, sugar, MREs, etc.)

References

Hardtack & Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life, by John D. Billings; University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Food in the American Military: A History, by John C. Fisher; McFarland, 2010.

Army Operational Rations - Historical Background:

http://www.qmfound.com/army_rations_historical_background.htm

http://www.qmfound.com/history_of_rations.htm