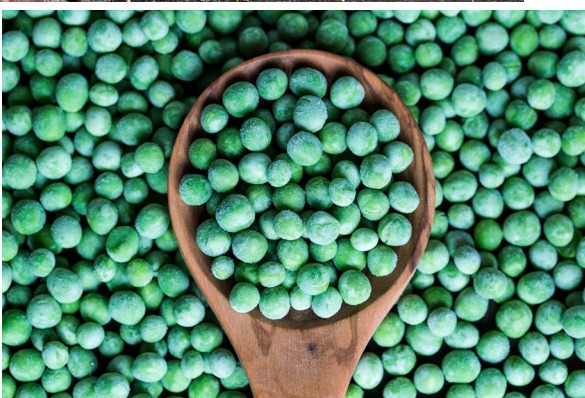


Rations





Teacher's Guide: Rations

The daily rations allotted by Congress were based on British standards. These provided enough calories and all needed nutrients except for Vitamins A and C. The bigger problem was that the soldiers did not always get these rations. Supply problems plagued both armies throughout the war, and it has been said that the Southern Campaign was as much a test of who could outlast the other as military strategy.

The only way to preserve meat for the army was to salt it, which required huge amounts of salt. Prior to the war, salt had been imported, which left the Americans needing it desperately. Salt works were established but struggled to keep up with demand. To preserve meat with salt, it was put into a brine, which made it very heavy to transport. Without salt, cattle had to be moved from where they were raised to where the army was and then slaughtered as needed. Since there was also a shortage of food for animals, this meant that they lost weight and provided less meat.

Instead of bread, men were sometimes given an equal portion of flour to make their own. Other times they were given hard biscuits, which wouldn't spoil as fast as bread, but men recorded that they could break their teeth on them. They tended to soak them in bread, milk, or stew before eating. Vinegar was added at some point when officers realized that their men were becoming sick. They blamed it on poor nutrition and added vegetables and vinegar to their rations.

How might food have been cooked? The flour could have been turned into biscuits with these ingredients or basic flatbreads, even dumplings to go in a stew. The meat could have been boiled or roasted. While peas cook quickly, beans do not, and they could have made the basis for a soup or stew, especially with the meat added. It would take at least a few hours to cook this over a fire. If rice was given instead of the milk, it could have been added to this type of dish.

In addition to the meager rations, the soldiers were expending a great deal of energy. They carried all of their belongings on their backs, didn't have adequate clothing, and were moving on rough roads. During the Race to the Dan, one officer recorded that his men marched 60 miles in two days – in sleet and rain.