

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

---

## Federal Army Rations in the Civil War

By R. E. J. Myzie

### Resources

#### If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Croner, Barbara M., ed.	<i>A Sergeant's Story: Civil War Diary of Jacob J. Zorn 1862-1865</i> . Apollo, PA: Closson Press, 1999.
Donald, David Herbert, ed.	<i>Gone for a Soldier: The Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard</i> . Boston, MA: Little brown and Company, 1975).

### Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Billings, John D.	<i>Hardtack and Coffee or The Unwritten Story of Army Life</i> . Boston, MA: George M Smith & Co, 1888.
Horsford, E. N.	<i>The Army Ration. How to Diminish its Weight and Bulk, Secure Economy in its Administration, Avoid Waste, and Increase the Comfort, Efficiency, and Mobility of troops</i> . New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864.
Kautz, August V.	<i>Customs of Service for Non-commissioned Officers and Soldiers as Derived from Law and Regulations and Practiced in the Army of the United States</i> . Philadelphia, PA : J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864.
Sanderson, Captain James M.	<i>Camp Fires and Camp Cooking; or Culinary hints for the Soldier: Including Receipt for Making Bread in the "Portable</i>

	<i>Field Oven” Furnished by the Subsistence Department. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862.</i>
	<i>Revised United States Army Regulations of 1861. With an Appendix Containing the Changes and Laws Affecting Army Regulations and Articles of War to June 25th, 1863. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1863.</i>

### Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email

### Web Resources

URL	Name and description

### Other Sources

Name	Description, Contact information including address, email

### Scholars

Name	Email
Ron Myzie	<a href="mailto:Ongs.hat.170@gmail.com">Ongs.hat.170@gmail.com</a>

### Topic Précis

<p>It was the responsibility of the Federal government’s Subsistence Department to ensure that Union soldiers were adequately provisioned and during the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War the army had codified a workable supply system to</p>
--

achieve this. Rations for permanent forts were quite different from marching rations. There was a much greater variety of foodstuff at forts or long-term encampments than there was in the field. Field rations had to survive without spoilage under sometimes adverse conditions. The army was careful about spending and took care to ensure that it got its money's worth when it came to purchasing anything. Manuals and guides were published for commissary officers and commissary sergeants to assist them in evaluating the quality of purchases. Rations issued by the army included hardtack, soft bread, salt pork, salt beef, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper and vinegar (for flavoring and as a preventative of scurvy). Armies were sometimes accompanied by herds of beef cattle, which were slaughtered for fresh meat. Soldiers supplemented army rations with purchases from sutlers, packages from home, purchases from friendly civilians, and looting food in enemy territory. New forms of food were introduced and included an instant coffee in a thick paste, desiccated compressed potatoes, and desiccated compressed vegetables. There were no soldiers classified as cooks and soldiers on the march formed 3- or 4-man messes and took turns cooking for themselves. Regulations governing rations were detailed and included specified amounts of rations to be issued, forms to be completed concerning the purchase, delivery and consumption of rations by army units. A review of the text of the regulations shows that the government was extremely thrifty in issuing supplies of every kind and made great efforts to prevent fraud. Given the circumstances and the need for expediency in raising, supplying, and feeding a very large army in a short period of time, the government did well in working through the myriad of obstacles. Federal soldiers may have gone hungry from time to time, yet no one starved.

\*\*\*\*\*