

REPORT NO. 59
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

Date 21 Mar 53

Food Complaints and Cooks' Training.

Canadian Army Overseas, 1939-43

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1. It is the purpose of this report to examine certain facts concerning food complaints made by Canadian troops in the United Kingdom during the period 1939-43, to discuss the measures taken to train cooks, to note the decrease in food complaints, and, relating these to each other, to draw the correct conclusions. Research on this subject has revealed that there were many reasons for food complaints: insufficiency of food, inferior quality and poor cooking to name the most important. This report does not deal with many factors which have an important bearing on the subject. Rather, the discussion deals almost entirely with the relationship of food complaints to the efficiency of cooks.

2. The importance that may be attached to a discussion of food complaints lies in the fact that such complaints have a bearing on Morale. Three "M" factors in Morale -- "money", "mail" and "meals" --

have an immediate and personal effect on the soldier. Since food is a basic necessity, "meals" in sufficient quantity and of adequate quality are of first importance.

3. Among Canadian troops in the United Kingdom in 1939-43, one of the factors which tended to lower morale¹ was found in the widespread and growing number of complaints regarding food. Initially it had been decided that Canadian troops would eat the same rations as the British soldiers (C.M.H.Q. 14/Rat/1, S.S. & T.O. to D.A.Q.M.G., "C" Div, 9 Dec 39). This meant a considerable change in the quality, quantity and type of diet, a change from abundant Canadian food to a strictly rationed and unfamiliar British army diet.

COOKS

4. While food complaints noted by the postal censors sometimes brought corrective action, army authorities seem to have been aware of some of the catering problems from the time Canadian troops first arrived in England - in other words before complaints began to pile up and before the regular censorship reports on Canadian mail were initiated. In the Canadian Army in 1939 it was necessary to find cooks and butchers from within the ranks of a unit. Cooks simply didn't "come with the rations" as they did later, i.e. from the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. ((H.S.) 146.1003(D1) Trades

¹ In spite of the intensive training undergone by Canadian soldiers in the United Kingdom, the greatest harm to their morale seems to have resulted from the operational inactivity enforced by their static role. Complaints of "boredom" were most common.

Training, Report on Organization of Cooks Training Wing R.C.A.S.C., 1941/44, p. 1) The recruiting policy had been designed originally to enlist civilian tradesmen and teach them only the military application of their trade. But in 1940 recruiting centres found difficulty in obtaining the required number of tradesmen, including cooks, and it was foreseen that basic technical training would have to be undertaken. ((H.S.) 112.3S2009(D46) Tradesmen Cdn Army Trg, October 1940-September 1944, C.G.S. to Minister of National Defence, 7 Nov 40)

5. Thus an interest was taken perforce in the training of cooks overseas as early as 1939. This was done by means of courses at Emergency Cooks Training Centres and at the Army School of Cookery, both of which were British organizations. By 7 Dec 39 courses had been arranged for Canadians and this practice continued. (C.M.H.Q. 2/Cooks/1, B.G.S., C.M.H.A. to Under-Secretary of State for War, 30 Nov 39 and D.A.Q.M.G., "C" Div, to C.M.H.Q., 7 Dec 39) These courses were not adequate however ((H.S.) 146.1003(D1) Trades Training, Report on Organization etc.). In September 1940 a serious fault was found with the type of cooks' training being carried out. The complaint was that cookery courses available since landing in England had been mainly restricted to cooks with previous civilian or army cooking experience (C.M.H.Q. 2/Cooks/1 B.G.S. (Cdn) H.Q. 7 Corps to Sr. Offr. C.M.H.Q., 23 Sep 40).

6. Improvements took place very gradually but were given added impetus in February 1941, when it became apparent that new plans were afoot. Lt-Gen A.G.L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G.,

D.S.O., (then G.O.C. 1st Canadian Corps) held a meeting to discuss catering and cooks. Having been assured of assistance from British catering facilities, the General said that he was interested in developing:

- a. an organization based on a pool of catering supervisors at CMHQ, supplemented by area advisers;
- b. trades pay for cooks; and
- c. training of unit messing officers and cooks at British schools.

Consideration had been given to the organization of a Canadian school of cookery, but in view of the vacancies available at British schools this project was temporarily abandoned. (C.M.H.Q. 14/Cat/1, various references, 21 Feb - 12 Mar 41) In fact, in March 1941, the British Catering Adviser for South Eastern Command informed Canadian authorities that an entire school could be turned over to the training of Canadian cooks and, on 21 Jul 41, the entire capacity of the Emergency Cooks Training Centre at Willems Barracks was allocated to the Canadians. (C.M.H.Q. 2/Cooks/1, Inspector of Catering to [Sr. Offr.] C.M.H.Q., 21 Jul 41)

7. The subject of a Canadian cookery school again came under discussion in March 1942. At this time a former divisional catering adviser and his successor reviewed the cook situation and suggested remedies. Many of the recommendations, too numerous to mention here, were rejected. However, plans were approved to implement the following:

- a. That all cooks be trained and trade-tested centrally at C.R.U.
- b. That training be undertaken in 1 C.G.R.U. and that a cooks' course be organized there for that purpose. Facilities are available, and this will prevent the present duplication resulting from several small independent courses being run in various Reinforcement Units.
- c. That the trade-testing be done under the supervision of a Catering Adviser who shall be a member of the standing Trade Test Board at C.R.U.

The following policy was also to be applied: instruction in cooking would be carried out under Canadian arrangements, as experience showed that British schools did not observe Canadian standards of cooking and hygiene. By 1 Jun 42 non-commissioned officers were being selected as instructors for the new Canadian Cookery School. (C.M.H.Q. 14/Cat/1, G.S.O.2(M.T.) C.M.H.Q. to B.G.S., 27 Apr 42; and G.S.O.2 (M.T.) to A.G.2, 1 Jul 42)

8. Evidence regarding the setting up of a Canadian cookery school is limited. At one time No. 1 Canadian General Reinforcement Unit was suggested as the locale for a Canadian cooking school, but this plan was cancelled in 1942 (C.M.H.Q. 2/Cooks/1/4, D.A.G., C.M.H.Q. to H.Q., C.R.U., 11 Aug 42). Eventually a cooking school was established at No. 1 Canadian Army Service Corps Reinforcement Unit ((H.S.) 146.1003(D1) Trades Trg, ...: Cooks and Butchers Wing formed at 1 C.A.S.C.R.U., August 1941). The unit war diary throws little light on the matter. Appendix No. 1 of the September 1942 war diary, No. 1 C.A.S.C.R.U., concludes with, "... and now we are setting up an organization to train all the cooks from the Canadian Army". The October 1942 war diary of this same unit makes incidental mention of a catering wing.

9. In March and April 1943 there was an exchange of messages between National Defence Headquarters and Canadian Military Headquarters which throws some light on the subject. In reply to a query from N.D.H.Q., C.M.H.Q. cabled on 26 Mar 43:

Initial proposal re cooks and butchers which was set up by Adm Order 210 of 13 Aug 42.... All reinforcement cooks now being concentrated Cooks and Butchers Wing CASCRU but transfers to RCASC voluntary basis only although RCASC personnel only eligible for trades pay within quota when unposted

This internal arrangement overseas on experimental basis at present but experience has shown that plan to train and hold all cooks and butchers in one unit very sound. However shortage of cooks very acute and serious considerations being given to compulsory transfer so that cross posting will be possible.

This compulsion may be necessary to overcome surplus of unemployed cooks in some Corps while large deficiencies exist in others. Whole situation now under review and therefore request no action Canada at present.

(C.M.H.Q. 1/Orig RCASC/1, Cable
A.974, Canmilitary to Defensor, 26 Mar
43)

A subsequent message, dated 3 Apr 43, said ".... experience has shown that the provision of cooks from RCASC sources is most satisfactory and therefore [we] request that all reinforcement cooks be supplied through RCASC sources as RCASC personnel" (ibid, Cable A. 1088, Canmilitary to Defensor, 3 Apr 43).

FOOD COMPLAINTS

10. Attention began to be focused on food complaints through reports submitted by the Field Censor (Home). Since the question of censorship is not a part of this report it is sufficient to say here that censorship, while designed primarily to check the leakage of information, provided useful evidence of the welfare and morale of the troops, and gave the opportunity to enquire into and ameliorate genuine causes of complaint. It was by this means that Canadian military authorities were able to take note of the food complaints and, when necessary, to take action to remove the causes for complaint.

11. It is difficult to establish precisely when a regular record was first kept of food complaints made by Canadian troops in England. One of the earliest reports is that of 23 Feb 40 when the Chief Postal Censor submitted a report to Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O., (then Senior Combatant Officer). The censor reported that: "...the insufficiency and bad quality of the food annoys the majority of the writers". However it was not until August 1941 that the censorship of "Free Mail" was instituted, and it is from censorship reports of this and subsequent months that most of the typical comments are obtained. (C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor/1, Chief Postal Censor to Crerar, 23 Feb 40; G.S.O. 2 (Int) C.M.H.Q. to B.G.S., 28 Jun 41, Appx "A"; and Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q., to Under-Secretary of State for War, 28 Jul 42)

12. Information on the state of morale as affected by food reached various Canadian headquarters from the field censors by way of Canadian Military Headquarters. In some cases investigations were ordered as a direct result of food complaints noted by the censors. Comments on food ranged from

condemnation to praise; complaints and appreciations normally occurred simultaneously from within the many Canadian units. Complaints were more noticeable among recently arrived units, and were more critical of the insufficiency of food than of the quality of the food and the standard of cookery.

13. Many soldiers failed to appreciate the necessity of rationing and there were repeated requests for food parcels from home. Typical comments were: "the rations we get wouldn't be enough to feed a rat" and "our biggest trouble is we cannot get enough [food]". a soldier from a highland regiment complained that the food was insufficient when returning from exercises. There were complaints, too, of the monotony of the diet, such as, "food ... nothing fancy but substantial" and "food all right but very monotonous". Complaints about bad food were manifold but tended to be general rather than specific. "Terrible", "unfit for pigs" and "even the dogs won't eat it", were comments in this class, as were: "some men claim that the food they get is making them ill", and "it [the food] was good when we first landed but now it is getting worse. Sunday ... for breakfast .. [we had] fish ... so rank we couldn't eat it". Some writers realized that the poor quality of the food which was served to them was often due to poor administration and to poor cooking. One soldier, writing in August 1941, and perhaps a little more discerning than his comrades, observed, "our meals have been poor and insufficient since hitting this country mostly because of mismanagement". The complaints of poor cooking are well illustrated by the following: "The food none too good is disgracefully abused by the cooks ..." and, "the rations issued are alright but the cooks mess it up so much that it is not fit to eat most of the time". (C.M.H.Q.

4/Censor/4/3, Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q. to H.Q. Cdn Corps 22 Sep 41, and Field Censor (Home) Reports, 15 Sep - 12 Oct 41)

14. Among the serious complaints were those emanating from certain British training camps² which, in the eyes of Canadian trainees, were notorious for serving poor food. A training camp in Cornwall was referred to as "the worst place for food" while Sonnybridge and Bordon also has bad reputations. In any event the majority of complaints concerned quantity. This is born out by the extracts from letters and the censors' comments, which ran in this vein: "complaints refer mostly to insufficiency", "complaints refer to quantity rather than quality" and "many of the new arrivals from Canada appear to be missing their Canadian food and have not yet got accustomed to the rationing over here". Another comment may have come close to the heart of the matter: "Most of the men's complaints invariably refer to one particularly bad meal and probably letters are written whilst the writers are still under the influence of this one bad meal and consequently their views are rather distorted". (C.M.H.Q.

4/Censor/4/3 and 4/Censor/4/4, FC(H) Reports, 1 Sep - 7 Dec 41)

15. If the food problem had been limited to routine complaints only it might not have been serious, but there were a number of implications. Besides complaining, men were spending their pay for food to abate the pangs of hunger. One soldier in a General Holding Unit wrote: "I draw four pound cash a

² Examples of the camps referred to are Cardigan, Catterick, Melton Mowbray and Nuneaton (C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor/4/4, FC(H) Report, 5 - 19 Jan 42).

month and 90% of it goes in canteens for food ... we have had our rations cut three times since we came over". Most serious of all was the threat of mutiny or near mutiny which occurred occasionally, as illustrated by the following extracts: "The boys had a riot yesterday over the rotten grub we are getting", and "nearly 3/4 of our section is under open arrest on charge of mutiny in the field.... It all happened on account of our meals". (C.M.H.Q. File No. 4/Censor/4/3, FC(H) Reports, 1 Sep - 12 Oct 41)

16. Some complaints resulted in special investigations. During the autumn of 1941 a number of letters containing serious criticisms of messing arrangements were noted. One letter written by a soldier from 5 Fd Regt R.C.A. stated:

We have been having trouble in the mess lately. We only get bread twice and sometimes only once a day.... Saturday .. we didn't get very much to eat and today we sent for the orderly officer... But all of Canada will hear about it if they have a riot here

(C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor/4/3, Postal and
Telegraph Censorship Submission No.
PO/76024/41, 29 Sep 41).

In a reply made to this complaint, and presumably upon orders from above to investigate, the commanding officer of this unit afterwards gave this explanation:

The unit is at present split in many small messes. Only temporary cooking arrangements have been in operation since ... August cooking facilities will be much improved.

He explained that the shortage of bread was due to the many haversack lunches made for sub-units on the move; as to the specific complaint quote above:

The case of Kirk [the complainant] has been thoroughly investigated....

This is an entirely exaggerated picture and ... [I] find it to be the product of one individual who had a passing grouse at the time.

...it is my considered opinion that any intentions to riot or mutiny within this unit are purely figments of the imagination of one individual....

(Ibid, C.O., 5 Fd Regt R.C.A. to H.Q.

R.C.A. 2 Cdn Div, 15 Oct 41)

On 22 Jul 42 the Inspector of Catering wrote to C.M.H.Q. saying that the catering advisor of South Eastern Command had invited him to go on a catering inspection tour. This happened as the result of a travelling cookery instructor (T.C.I.) having received complaints, noted through the censoring of letters written by Canadians training at some unspecified Royal Army Ordnance Corps establishment. These complaints could not be found. (C.M.H.Q. 14/Insp Cat/3, Inspector of Catering to A.D.S.T., C.M.H.Q., 22 Jul 42) The above are but two of a number of instances where food complaints were investigated.

17. Aside from the question of quality and quantity of food and the standard of cooking, there were several other causes for food complaints. Doubtless there were clashes of personalities and there was at least one example of seeming lack of cooperation. This occurred when an attempt was made by Headquarters 1st Canadian Infantry Division to prevent the sending of a field report from a catering adviser to the Inspector of Catering (C.M.H.Q. 14/Insp Cat/3, Inspector of Catering to A.D.S.T., C.M.H.Q. 18 Mar 42). Units sometimes complained of being unable to obtain certain commodities normally supplied by the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, (NAAFI) (*ibid*, T.C.I. to Inspector of Catering, 2 Apr 42). In October 1940 the issue of eggs ceased and the meat and fish ration was decreased. On the other hand it must be admitted that from time to time there were also improvements in rationing: in November 1940 fresh milk was issued in lieu of canned milk; another improvement concerned mutton, which was very unpopular with Canadian troops - arrangements were made to

draw this commodity once a week only. (C.M.H.Q. 14/Rat/1, various references, e.g., folios 63A, 85A, 86A and 119, etc.)

IMPROVEMENTS

18. As events turned out poor food and cooks' training continued to be problems until the end of the war, but there were some improvements. The censor noted in November 1941 that food complaints were not so frequent and generally referred to bad cooking rather than to the food itself. For example: "Our meals are swell now. We have a new cook and he sure can cook. Same food but what a difference". (C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor/4/4, FC(H) Report, 10-23 Nov 41) In March 1942 a writer from the Edmonton Regiment wrote that food had improved since the cooks had been changed; someone from the 3rd Canadian Infantry Holding Unit wrote: "We are on the same rations as the others but the cooks do a better job". (C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor/4/5, FC(H) Report, 16 Feb - 1 Mar 42) By the end of 1943 food complaints had dropped to a fraction of one per cent of all letters examined by the Censors. Indeed, less than one per cent of the letters contained any comment on food. (C.M.H.Q. 4/Censor Reps/1/3, FC(H) Report, 25 Nov - 6 Dec 43)

19. The improved messing conditions were suggested in accounts from two or three of the formation headquarters. On 9 Jan 42, H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div reported to H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps that the only complaint was the monotony of the diet, but that the cooks were making every effort to overcome this

difficulty and that, on the whole, they were extremely good. 3 Cdn Inf Div also reported an improvement but pointed out that there was still a shortage of well-trained cooks. In the following month the division felt justified in reporting that the standard of efficiency of cooks seemed to be improving, and that it was considered this could be traced directly to the benefits derived from courses held at the School of Cookery. 2 Cdn Inf Div also advised Corps HQ that Censorship reports indicated that, in many cases, the troops were receiving plenty of good food. In April 1942 the same formation reported that the divisional catering adviser was proving to be of conservable help to units in providing diversified menus and that the quality of rations was good. ((H.S.) 220C1.009(D47)

Morale) At the end of 1942 H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div commented:

Messing officers and Senior N.C.O. cooks' conferences convened by the Div Catering Adviser [D.C.A.], regular inspection of unit cooking facilities by the D.C.A., and the attachment of Sgt Instructor Cooks to units experiencing difficulty in maintaining a satisfactory standard of messing have all resulted in an improved general standard throughout the division.

(Ibid, Morale Report, G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div to G.O.C. 1 Cdn Corps, 9 Dec 42).

As has already been noted, by 1943 food complaints had decreased to a fraction of one per cent of the mail examined.

CONCLUSION

20. Initial research for this report suggested that because of food complaints picked up by means of the censorship of mail special measures were taken to train cooks, with the result that there was a decrease in complaints. Undoubtedly the training of cooks led to an improvement in meals, but it is not certain that special cooks' training came as a direct result of Field Censors' Reports on food complaints. In other words complaints did decrease with the passing of time, certain measures were taken to train cooks, but a continuous "cause and effect" relationship cannot be established on the evidence examined. During the period from 1939 to 1943 there was a simultaneous development of growing food complaints and of an expanding cooks' training programme followed by a general improvement in messing in the Canadian Army Overseas.

21. While censorship brought to light many food complaints, catering advisers also uncovered many messing problems which affected the quality of meals, and with which they dealt effectively. The catering adviser supervised and inspected the cooks' early training and subsequent efficiency, kitchen equipment and accommodation, and of course, rations. Unlike the censors, who could only add up the number of complaints and report them to C.M.H.Q., catering inspectors could at once note complaints,

determine the cause and finally take appropriate action or give advice to a higher authority, as required.

It seems probable, therefore, that catering advisers, rather than censors, were mainly responsible for correcting the causes of food complaints.

22. In short, three factors have an important bearing on the decrease in food complaints:

(a) Registration of complaints: (1)as noted by catering advisers; and

(2)as noted by censors.

(b) Improvement of Cooks: (1)by training;

(2)by reorganization as part of
R.C.A.S.C. with trades pay; and

(3)advice from and inspections by
catering advisers.

(c) Soldiers grew more accustomed to the British Army diet as time went by. It should be noted that new arrivals almost invariably complained about food.

23. Censorship reports indicate that registration of complaints attained a peak at some time prior to 1941, but confirmation of this theory is lacking. However this much is evident: Comments regarding food in 1941 tended on the whole to be critical, while in 1943 criticism of food had almost disappeared, although naturally complaints never ceased. Overseas training of cooks was initiated in December 1939 using British facilities, and apparently not until late in 1942 was a Canadian Cookery School established but by this time food complaints were already on the wane. Hence while the training of cooks undoubtedly influenced the prevalence of food complaints it was not the only, or necessarily, the most important influence.

POSTSCRIPT

24. It is evident that the problems discussed in this report are likely to arise again in the future. At the date of compilation of this report the subject of military cooking was under discussion in the Canadian press. Pte J.C. Lacombe of Vancouver said Canadians then billeted in British Camps in Germany were displeased with rations. "We had fish four times a week", he said, "and then they had enough nerve to ask if we wanted kippered herring on Sunday. We used our pay to buy extra food". In Ottawa Brig. W.L. Coke, Director General of Army Medical Services who recently returned from a tour of Canadian forces in Germany said the [27th] Brigade received British rations because its entire supply channel was through the British army.... The only cause for complaint might be poor preparation

but generally the food was very well prepared. (The Montreal Daily Star, 8 Dec 52: Troops Report on Morale. Brig. W.L. Coke tells of food plan.)

25. This report was prepared by Lt. C.A. Larson.

(C.P. Stacey) Colonel

Director Historical Section