

Chapter 9J

Rations

Napoleon Bonaparte, the French emperor, famously said an army marches on its stomach. Anyone who has spent any time with soldiers in the field knows they have an inordinate interest in food – and boots.

The food the SA Army serves its soldiers typically falls into three categories:

- Fresh rations
- Wet rations
- Dry rations

“Fresh rations” are fresh meat, vegetables, fruit and bread prepared and served to soldiers either in the field or in base. This food is generally bought from local suppliers and is the same as that found in most supermarkets.

“Wet rations” are standard (the same that can be bought in a supermarket) tinned foods supplied to troops in the field.

“Dry rations” are pre-prepared military-specification ration packs (“ratpacks”) typically issued to troops in the field. It contains all the food, beverage and peripherals one soldier will need in a 24 hour period. These rations are issued on a scale of one per person per day. They typically cost about R100 per pack.

More on dry rations

General information¹

Ration packs have been scientifically designed to fulfil the nutritional need of most soldiers. The amount of protein, fat and carbohydrates are balanced to provide the correct ratios. There are certain products in the ration pack that have been fortified with vitamins and minerals to ensure that soldiers get the nutrition their bodies require. There is no need for additional vitamin and mineral supplements when using ration packs, provided the primary products in the pack are actually eaten. It is of vital importance to eat the products with the most nutritional value, being the canned products and dried fruit, as well as the fortified products, being the porridge, energy bars, sweets and nutritional drink. Soldiers often keep the sweets, energy bars, dried fruit and sports drink for their children at home, or give it away. This practice compromises the soldier’s nutritional intake and should be discouraged. The main meal should be taken with friends. Putting together all the cans and flavouring it with other products can produce quite interesting

¹ Taken from a leaflet found in a ration pack distributed at the 2006 edition of SA Army Exercise Seboka.

meals. For example: heating the meat balls with some cheese gives a dish that is creamy and delicious. Making the meal a social occasion is pleasurable and will increase the amount soldiers eat.

“Best before” date

Every pack has been stamped with a code that indicates the “best before” date. This is not a magical number. The pack does not suddenly become inedible or toxic after that date. Most of the items in the pack have a shelf life much longer than the “best before” date. The item that limits the shelf life of the total pack is the cheese. According to the manufacturer, the minimum shelf life of the cheese is nine months. It can last longer if stored in good conditions. To accommodate this shelf life, the shelf life of the total pack is considered nine months. All the other products will still be in very good condition. In fact, the canned and other products will last at least 18 months, depending.

Maintaining adequate hydration

An adequate fluid intake is imperative. It is essential that soldiers do not dehydrate, as dehydration will affect their physical and mental performance. Even a small dehydration will influence their ability to reason and impair physical performance. The hypotonic sports drink powders may be used to flavour water. It is important for soldiers to monitor the colour and the volume of their urine. Check that it is colourless or light straw. Darker urine may indicate they are not drinking enough fluid. Note that some medicines and food affects the colour of urine. It is important for soldiers to know their bodies and be in a position to judge when they are not taking enough water.

Ration Packs

There are currently five variants, numbered one to five. Most soldiers have one or more favourites and a vigorous trade usually ensues when these are issued. Here follows suggested menus:

Packs 1, 3, 4 & 5

Breakfast

- Hypotonic sports drink
- Porridge with sugar and creamer
- Coffee with sugar and creamer
- Chewing gum

Mid-morning snack

- Nutritional shake
- Energy bar
- Chewing gum

Lunch

- Ready-to-eat meal
- Salt/sauce
- Biscuit with cheese and jam
- Coffee with sugar and cream
- Chewing gum

Mid-afternoon snack

- Hypotonic sports drink
- Energy bar
- Chewing gum

Supper

- Ready-to-eat meal
- Salt/sauce
- Biscuit with cheese and jam
- Tea with sugar and creamer
- Chewing gum

Late night snack

- Instant soup
- Biscuit
- Dried fruit
- Chewing gum

Pack 2 (Adds maize porridge, deletes biscuits)

Breakfast

- Hypotonic sports drink
- Porridge with sugar and creamer
- Coffee with sugar and creamer
- Chewing gum

Mid-morning snack

- Nutritional shake
- Energy bar
- Chewing gum

Lunch

- Ready-to-eat meal (Corned beef)
- Salt/sauce
- Maize porridge with cheese
- Coffee with sugar and cream
- Chewing gum

Mid-afternoon snack

- Hypotonic sports drink
- Energy bar
- Chewing gum

Supper

- Ready-to-eat meal (Chilli con carne)
- Salt/sauce
- Biscuit with cheese and jam
- Tea with sugar and creamer
- Chewing gum

Late night snack

- Instant soup
- Dried fruit
- Chewing gum