

April 22, 2020

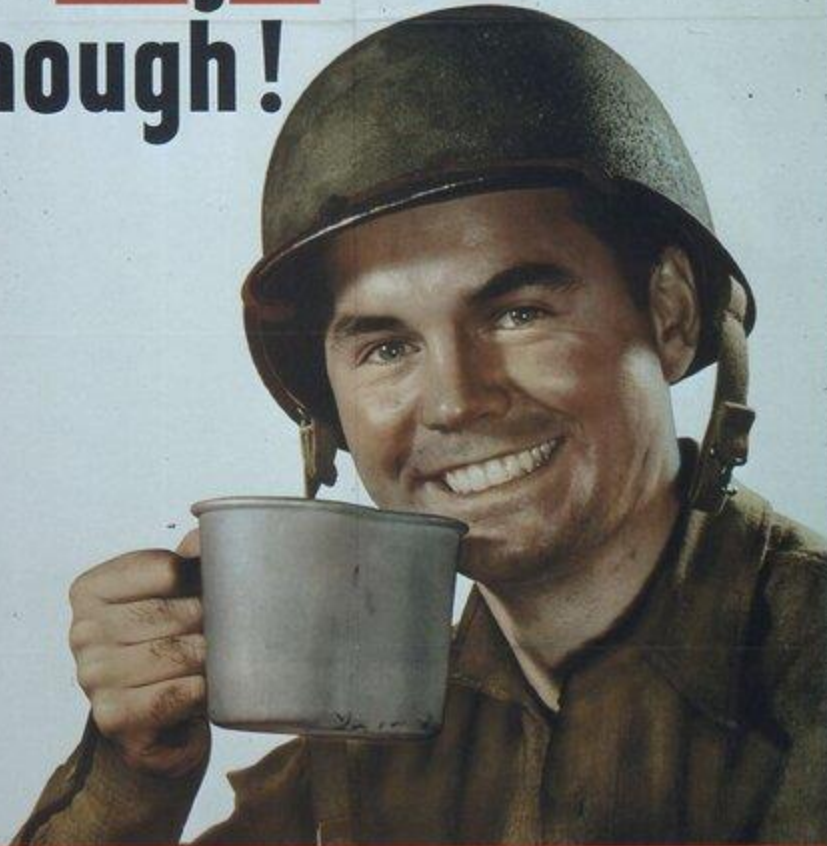
America Rations for World War II Victory

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



Shortly after the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the government instituted a rationing system to help ensure the nation would have the materials and goods necessary for the war effort as well as to discourage hoarding and prevent price gouging. President Franklin Roosevelt established the Office of Price Administration (OPA), an agency within the Office for Emergency Management to develop and oversee the ration program. To further assist in managing the price and availability of materials in January 1942 Congress passed the Emergency Price Control Act formally granting the OPA authority to regulate price limits and ration food and other essential items.

**Do with less—  
so they'll have  
enough!**



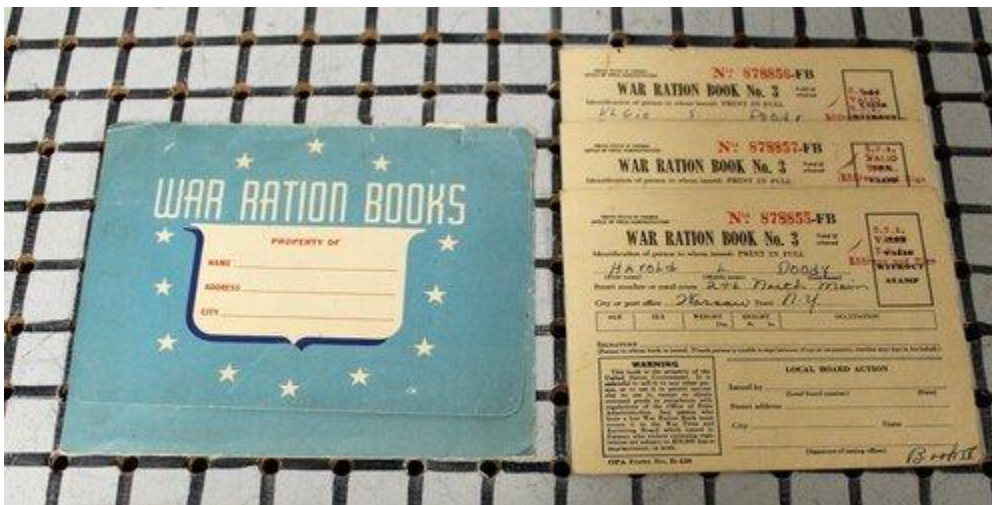
**RATIONING GIVES YOU YOUR FAIR SHARE**

Some materials regulated by the OPA were in short supply due to disruptions in trade and transportation. For example, most of the rubber used in the United States came from the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) which had fallen under control of Japan. To ensure rubber was available for military use, the OPA restricted the purchase of new tires. Apart from emergency and delivery vehicles, buses, and some farm tractors, American consumers could have tires patched or re-treaded only.

The OPA established a points system for regulating the purchase of foodstuffs, beginning with sugar in 1942. The points were represented by stamps in booklets. Each month nationwide more than 5600 local ration boards staffed by volunteers provided families with their ration booklets. Every member of a household, including babies, received points. To purchase food, a shopper would pay the price of the item plus its assigned point value in stamps. In 1943, each person received 48 “blue points” to purchase canned, bottled, or dried foods and 64 “red points” to purchase meat, fish, and dairy per month.



Rationing created numerous challenges for Americans on the home front. The point system devised by the OPA was complicated and points values changed based on fluctuations in supply and demand. This created additional challenges for families already struggling to adapt to decreased availability in the market, as it required home cooks to plan meals well in advance. Further, when the OPA announced new items would be added to the list of rationed goods, consumers flocked to stores to purchase large quantities of those items before restrictions went into effect. Black markets sprang up in which people illegally traded points with one another, sold counterfeit stamps, or bought and sold stolen goods.



To help ease the burden rationing placed on civilians, newspapers and government agencies offered classes and publications highlighting ways Americans could stretch their points and supplement store-bought goods. Cookbooks offered recipes that taught home cooks how to stretch scarce foods like sugar and meat or prepare family favorites with creative substitutions. The “Victory Garden” program encouraged families to grow and preserve their own fruits and vegetables, freeing canned goods for soldiers. Nearly 40% of US vegetables grown during the war came from such gardens. Government propaganda posters with slogans like “Grown Your Own, Can Your Own” and “Do With Less So They’ll Have More” encouraged Americans to think of rationing as patriotic and supporting Allied victory in World War II.