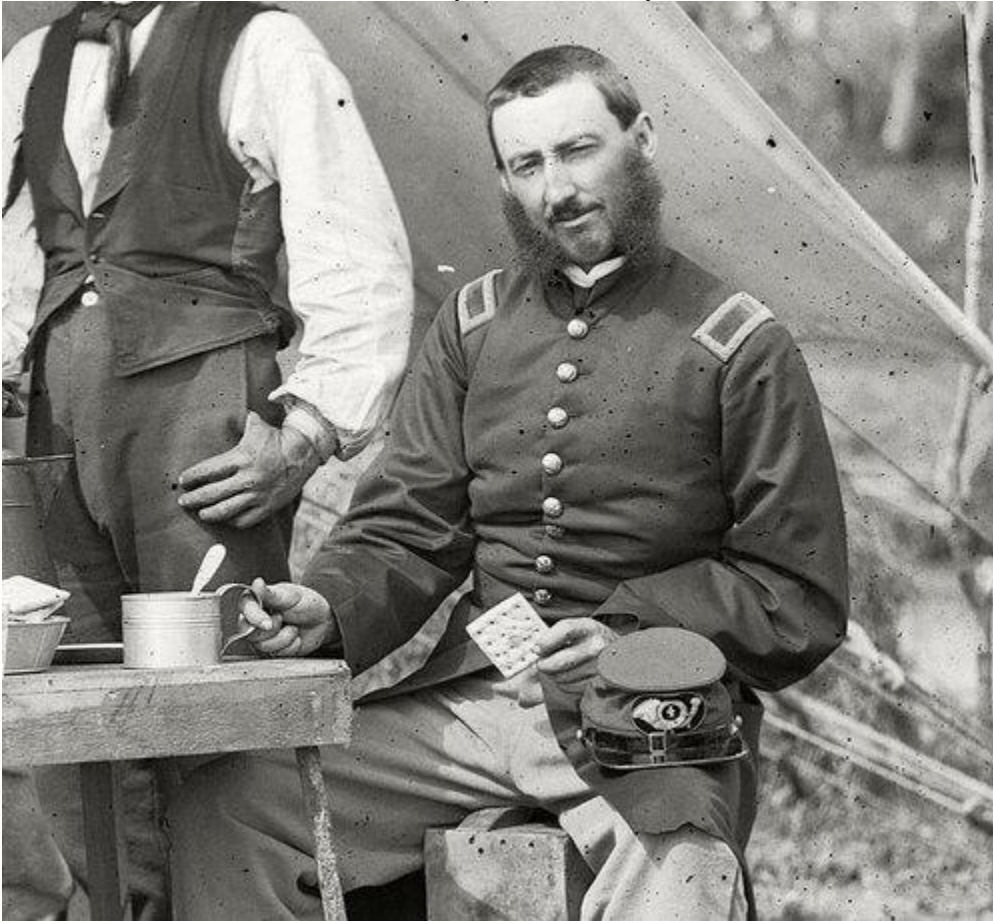


April 2, 2020

Coffee at The Front

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)



Coffee is a source of energy, a morale-booster, and even a social focal point. It can unite everyone and also divide a room at the same time - brew method, roast, cream or no cream, hot or cold, only in the morning, or there is simply never enough. However, coffee has and will be one thing that those deployed and others at home can in some way share as a commonality no matter the timezone or method of brewing.

In the American Civil War, coffee was many times the only fresh-item that was offered or drawn from Union supply. For the Confederacy, soldiers made due with what they had on hand as a substitute for the elixir of life, including seeds, nuts, and chicory (still popular in some areas of the US).



Salvation Army, Coffee & Donuts.

When alcohol was banned on naval US naval vessels by Sec. of Navy Josephus Daniels in World War I, coffee quickly filled the void. Which some say lead to the the beverage being referred to as a, *Cup of Joe*. But it (coffee,) did pair nicely with the donuts being served... much like it did years before during the Civil War alongside of hardtack.

In the World War II and in Korea coffee continued to play a key role - being a reprieve from battle-stress while relaxing with squadmates, a morale boost while pulling firewatch, and unfortunately, being the only warm "meal" on countless days.



Marines on Iwo Jima, coffee in hand.

For Marines on Iwo Jima... this meant making batches of hot coffee and serving it out of wooden buckets while being shelled. If you think the morning trip to the drive-through is treacherous, imagine drawing a cup a coffee while looking over your shoulder for an attack.

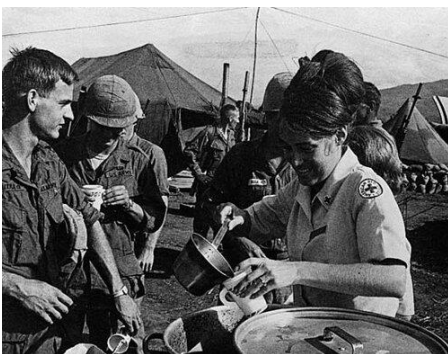


Photo of Model 520 G.I. Pocket Stove, MM2019.15.1A-C

A common way to make coffee during this time period (WWII-Korea), and to heat the issued rations was with the Model 520 Pocket Stove, pictured, manufactured by the Coleman Company well known for its camping and outdoor products.

This particular stove was issued to and carried by Elmer E. Latta (b. 1924- d. 2017) of Somerset, PA. Latta enlisted on 10/29/1942. He became part of the 291st Infantry, 75th Division and served as a Radar Crewman. Mr Latta also served during the Korean conflict as a Master Sergeant, Company C, 110th Infantry. The stove was carried by Mr. Latta during WWII, and eventually donated to the Museum.

The pocket stove represented an important technical innovation, as it could easily be carried by paratroopers, ski-troops, and behind enemy lines. It enabled soldiers to boil water for purification and was large enough to heat C-rations for two men.



C-4, most commonly used as an explosive charge was also used by countless service members in Vietnam as a replacement for a heating element to make a fresh Cup of Joe or their issued rations! Although the most famous of images of coffee in Vietnam is of Red Cross civilians ladling the energy-mud into canteen cups.

Flash forward to today... coffee remains a key part of daily life for the soldier, marine, sailor, and airman. Much like the Model 520 Pocket Stove, the MSR Whisperlite International (able to burn multiple fuels) and the JetBoil (using compressed and canned fuel) are common stoves carried by service members in the field to heat rations, boil water, and make coffee. Another advent being carried by many also includes the variations of hand held presses functioning as one cup french press.



Many things have changed on the battlefield, seas, and in the air, but the coffee has always remained. It will, arguably, be the one thing that every generation of serviceman and woman will know and share as a common piece of k