



2016-05

Life on a Royal Navy Ship—Meals

Meals on Royal Navy ships during the age of sail were simple and repetitive. In general they provided basic nourishment and little more. At approximately 1500 calories per day it was better than many people living on shore at the time.

Each and every day, all sailors were entitled to one pound of ships biscuit or bread and a gallon of beer. In many cases the beer was substituted with rum or wine (blackstrap) in lesser amounts. All personnel on the ship - officers and men, were entitled to these rations. In each case during this period, the purser, who was responsible to the provision of these rations, was entitled to 1/8 of the amount to cover his pay and for spoilage. On a 16 ounce pound that meant a man only received 14 ounces of food, which was carefully weighed. The meal rations provided each day in addition to the ship's bread and spirit ration were:

Sunday	1 pound pork ½ pint of peas
Monday	½ pint oatmeal 2 ounces sugar 2 ounces butter 4 ounces cheese
Tuesday	2 pounds beef
Wednesday	½ pint of peas ½ pint oatmeal 2 ounces sugar 2 ounces butter 4 ounces cheese
Thursday	1 pound pork ½ pint of peas
Friday	½ pint of peas ½ pint oatmeal 2 ounces sugar 2 ounces butter 4 ounces cheese
Saturday	2 pounds beef

The spirit ration was considered a component of the daily rations for any sailor, although underage sailors didn't receive any spirits and were provided monetary compensation in lieu of this payment.

While the purser could substitute the meals with other products, this rarely occurred. All these products were loaded on the ship in a dry or salted state. It was rare that any fresh vegetables or fruit was provided. Hence during the early part of the 1700's scurvy was a problem. It was only in the latter half of the century that lemons and limes were discovered as remedies to scurvy.

Although the shipboard routine varied on different ships, generally one man per mess was assigned as 'cook' each day. The cook collected the rations from the purser (usually purser's mate) and delivered those rations to the mess. In the case of meat, that was placed in a bag and delivered to the cook who boiled the meat in a copper cauldron each morning in time for the noon meal. This boiling was necessary to soften the meat and remove as much salt as possible.

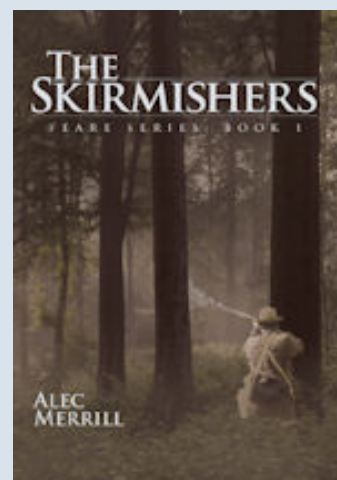
The noon meal was the only 'hot' meal of the day. For the oatmeal and peas, the mess cook would use a portion of the water ration to prepare the items as agreed upon by the mess. The mess 'cook' was responsible to issue the food to each man equally and if there were any issues, he was responsible to make up for shortages. In the case of the ship's bread, it was placed in a bread barge and men took their ration when they desired.

Although spoilage and weevils in the ship's bread did occur, the extent of the occurrence is not known.

Officers were entitled to the same fare as the sailor, although they generally pooled money to purchase supplemental rations. While participation in this pooling of funds was not mandatory, any officer opting-out was not regarded favourably.



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