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A cup of 'Joe,' please Coffee and the U.S. military enjoy a long coexistence that transcends the passage of time

By Tamara Eastman, DeCA historian

FORT LEE, Va. – Many people reach for a hot cup of coffee in the morning to help jumpstart their day. In fact, according to coffeeresearch.org Americans on average tend to consume about 3 cups of coffee each day. Commissary customers can stock up on their daily brew – be it national coffee brands or the Defense Commissary Agency's own private label coffee through its Freedom's Choice brand – and save money in the process.

"Coffee and the military go together like the commissary and patron savings," said Marine Sgt. Maj. Michael R. Saucedo, senior enlisted advisor to the DeCA director. "And our customers can shop their commissary to get whatever coffee they want at significant savings." The military's love affair with coffee go back to the Revolutionary War. Before the war, coffee was the first choice of beverage for George Washington and his wife, Martha, and he became an importer of coffee. In 1770 Washington received 200 pounds of coffee beans at his home. Martha Washington considered herself a coffee aficionado and established her own set of guidelines for the perfect roast.

By the time the Civil War broke out, coffee was a very popular beverage in the U.S. and it was extremely popular among the soldiers on both sides. Coffee prices escalated as supplies dwindled. For example, according to civilwartalk.com, the price per pound in 1861 was \$3; in 1862, \$1.50 to \$4; in 1863, \$5 to \$30; and in 1864, \$12 to \$60. By 1863, the Union Army had an abundance of coffee beans, with Union soldiers receiving 36 pounds of coffee each year in their rations. When the coffee rations began to run short for the Confederates, they found ways to make coffee substitutes using such things as acorns, chicory, dandelion root and beans. Needless to say, it wasn't anything like real coffee.

When Union soldiers moved out after a skirmish in the Northern Neck of Virginia the Confederates scoured the campsites for leftover coffee beans on the ground. It didn't matter that dirt and debris coated the dropped beans, they were too valuable to leave behind. Some Union and Confederate troops met up and traded coffee beans for tobacco. In Petersburg, Virginia, James Hall, a soldier in the 31st Virginia Infantry, wrote in his diary that they had maintained a truce with a Yankee unit for a few minutes and traded tobacco for coffee beans before they resumed firing upon one another.

The first time instant coffee was mass produced was in 1910 by George Constant Louis Washington, and by World War I instant coffee was giving the American troops a much-needed boost in the trenches. The Department of Defense was purchasing as much as 37,000 pounds of instant coffee each day for the troops. During World War I, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels prohibited alcohol on all naval vessels and the strongest drink permissible on the ships was coffee. The disgruntled sailors weren't too happy about their alcohol being eliminated and began referring to their coffee as a "cup of Joe." To this day the term "cup of Joe" continues to mean a cup of coffee.

Nescafé was the first national brand of instant coffee released by the Nestlé Corporation on April 1, 1938, becoming an American staple during World War II. When the war started, Nescafé was producing small, lightweight packages of instant coffee that were inserted in individual Army ration kits and ensured the troops would enjoy a cup of steaming coffee wherever they went. The U.S. troops in World War II found the Italian espresso roast coffee too strong and watered the coffee down, creating the Café Americano. The same small rations of instant coffee continued to be inserted into ration kits throughout the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The G.I.s during the Vietnam War made coffee using C-4 explosives as a heat source. Red Cross canteens served hot coffee to troops throughout both World Wars, the Korean War and Vietnam War.

Today, U.S. service members continue to love their coffee, and some military retirees have started their own coffee companies including Lock 'N Load Java; Veteran Coffee Roasters; Black Rifle Coffee Company; and Ranger Coffee

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'More, better options'

Commissary fueling stations give on-the-go troops a nutritious, money-saving alternative to fast foods

By Kevin L. Robinson, DeCA public affairs specialist

FORT LEE, Va. – Commissaries are on a mission to help active troops avoid unhealthy fast food. To do that, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) has rolled out Dietitian-Approved Fueling Stations, offering nutritious and cost-effective alternatives at many of its stores.

September marked the end of a nine-month rollout with 174 commissaries now sporting the fueling stations near their front-end checkout aisles. Twenty-four stores have stations in Europe; 17 in the Pacific. Check the Dietitian-Approved Fueling Stations listing on the DeCA website for station locations.

DeCA's latest nutritious initiative is perfect for the military members on the go, said Marine Sgt. Maj. Michael R. Saucedo, senior enlisted advisor to the agency director. "Our message to our active customers is simple: Don't undo all of your progress from fitness training, or gains from hitting the gym, with a high-calorie drive-thru meal," he said. "Come refuel the right way with us at your commissary."

Since introducing its fueling station coolers, DeCA has seen a 200-percent increase in sales of the fueling station items from January through August. The stations, conveniently located in the front of the store, vary in size and makeup based on available space. The lineup of snacks and meal options are approved by Deborah Harris, DeCA's dietitian and health and wellness program manager, MPH, RD, CDCES (master of Public Health degree, registered dietitian and certified diabetes care and education specialist).

"Our fueling stations offer tasty, nutritious meals and snacks that help maximize your performance through nutrient dense foods, while also saving time and money with quick and easy selections," Harris said. Customers can expect to see products that offer protein, healthy fat, complex carbohydrates and a low-calorie form of hydration from the following categories:

- Single-serve options of snacks and meals including the option for many stores offering deli sandwiches
- Chilled, flavored or unflavored no calorie or low-calorie waters and sports drinks
- Single-serving hummus
- Packets of ready-to-eat lean protein, fruits and cheese
- No-added-sugar yogurts
- Low-sugar protein bars
- Prepared sliced fruits and salads

The refueling station launch followed the commissaries' release of the new Dietitian-Approved Thumb (DAT) program which uses DeCA-designed software to analyze and identify products in most of the commissary food categories based on FDA-defined health attributes. The attributes analyzed identify dietitian-approved foods that limit added sugar, sodium and unhealthy fat while offering whole grains, healthy fats, fiber or lean protein.

Both programs illustrate the commissaries' support of the military community related to the mission readiness and resilience, and how the benefit supports the health and wellness of service members throughout their careers and afterwards, Saucedo said. "Commissaries have a significant role in the military's 'Fueling for Performance,' campaign," Saucedo said. "Our fueling stations help offer cost-effective options that connect the importance of nutrition and diet to overall readiness.

"So the next time you are headed to the field or need to stock your barracks or office fridge, go to your local commissary," he added. "We're here to help you maintain your mission readiness and your fitness with our Dietitian-Approved Fueling Stations."

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