



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Soap

Bars of soap like this were part of millions of packages the Canadian Red Cross sent to Allied **prisoners of war**. The parcels provided essential food and supplies. During the Second World War, Canada produced nearly 16.5 million of these parcels.

Reproduction



Soap © Canadian War Museum

Wartime Soap

Allied **prisoners of war** received soap like this in Canadian Red Cross Packages. Prisoners used the soap for personal cleanliness and laundry. Along with carefully chosen foods, the soap was packed into a cardboard box, often called a Red Cross food parcel.

Each parcel included 57 grams of soap – about half the weight of the modern version

in the Discovery Box. The rest of the parcel contained food. The contents were standardized to make the parcels easier to manufacture, pack and ship.

The complete parcel weighed 5 kilograms. Each prisoner was supposed to receive one parcel a week.

Essential Supplies for Prisoners of War

The parcel's food contents were meant to supplement the food prisoners received as **rations** from their captors. The food was chosen to add vitamins and nutrients, as well as calories.

The food had to survive being transported and stored without refrigeration, and included canned foods such as meat, cheese and condensed milk. The parcels also contained dried fruit, biscuits, and other items such as salt, pepper and sugar.

In wartime Germany and Italy, food and supplies for prisoners were often limited, but they generally received their parcels. In Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, prisoners received very little food, and were often abused and even tortured. Prisoners in those camps were rarely given their parcels.

Allied countries co-operated in producing food parcels, and shared the supply between their prisoners of war. Without the parcels, almost all prisoners felt they would not have had enough to eat. Biscuits, butter, meat, milk and chocolate were among the prisoners' favourite items.

A Major Canadian Effort

During the war, Canada produced nearly 16.5 million prisoner-of-war parcels. Each one had to be carefully packed by volunteers. Women packed the boxes, while men too old for military service prepared the finished packages for shipment. This reflected attitudes at the time about appropriate roles for women and men.

Preparing the parcels was a major aspect of the work of the Canadian Red Cross. Relying on volunteers for packing, a large part of the funds raised by the Red Cross went towards parcel contents. Packing plants were set up in six Canadian cities: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Montréal, Quebec, and Toronto, Hamilton, London and Windsor in Ontario.

Vocabulary

Prisoners of war:

Members of the military taken prisoner by the enemy. During the Second World War, they were often held in special camps.

Rations:

A specific amount of food and other items given to people.