



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Ration Book and Meat Tokens

Introduced in 1942, ration books were part of the Second World War experience for most Canadians outside the military. People presented coupons when buying items such as sugar, coffee, tea, butter, meat and gasoline. Starting in 1945, meat tokens gave Canadians more flexibility in buying small amounts of rationed meat.

Original



Ration Book and Meat Tokens © Canadian War Museum

Ration Books

Ration books were issued to almost all adults and children, except for military personnel. When people wanted a rationed item, they would exchange coupons for a specified amount of that item when they bought it.

The government introduced new ration books from time to time as details of the system changed. The examples in the Discovery Box are original wartime books issued to Canadians.

Food and Supplies for the Allies

Rationing helped free up food for other countries, especially Britain, and helped feed Allied military forces. Starting in 1939, the federal government urged Canadians to buy less of anything in short supply.

The government then asked people to voluntarily limit purchases of scarce items, including sugar.

Rationing Begins

Voluntary measures were not successful. Coupon rationing soon began, starting with gasoline in April 1942. Over the next year, sugar, coffee, tea, butter and meat were also rationed.

The government restricted food served in restaurants and cafeterias. Many people added to their supplies by growing their own food in gardens.

Later in the war, rationing for coffee, tea and meat was suspended. From 1945 to 1947, rationing was reintroduced for some kinds of meat. This helped feed countries facing food shortages as a result of the war's devastation.

Meat tokens were introduced in 1945. If people bought less than a coupon's worth of meat, they would get "change" in tokens to use for a later purchase. The tokens were made of wood fibre, and were designed to be difficult to counterfeit.

Other Wartime Limits

The government also controlled many other items such as new household appliances and automobile tires.

In other cases, there were limits on what could be made and sold. This included clothing, which could only be made in certain styles, or with certain fabrics. These limits helped free up more materials and manufacturing capacity for wartime needs.

Canadians faced far fewer limits on food and other products than people in many other countries. Canadians generally supported rationing, although there was an active illegal market for some goods. This was especially true for gasoline and automobile tires.