

Life at Bosque Redondo Reservation

Lesson 2 – Rations & Food

By Rhonda Gutierrez

Essential Questions:

1. Why would there be a need to manage the food at the fort?
2. How would the government keep track of the food that they gave out?
3. How could people use the system to try to get more food since there was so little?
4. Was the food safe and healthy

Objectives: Students will be able to...

1. Discuss how the ration system was supposed to work and how it really worked,
2. Appraise how the system wasn't effective and how the Native Americans beat the system, and
3. Analyze the difficulty in creating a system to track and manage food rations.
4. Assess how effectively the rationing system at Fort Sumner worked and if it was humane.

History

When people arrived at Bosque Redondo, nothing of the fort existed. As soon as the Mescalero Apache arrived, they began construction of the fort and preparing the land for planting. Carleton figured that initially the people would have to be fed and cared for until the crops came in and they were self-sufficient.

The food was quite foreign to the Native Americans. A typical ration consisted of about a pound of white flour, or cornmeal, eight ounces of meat such as beef, bacon or pork, and small amount of sugar and coffee beans. Many people ate the food stuffs raw and became sick. They didn't know what coffee was but thought that they were like pinto beans and tried boiling the beans. The other problem was fraud and the contractors trying to make money off of the Army would provide poor quality foods, flour with mix of plaster of paris and other non-edible particles, or contained bugs. The government was supposed to go with the lowest bidder but General Carleton often awarded contracts without bidding to New Mexicans and a few cases purchased higher priced beef over lower price mutton because of the relationship with the cattleman. (Lanehart, pg 38).

Another big problem was supply. Fort Sumner was very isolated and required wagon trains to bring the food. Sometimes the Comanche raided the trains and never were there enough supplies to give full rations for any period of time. There weren't railroads at the time, so wagon trains were used.

To ensure consistent distribution of what food was available at Bosque Redondo, the Army instituted a system of ration tokens through the U.S. Subsistence Department.

Materials

Old West Army Cookbook 1865-1900, various craft supplies: pencils, scissors, paper, markers. Copy the Copy Cat handout. Can also copy off the Discussion Questions
Rations and Food: Power point with the history and photos

Key Concepts/Vocabulary

Ration
Rationing System
Counterfeit
Replica
Impurities
Contractors
Bidding System
Subsistence

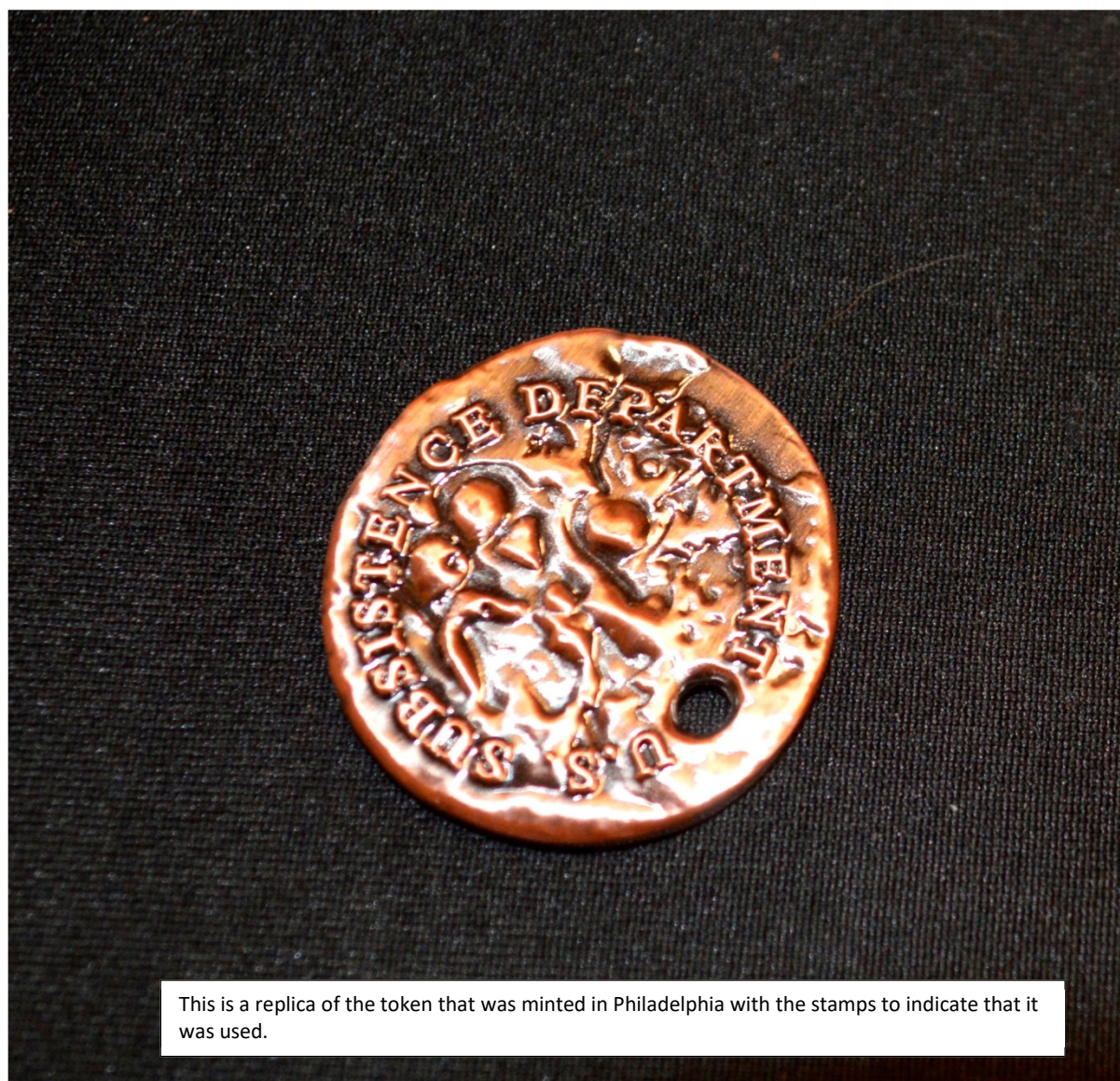
Grades: 7th – 12th

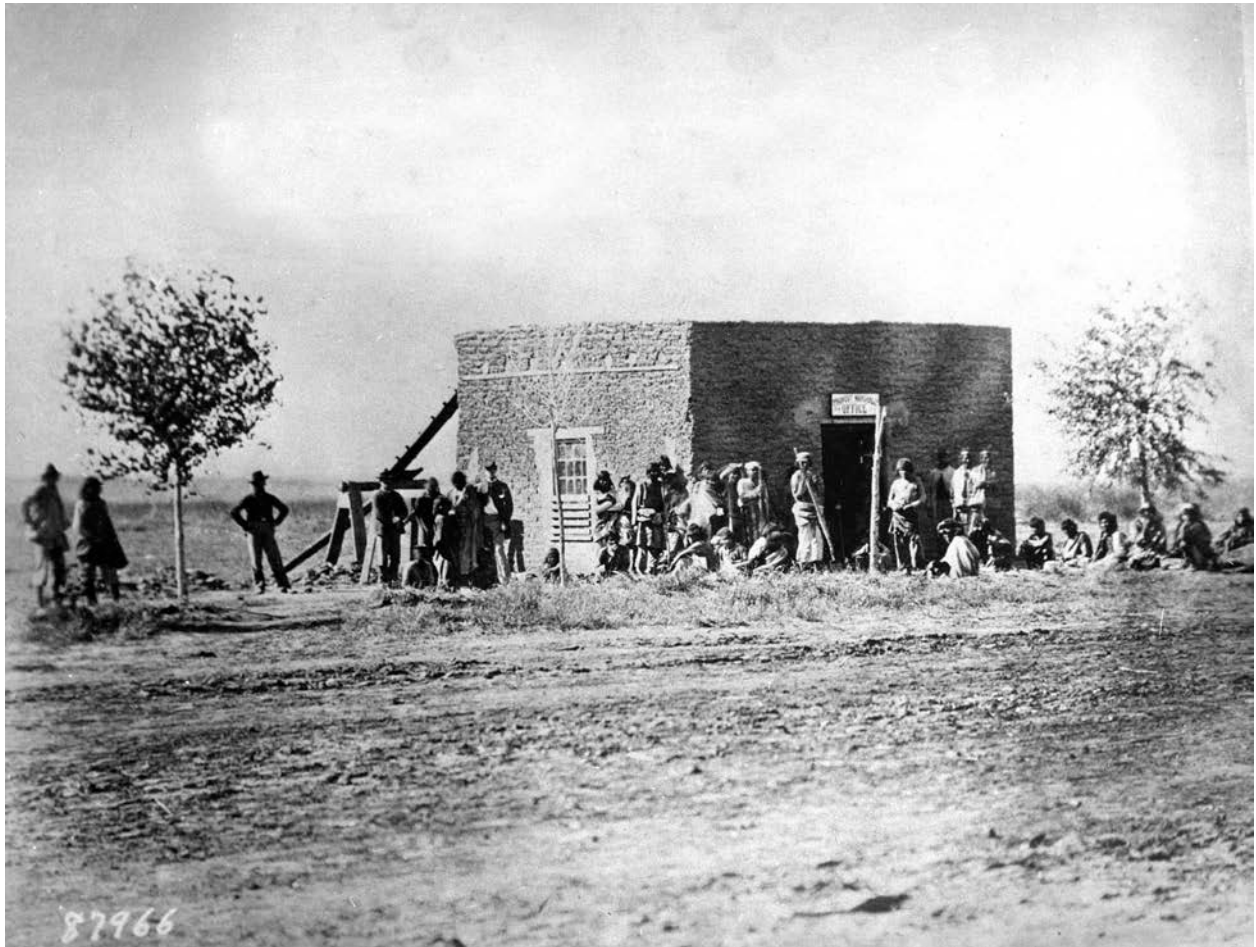


At first, the army created tokens out of a cardboard material. The cardboard didn't work very well as the Navajo attempting to get more food as most of the time there wasn't enough to survive on created counterfeit tickets. The Army attempted to thwart these tactics by creating tokens. The first tokens were stamped tin with U.S. Subsistence Department and on the other side "One Ration". The soldiers would stamp a mark such as a number, symbol or letter into the ration indicating that it had been used. The Navajo were being trained as blacksmiths and had access to tools and tin and began creating exact duplicates.

To combat the counterfeiting, the Army had tokens made of a brass/copper alloy stamped with Philadelphia Mint. Again the Navajo were able to create exact copies using copper from cook wear. At one point there was suspected to be as many as 3000 counterfeit tokens in circulation. May 9, 1865 in a report from Captain Henry B Bristol at Fort Sumner to Taylor the Post Adjutant wrote, "I would state that the number of spurious tickets are increasing and that they are handsomely executed as to be undistinguishable. Three hundred of these tickets are among the genuines and are so much alike and the same that Mr. Edgar is unable to throw them out."







Indians receiving ration tickets, Provost Marshals office, Fort Sumner, New Mexico, Unknown, 1866. Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), negative #044520.

Activities:

Once the students learn the information regarding the tokens they will have two activities; one recreate your token, how close can you get? And the other is plan meals using the available foods at the fort using the *Old West Army Cookbook*.

Preparation:

Gather a few crafting items such as pens, pencils, scissors, markers and paper. The idea is that students will use available items to create their duplicates but without intervention or explanation. The students are to create an exact or close to exact copy. There are no rules to how the students do so and with very little explanation. Some may trace, some may freehand and create an impression by drawing over the original. The idea is that they are to come up with the copy using their own imagination and there will be good copies and poor copies.

Copy Cat

Instructions: There are two boxes below. The first is a picture of an imaginary ration token and in the other box you are to recreate the token. Use available tools from the classroom and be creative.

Here is the coin to try to replicate:



Token created by Katelynn Kenyon, BRM

Try your hand at drawing the coin from above

Now answer the following questions:

1. How close did your coin come to the original? _____

2. How hard was it to draw? _____

3. Do you think that if you used your counterfeit coin that it would pass as an original coin? _____

4. What would be the consequence to you and your family if you couldn't make a coin like the original? _____

5. What might be a consequence if your copy didn't pass as an original? _____

6. How might you feel towards those people who could make exact copies? _____

7. What other problems might exist with a ration token system that was used at Bosque Redondo?

Army and Food

The army soldiers ate basically the same rations as the Native Americans and had the same problems such as poor quality and lack of food stuffs. Because there wasn't refrigeration there was limited ways to store food. Much of the food was brought by wagon train from Fort Union which in present day is about 140 miles north of Fort Sumner. Cattlemen from Texas and New Mexico saw the reservation as an opportunity to make money. In the summer of 1865, cattle driven by Jim Patterson and Bill Franks came up the Pecos from Texas and that cattle drive pre-dated the Goodnight drive one year later. (Thompson, pg 93) and it helped to drive down beef prices. Charles Goodnight along with his partner Oliver Loving drove Texas longhorns from present day Newcastle Texas, across west Texas and then entering New Mexico near present day Carlsbad crossing miles of open plains to intersect the Pecos River which they followed north to Fort Sumner. The cattlemen drove cattle further north through New Mexico, Colorado and into Wyoming. The first drive was in June of 1866 and Fort Sumner paid about \$12,000 for beef. Another cattleman John Chisam drove cattle to Bosque Grande along the Pecos River near present day Roswell to sell to Fort Sumner. General Carleton also purchased beef from New Mexican cattlemen such as Lucien Maxwell, C.S. Hincley, and John and Andres Dodd (Lanehart, pg 38) from northern part of the state.

The amount of food for soldiers was based upon ration system and while at Fort Sumner, most of the time, soldiers were on half ration. A ration was considered: 12 ounces of pork or bacon or 20 ounces of fresh or salted beef, 22 ounces of bread or one pound of hard bread or 20 ounces of corn meal. Other food items provided in bulk were beans, peas or rice, coffee beans, sugar, vinegar, salt, pepper, potatoes, sugar and/or molasses. (Caperton, pg 3). While at Fort Sumner the typical ration was halved. The food stuffs were distributed through the Post Commissary and each company prepared meals for their company. The kitchens were in the barracks and each company prepared meals usually three times a day. Cooks weren't trained and "few possessed any great culinary talent," (Caperton, pg 6). Many forts had company gardens to supplement the rations and often soldiers hunted game as well.

The Mescalero Apache and Navajo rations were slightly different from the soldiers. The rations were distributed typically twice a week and were supposed to last for several days. Rations typically were one pound (16 ounces) of flour, a half cup of sugar, 8 ounces of salted bacon and a cup of whole bean coffee. Often these were halved as there wasn't enough food. Flour, sugar and coffee were unfamiliar foods to the Native Americans and they often ate the food raw and got sick from it. When they had corn meal, they could make a mush but it isn't possible to make a mush from flour in the same way.

Slim Fast Coffee

This is a story told to the staff at Bosque Redondo by a Navajo man who visited the site:

When he was enlisted in the Army he was only 18 and homesick for home. He asked the cook on duty to make "Slim Fast Coffee" that his grandmother used to make for him. The cook hadn't heard of that and asked what it was. He explained that his grandmother would make a roux of flour with hot bacon grease, then instead of making a traditional gravy by adding milk, she would add coffee sweetened with sugar and make a thickened cup of coffee. He called it Slim Fast Coffee because she kept her coffee in a Slim Fast can.

The thickened coffee was something that would have been made at Bosque Redondo given the nature of the rations and is an example of how the diet was changed as a result of coming to Bosque Redondo as the Navajo would've never had flour, sugar or coffee prior to internment.

Activity:

Using *Old West Army cookbook* (digital copy in folder Life at the Fort), the students will try to make meals using the rations. This will take calculating. For example hardtack, this was a staple for every fort and soldier because it lasts forever. The recipe calls for 4 cups of flour. 1 cup = 16 ounces so it would take 4

rations of flour to make. So students will have to either reduce recipe to be able to make a single serving or consider combining several rations. Considering that rations per person, a family of four would receive enough flour to make hardtack. The students will find out that there is little in the cookbook that people could make.

This activity can be a formal written assignment, but here it is used as a discussion activity. After the students have had some time to look through the recipes and come to that moment of surprise of how little there would've been to eat, then a discussion could take place in a class group or with small groups and the discussion questions can be printed or read by the teacher.

Discussion Questions:

1. What recipes did you find to make using the ingredients?
2. How challenging was it to find a recipe that you could make?
3. How healthy was the diet?
4. Given that much of the food was spoiled or contained impurities or bugs, what might you do or is there a way to make the food safe to eat?
5. How would it be for you to eat the same foods every day for all your meal?
6. The typical calorie per day was estimated at about 1000 calories. We are supposed to have about 2000 calories per day for women and 2500 calories per day for men for our modern more stationary lifestyle. The Native Americans were performing hard physical labor from making adobe and building the forts to digging irrigation ditches, plowing, planting the fields, gathering wood. What do you think the health was of the people who were at Bosque Redondo?
7. May 9, 1865: Captain Henry Bristol reporting to Taylor, Post Adjunct, "...at the last count of the Navajoes (sic) on the reservation, made the 30th day of April, 1865, it showed a loss of about 900 Indians. Upon inquiring among the chiefs I am informed that a great many poor and sick families have left the Bosque, the former to herd sheep for Mexicans....The sick have gone to regain their strength and health. Many yet remain who complain of constipation, headache, and fevers. I am of the opinion that many deaths have occurred that have not been reported. The sickness generally is among the grown up and aged." After reading this report, what ways do you think that the food contributed to the sicknesses reported?

Standards:

Common Core: Grade 6- 8: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, Grades 9-10: 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, Grades 11-12: 2, 3, 4.

History: Grades 5- 8: History: 5 – 8 & 9-12: Students are able to identify important people and events in order to analyze significant patterns, relationships, themes, ideas, beliefs, and turning points in New Mexico, United States, and world history in order to understand the complexity of the human experience.

1-D: Research historical events and people from a variety of perspectives.

History: 9-12: Use critical thinking skills to understand and communicate perspectives of individuals, groups and societies from multiple contexts.

Resources

Caperton, Thomas J, and Fry, LoRheada. 1975, Santa Fe, NM, Museum of New Mexico Press.

Lanehart, David. *The Navajos and the Peace Commission of 1867; a Thesis in History*. 1981, Lubbock, Texas, Texas Tech University.

Hinton, Howard. *Chisum, John Simpson*. Texas State Historical Association.
<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fch33>

Richarson, T.C. *Goodnight-Loving Trail*. Texas State Historical Association.
<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ayg02>

Thompson, Gerald. *The Army and the Navajo*. 1976, Tucson, Arizona, The University of Arizona Press.