

ELEVEN SHEEP FOR DINNER

(By "23/762")

THE city housewife, shopping for dinner with her little basket, would drop it in astonishment could she see the quantities of food prepared for each meal in a military camp. If, by some fantastic mistake, she were called upon to prepare dinner for a battalion at Trentham, she would have to replace her basket by a motor lorry. Cooking is done in a big way in the camp kitchens.

"What have you for dinner to-night?" I asked the cook-in-chief of one of the huge kitchens at Trentham. Appetising smells wafted through the door suddenly suggested the idea of a visit.

"Roast mutton; we're roasting eleven sheep. Look at these!" He opened oven doors to show me dish after dish of sizzling joints, all boned so that when they are cooked they can be sliced quickly for the tables on a machine which is both meat and bread cutter as the occasion demands. Near the stoves—large ones like those of the big hotels—stood dixies ready for the gravy, which is made by the gallon from the rich drippings.

This was only one of the cookhouses of the camp. There are three others, all preparing equal amounts of food for hungry men. I had a mental vision of 44 sheep being cooked at one time, and the slow disintegration of a whole flock as the ovens of military and air force camps were filled for one day's meals.

For the next half-hour I was shown every department of the kitchen—a kitchen as spotless as that of any house-proud woman, and in which every dish shone like those of artistically illustrated advertisements.

Six Hundred Pounds of Onions

Three coppers containing boiled onions added to the succulent smell—672lb. of them. There were 4½cwt. of potatoes, some roasting, some boiling. Ten cases of cabbages must be prepared for one meal. A sack of carrots just doesn't go anywhere.

Creamed rice was simmering in a huge boiler, and on top of one stove a golden custard was being prepared—in the proper manner. The dish which contained it was sitting in a cauldron of boiling water, just as Mrs. Beaton advised long, long ago. Her methods may have been more delicate, but not more efficient than those of to-day's army cooks.

Seventy 4lb. loaves of bread had been machine-sliced ready for the table, and six 14-gallon boilers were waiting for the tea, seven and a-half pounds of which disappear with each meal.

Milk is there by the gallon. Because many of the men prefer their tea without milk, the milk goes to the tables

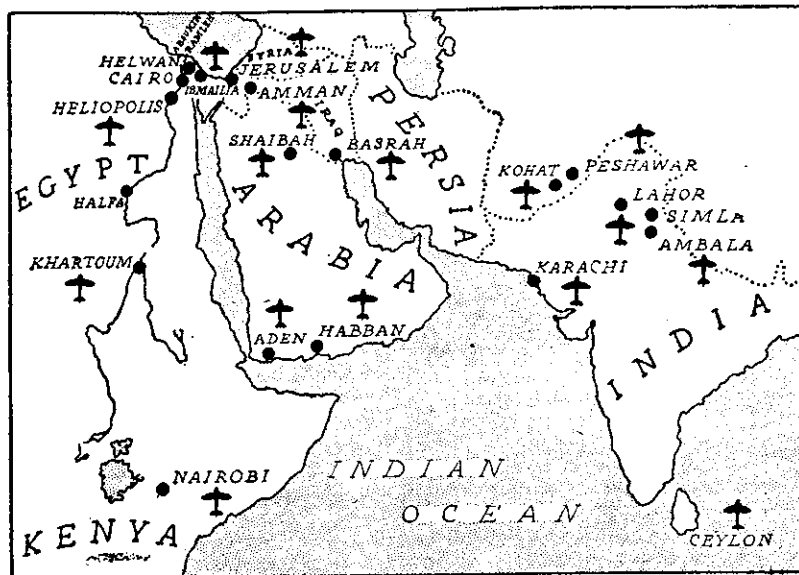
in jugs so that each man may help himself. There is also sufficient milk for each man to add some to his sweet if he so desires, for the individual ration is half a pint a day.

The Butcher's Shop

Our first call was on the butcher, who has his "shop," cool and clean, in one of the several departments attached to each kitchen. He was busy preparing

soup or salad. Here again, any waste of time or materials is eliminated.

All milk, butter, cheese and cold meats are kept in another department, specially constructed as a cool store. Whole cheeses were stacked there. As each battalion uses 100lb. of butter a day, some idea can be gained of the quantity in store. Another department houses cases of tomatoes, and apples, and on concrete shelves cold meats and bacon, machine-sliced, are covered with cloth, though not a fly nor a speck of dust could be seen. The vegetable room contained sacks of potatoes and onions, cases of parsnips, carrots and cabbages.



THIS MAP shows at a glance the Royal Air Force bases in India and the Middle East just before the outbreak of war. Those in Egypt and Kenya have been busy since the Italians opened hostilities

600 chops for breakfast the following morning.

"We had 300lb. of sausages yesterday morning, and last night 1600 saveloys disappeared for dinner," said he, as he prepared to divide another sheep from the stock which hung, with sides of beef, ready for jointing and trimming.

Nothing is wasted. All surplus fat is saved, and all bones and scraps are used for the making of soup, which is always served for the mid-day meal. Any surplus fat from the cook-houses is sold for soap-making, and the money added to the regimental funds of that particular unit.

Next door was the storeroom, with bins for flour, oatmeal, sugar; its shelves stocked with supplies of tea, salt, pepper, rice, sago, tapioca and all the other ingredients which form a part of the soldier's varied menu. Its principal exhibit, however, was a large machine, which is a marvel of labour-saving. Electricity provides the power. All mixing of ingredients for cakes and scones and pudding is its first job: then, by the addition of certain gadgets, it will grate any oddments of cheese that are too small to go to the tables. Add another gadget and it slices vegetables which go into the

The "Left-Overs"

But that is not all. In a pantry were the "left-overs," all neatly arranged in dishes on shelves and tables. These are used up in some form or other. Such food as can be prepared in advance stays there until it is wanted.

Attached to each camp kitchen is a rest room for the cooks, and a hot-water room where in wet weather towels are dried round the furnaces and hot-water containers.

Mechanised Cooking

Modern military methods do not end with mechanisation; they have been applied to cooking with the result that much of the fatigue of the last war has been eliminated. The weary task of peeling potatoes, for instance, is now taken over by a machine which removes the skins in a few minutes. All the cooks have to do is to remove any blemishes afterwards. That is only one small part of modern military efficiency in this war.

Attached to each cookhouse are the messrooms of the unit for which it does the cooking. Regulations require that the floors are washed out twice a day. Serving pantries join the two. Here mess orderlies collect the steaming food for each table. When the men have finished their meal they pass through a washing-

up annex where tubs of water—hot and cold—are waiting. First the dishes go into a tub of hot water containing soap and soda and then in a tub of cold. Each man is responsible for the cleanliness of his own eating utensils.

The cooks themselves are all trained men, many of them former chefs who hold positions in well-known hotels. One told me that he had been head chef for five years in a well-known Rotorua establishment. All have passed through the Army Cooking School.

Apart from a general air of efficiency and order, the most noticeable feature of the cookhouses is their spotless cleanliness. No splashes litter the walls or the floor. Every dish is in its place; all utensils are subject to close examination every day by the responsible officers. Even the stand set aside for refuse tins (which are removed twice a day) is white-washed and periodically scrubbed. Sumps and grease traps receive daily attention. There is nothing of that stale smell so often associated with camps.

Contrasts

What a contrast it all is to the Trentham I remember in 1915. Our cook-houses were primitive affairs where the unfortunate camp cooks struggled in clouds of smoke with their stews and dixies of porridge and tea. They bore all the familiar hallmarks of a camp cook—grubby clothes and soot on their faces, a striking contrast to the cleanliness of the cooks of to-day. Fatigue parties set outside, laboriously peeling potatoes or preparing other vegetables and loathing the monotonous task. At meal times we sat at improvised tables in the huts where we slept, and afterwards swilled our eating utensils in dixies of water, or under a tap in the open when the water became too thick to use. Soldiers of to-day have their mess-rooms and a variety of food we never knew. Those of us who remember the last Trentham never cease to remark on the changes in the new camp where muddy tracks have become tar-sealed roads and electric light replaces the guttering candles which lighted us to beds on the floor.

Ministers' Sons In Uniform

Three Ministers of the Crown have sons with the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force. They are:

The Hon. F. Jones, Minister of Defence, whose son, Private E. F. Jones, left New Zealand with the 2nd Echelon and is now in England.

The Hon. H. T. Armstrong, Minister of Housing, whose son, Private K. M. Armstrong, is with the A.S.C. in Egypt. He sailed with the 1st Echelon.

The Hon. R. Semple, Minister of Public Works, whose son, Private J. H. R. Semple, is with the Advanced Training School at Trentham.