



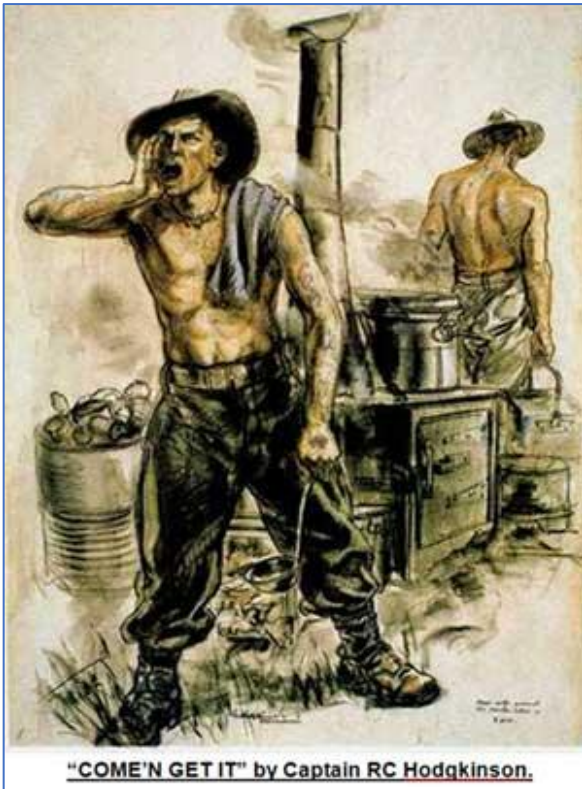
FROM THE GALLERIES AND COLLECTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Typically only a small portion of a museum collection is exhibited at any one time. This is due not only to practical consideration of display space but a range of professional considerations designed to protect and preserve the artefact.

This series highlights objects and stories you may have overlooked in the galleries or collection items awaiting the opportunity to be viewed and share their story. Enjoy and explore further.

Cooking Up A Storm



In the early days of the Australian Army, cooks were drawn from the ranks of the Regiment. Unfortunately, the kitchen was used as a dumping ground for the problem soldier; rarely did a soldier of any quality or ability volunteer for this despised trade. The quality of the food produced by these regimental cooks can be best summarized by the infamous World War I catch cry "Who called the cook a bastard?" the retort being "Who called the bastard a cook?"

During World War I, soldiers fighting in the trenches were given hot meals, when possible, brought forward under the cover of darkness. During the day they fended for themselves and ate bully beef and biscuits with the sometimes supplement of cheese, jam and bread. When relieved from the trenches soldiers were fed hot meals in the rest areas at the rear.

Between the two World Wars the feeding of the peacetime Militia or Citizens Military Forces (CMF) at their brief annual camps depended upon civilian cooks (shearers' cooks etc). Their general lack of culinary skills fixed firmly in the minds of many the concept that the cook was a deplorable necessity.

At the outbreak of World War II, the reputation of the unit cook was still at an all-time low. Qualified Cookery Instructors were running cookery courses, however only the worst soldiers of the regiment were being offered up for training. It was rare for a qualified chef or catering tradesperson to volunteer because of the low status accorded to them.

Things began to change in 1939 after Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks, a prominent Professor of Human Physiology and Pharmacology at the University of Adelaide was appointed the District Catering Supervisor in Adelaide. This appointment brought a scientist into direct contact with the feeding problems at its most important point, the kitchen.

Hicks recognized that to improve the feeding of the Army it was necessary to get good soldiers to be cooks, improve the standard of cooking equipment used, improve the standard of training with a more scientific approach and improve the quality of the rations.

The Army Museum has an extensive range of field cooking appliances used by the Australian Army in the 20th century. At present they are tucked away at the rear of the main exhibition building (Building 17) and so can be overlooked by visitors. New interpretive signage has been positioned and planning is underway to upgrade the display shelters.



Nuggett

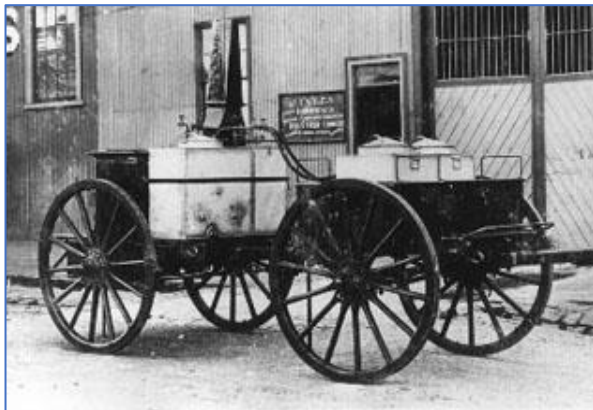


The earliest example in the collection is the Soyer stove was the invention of French chef Alexis Benoit Soyer who worked to improve the food provided to British soldiers in the Crimean War. The introduction of his new portable stove and an easy to make recipes, radically improved the way that soldiers were fed and hence their health and morale.

The stoves were very simple to use and economical. Soyer's stove consisted of a drum with an enclosed furnace below. The stove could use any available fuel [wood, coal, gas, peat and even camel dung]. The stove was capable of boiling 12 gallons of liquid. According to Soyer's calculations, they could save an army of 40,000 men, 90 tons of fuel per day. One stove could cook efficiently for fifty. The stove could be used either indoors or out, and would function in all weather conditions, including heavy rain.

They were easy to clean. Removing the caldron, and inserting a false bottom allowed the stoves to be used for baking bread as well as roasting meat, potatoes and puddings. They could also function as space heaters. The stoves were so successful that the British Army continued to use them for 120 years. Australia and Canada also adopted them. As in the London Blitz, stoves of this type can be rapidly deployed to feed disrupted communities during emergencies.

James Fletcher Wiles served in the Second Anglo-Boer War and observed that there was an urgent need of catering equipment for the front line troops. He conceived the idea of a mobile steam cooker, instinctively realizing that steaming vegetables was much better than boiling them.



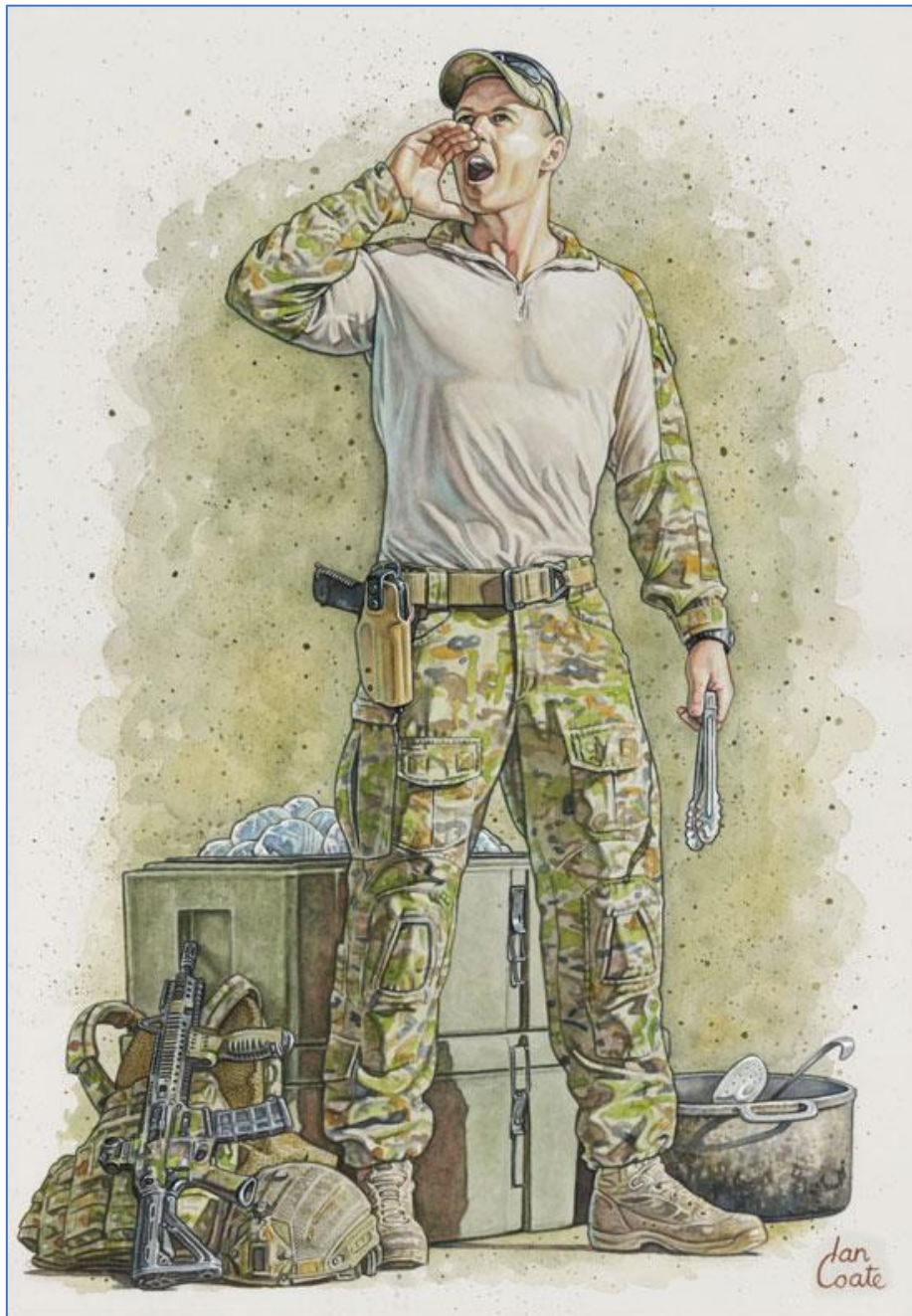
The original Wiles Mobile and Stationary Steam Cooker was a horse drawn travelling kitchen, a combination of steam boiler, roasting oven, hot and cold-water tanks and a limber, which were connected by steam hoses and carried two large steamers or stock pots. During World War One, Wiles produced over 300 cookers which were used under active service conditions in Egypt and France.

Between 1918 and 1939, the Australian Army reverted to fired ovens and boiling/baking for cooking. Nutritional concerns resulted in the Army reverting to steam cooking after the start of World War 2 and Wiles steam cookers were again adopted. Over 3,000 units were eventually produced for Allied armies. Two models were produced, a 2 wheel and a larger 4 wheel model. The Army Museum currently displays a 2 wheel version.



They could be operational in 20 minutes, and cooking could take place while being towed up to 35 mph. The units remained in service in the Australian Army until 1980 when boiling/baking style cookers were reintroduced.





***Royal Australian Catering Corps –
Come and Get It (Water Colour)***
Original Artwork Location: SASR Art Collection

<https://www.army.gov.au/our-people/organisation-structure/army-corps/australian-army-catering-corps>

<http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-food/food-fighters.htm>

<https://iancoate.com/military%20art%204.html>