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# THE NAVY'S LARDER

AND THE  
MARKETING LIST OF  
THE SHIP'S HOUSEWIFE

By  
JOHN S. MARGERISON



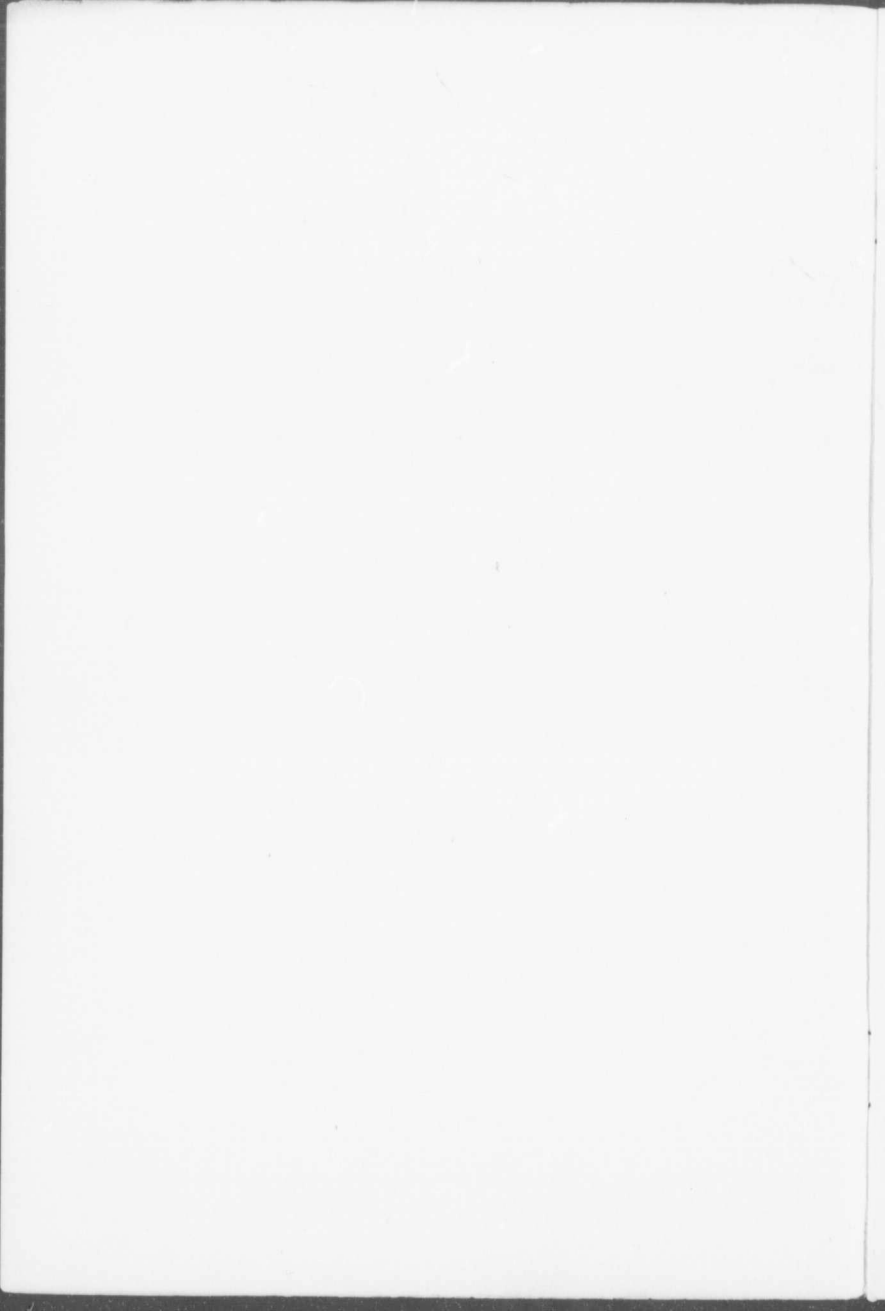
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# THE NAVY'S LARDER

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## MARKETING LIST OF THE SHIP'S HOUSEWIFE

By

JOHN S. MARGERSON

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It is more or less popularly supposed that, given a liberal supply of rum and a chunk of tobacco to chew, the naval sailorman cares little about food such as is consumed by those he terms so patronisingly "shore-loafers." Yet, if this be the case, why is it that fully one-sixth of a battleship's storage space is set aside to accommodate the myriad varieties of foodstuffs required for the maintenance of what is really nothing less than a floating town?

Provisions, as the sailor knows it, is a very wide term. All that the sailorman reads, smokes, wears, drinks, or eats, comes under that heading—"paymaster's stores" is its official designation. Indeed, one of the main points for consideration in the equipment of a fighting fleet is the supply of food of excellent quality, of great variety, and of sufficient quantity, as all these things are factors in giving the man behind the gun and torpedo-tube that stamina which enables him to deal the knock-out blow after he has weakened his opponent.

The two main items—indeed, the two essentials—are bread and meat. In the old days, ships took to sea with them huge quantities of hard biscuit, in many cases scores of years old, and literally crawling with weevils and other bread-eating insects, with the result that, while tons of food were wasted, the sailormen were ill-nourished. The same with beef; in the bad old times the Navy relied upon "salt horse"—as it was called—for the flesh portion of its diet; and, as an example of the age some of this stuff attained before it was consumed, I may state—and it is a fact—that I have personally been present when a cask of salt beef over eighty years old was opened and served out to a warship's complement, and,

what was all the more astonishing, was quite eatable and fit for consumption.

Nowadays the Navy gets—at least in its big ships—fresh bread and fresh meat every day.

The installation of great bakeries, and the erection of huge cold-storage and refrigerating-rooms, as well as the organisation of a system of constantly-arriving supply-ships carrying food, have made the lot of the modern sailorman much better than it was even a decade ago. Smaller ships, too—the destroyers, submarines, and patrol craft—while not carrying either bakeries or cold-storage rooms, can always rely upon supplies of fresh provisions from their better-equipped big sisters; thus the Navy benefits all round, and is better fed in every way.

Large quantities of vegetables are also carried, though only as regards potatoes are they actually fresh. Preserved carrots, turnips, celery-seed, and even potatoes are put up in tins and served out when required by the paymaster, who is the housewife of the ship.

But there are times when fresh meat is not available, and to meet sudden emergencies of this kind salt pork is supplied in casks, as also are tinned beef and mutton, affectionately termed "Fanny Adams" by the sailorman.

A feature of the Navy's dietary is the fact that when salt pork is on the menu, thick, substantial pea-soup invariably accompanies it; rice in generous quantities is the concomitant of corned beef; while "flour, fat, and figs" help the tinned mutton to give the sailorman that pleasant sensation of belt-tightness which always follows an appreciated meal. The reason for these extras lies in the fact that on these days only half-rations of potatoes are issued, the other things making up the sufficiency of the ration, and at the same time providing that variety which is the salt of life.

#### *Sugar and Tea and Flour by the Ton.*

Huge quantities of flour, also, are carried, not only for bread-making, but for the concoction of that dish dear to the heart of the bluejacket—"figgy duff." The great dreadnought will carry in her holds as much as 500 tons; the small light cruiser may have only 50, according to the amount she is allowed for consumption every half-year. Nothing but flour is stowed in one hold; the 240-pound sacks lying tier upon tier, with the red label, showing the date of manufacture, date of issue, and several other things, hanging at its mouth.

Sugar and tea are also in great demand. The tea is in the ordinary familiar square chests, lined with lead-foil, which require careful handling to prevent damage, and must be

stowed where salt water will not contaminate their contents. The sugar is in 2-cwt. barrels, which must not be confused with those containing salt; these latter bearing a striking resemblance to their sweeter brethren, and, in order to prevent mistakes, are stowed in a separate hold altogether.

The dry-provision hold is reserved for tinned goods—for rabbit, salmon, corned beef, mutton, tinned carrots, turnips, potatoes, and celery-seed, suet, raisins, currants, jam, marmalade, condensed milk—tons and tons of this latter—crowding upon each other in orderly rows, while the barrels of rice share the after hold with the salt.

There is one special stowage set apart for the spirit, and called the spirit store. Into this go the huge barrels of rum with their red-rimmed markings, and, so that they shall not be lonely, vinegar, in exactly the same-sized casks is stowed here also. But, to tell them apart, the vinegar casks have white rims—a mistake in opening either kind of provisions might be nearly fatal. Also, because it is inflammable, the painters' turpentine also finds a home in the spirit room—though this is "carpenters' stores," and has nothing to do with the paymaster. And, in those ships lucky enough to carry motor-boats, here, also, is stowed the petrol for driving them. The spirit store is fitted with a flooding arrangement in case of fire, exactly the same as the magazines and shell-rooms of the ship.

"Provisions," as I have said, is a term embracing many things—one needs to witness the operation termed "provisioning ship" to realise how many. Fat and flannel and figs; soap and socks and sugar; lard and lanyards and libraries—these latter for the pleasant passing away of odd hours when duty eases up a little; petrol and pickles; coffee and candles and currants; tea and tobacco and turpentine; biscuits—ships still carry them in case the bakery breaks down, or for other emergencies—and beef in tins; salmon and suet; raisins and rabbits—again tinned; the memory refuses to record the whole miscellany of foodstuffs that enter the ship on these occasions. For, not only is the paymaster responsible that Jack has a sufficiency of food, he must make sure that there is enough clothing in the ship to dress its whole company twice over if needs be; that the chaplain has a full supply of Bibles and prayer-books for ministering to the men's spiritual needs, and enough school stationery and library books to entertain and educate their minds; that there is a plenitude of tobacco—both in the raw, naked leaf and manufactured, in tins—for their delectation; and soap sufficient to cleanse themselves and their clothing, no matter the odds against personal cleanliness—which is the sailorman's one fetish.



And, besides all this, there is another supply of food in the ship—that collected by the canteen, to be retailed at fair prices to those men who require delicacies of any kind to tempt the appetite—if it needs any tempting after four hours spent in drill, or in facing the bleak winds that make the North Sea their especial abiding-place. Nor, in the canteen, is there any less variety than in the paymaster's stores—only the food is of a more perishable kind. Butter and beans, kidneys in tins, veal and ham pies, eggs, cigarettes—half a million packets a month are none too many for a big battleship—matches, dried herrings, kippers, haddocks, sardines, bloater-paste, and many other mysterious concoctions in tins; sides of bacon and cases of eggs, dozens of round cheeses, and boxes of bloaters; tons of "German" sausage—why does the sailor call this "Ordinary Seaman's Delight"?—tinned fruits, boxes of chocolates, and caramels for Jack's sweet tooth; great slabs of cake, mountains of macaroni; shoals of sago and tapioca; chutney, sauces, spice, candied fruits, lemonade-powders, and hosts of other things may be purchased from the canteen, either for ready money, or by a credit system which debits the man's mess with the price of the goods, leaving it to collect the cash from him at the month's end, when accounts are rendered.

The system by which the sailor can augment his rations by purchasing from the paymaster those things which cannot be obtained from the canteen is worth mentioning here. Each man is allowed the sum of 4d. per day above the value of the rations which he must take up from the paymaster, and with this 4d. he must buy all extras, such as a second vegetable for dinner, butter for his bread. Such things as bread, meat, potatoes, salt and condiments, sugar and tea and milk and jam are compulsory issues; but suppose the sailor desires a pie for his dinner, with beans to supplement the potatoes, and a tapioca pudding for a sweet. The flour for the pie-crust he can get from the paymaster, its value being debited from the 4d. per day per man; the beans, tapioca, and so on, he buys from the canteen on the monthly credit system. At the end of each month the paymaster calculates the total messing allowance of each mess, deducts therefrom the value of the provisions that mess has drawn from him on "repayment," and hands the difference over to the senior hand. The senior hand, with this money, pays the month's canteen bill, and it is exceedingly seldom that he has not to ask his messmates to put their hands into their own pockets and contribute equal shares to the amount necessary to clear the canteen account. But even if a ship had a full canteen and provision-holds stacked to overflowing, all these provisions would be useless

to her without water. In every ship's bottom are built tanks, which, upon every possible occasion, are filled from the distilled-water hydrants in the dockyards. But where a ship does not go to the water, the water comes to her, carried in a specially-constructed vessel armed with mighty pumps, which, lying alongside, transfers the precious fluid to her bigger comrade, and then goes back to shore for more.

But there are stations where even water-tankers cannot come, and the ship must depend upon herself for her drinking and washing water. And what is more, she must get this fluid from the salt, salt sea.

In every ship of any size condensers are fitted capable of distilling as much water as can possibly be required for any purpose. And when the condensers, the distillers, and the aerators have finished with the salt sea fluid, the resultant water is almost as good as that which Nature herself supplies, without any admixture of chemicals, and, though very "hard," distilled water can be used for drinking, cooking, or ablutions of body or attire.

But it usually happens that when a ship gets down to drinking condensed water, she is also feeding upon tinned and preserved provisions, and the two things in combination tend to give the sailormen that dread maritime disease—scurvy. But—the Navy never leaves an emergency open, if possible—"provisions" here again step in; the paymaster opens his special cases, and from small blue-glass bottles serves out to each man a certain quantity of lime-juice, which, besides being a beverage, is at the same time a cure for, and a preventative of, scurvy. Truly the paymaster is the ship's housewife; and Jack's larder the best stocked store-cupboard in the whole world.