



U.S. ARMY



THE GREAT TURKEY LIFT OF 1944



In the fall of 1944, the U.S. Army made a deliberate effort to give front-line troops a real Thanksgiving meal. Much of the turkey for American forces in Europe was shipped from the United States aboard dedicated transport tonnage – most notably the SS Great Republic which is depicted above and singled out in contemporary accounts as carrying a major portion of the turkey allotment. The birds were packed in refrigerated or frozen cargo holds and sent as part of Quartermaster shipments for the holiday.

Once the food arrived in European ports, distribution became the next challenge. Unfortunately, the Quartermaster Corps didn't coordinate with the Transportation Corps to have any trains available that day to - you know - transport everything. Eventually both organizations worked out a way to move the cargo by rail and truck from supply depots to the corps/division supply points and mess kitchens, using refrigerated cars, insulated trucks and the Army's established cold storage supply chain to preserve meat until serving. If PowerPoint existed in 1944, it's safe to say this would have generated plenty of slides for the after-action review.



Turkeys arriving at Liège, Belgium for Christmas, 1944 (Quartermaster Supply in the European Theater of

At the Division and subordinate levels, turkeys were received at local supply points and prepared in mess halls, field kitchens, or improvised unit feeding points for front-line soldiers. In some forward or rapidly moving sectors, locally procured poultry or preserved/canned substitutes supplemented shipments when refrigeration or transport to a specific unit was impractical. Both options provided much needed relief from the daily supply of C-rations.



SGT Louis S. Wallace bastes a turkey being roasted in an M-1937 field range, somewhere in Europe, 22 NOV 1944 (US Army Signal Corps)

In total 1,604 tons of turkey, enough for every American soldier in Europe, were delivered successfully. Back in the U.S., turkey was among the few things not rationed during the war. But, unfortunately, due to the number of turkeys going overseas it did create a shortage. A New York Daily News article from 22 NOV 1944 recounts a police raid on a black-market turkey selling operation in Brooklyn. (If your grandparents had a police record for trying to buy a black-market turkey for Thanksgiving, props to them.)

Happy Thanksgiving from the ASC History Office!

U.S. ARMY TURKEY RECIPE (CIRCA 1944)

NO. 435. ROAST TURKEY

Substitute 100 pounds young fat turkeys for chickens in recipe for roast chicken. Reduce salt to 6 ounces (12 mess kit spoons) and pepper to ¾ ounce (3 mess kit spoons). Bake turkeys weighing up to 16 pounds in moderate oven (325° F.) approximately 4 hours, turkeys weighing 16 to 20 pounds in slow oven (300° F.) and turkeys over 20 pounds in slow oven (250° F.). Bake turkeys until all traces of pink juice have disappeared from the meat. Allow turkeys to stand at least 30 minutes before carving.

NO. 436. POULTRY DRESSING

Yield: 100 servings,
3 to 4 ounces each.

Ingredients	100 servings	 servings
Celery, chopped.....	5 pounds (5 No. 56 dippers).....	
Onions, finely chopped.....	2½ pounds (2½ No. 56 dippers).....	
Fat (for frying).....	3 pounds (1½ No. 56 dippers).....	
Bread crumbs, soft.....	24 pounds (48 No. 56 dippers).....	
Poultry seasoning.....	1½ ounces (3 mess kit spoons).....	
Salt.....	2 ounces (4 mess kit spoons).....	
Pepper.....	½ ounce (2 mess kit spoons).....	
Parsley, finely chopped.....	8 ounces (1 mess kit cup).....	

1. Fry celery and onions until partially cooked.
2. Add bread crumbs, poultry seasoning, salt, pepper, and parsley; mix well.
3. Place in greased baking pans; cover with buttered parchment paper.
4. Bake in moderate oven (350° F.) about 1 to 1½ hours.

NO. 437. CORNBREAD DRESSING

Substitute an equal quantity of crumbled cornbread for the bread crumbs in recipe for poultry dressing.



U.S. Army Soldiers training stateside procuring their own turkey dinner with a M9A1 bazooka.

SEPTEMBER TRIVIA

1. When was Thanksgiving made a national holiday?
2. When did the earliest Thanksgiving celebrations take place in the Army?
3. Who issued the first Thanksgiving proclamation?

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS

1. The 1961 Hoelscher Committee led directly to the creation of which unified logistics command in the U.S. Army?
U.S. Army Materiel Command
2. What 1973 policy ended the draft and transformed the Army into an All-Volunteer Force?
The Gates Commission recommendation to the SECDEF in 1971
3. What was the significance of "Black Friday" in 1961?
It was the day that all of the separate U.S. Army materiel commands were unified under the planned new Army Materiel Command.



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