December 2025







As the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) settled into occupation duty following the Armistice of 11 November 1918, Soldiers faced their first Christmas in a world no longer at war. Though the guns had fallen silent, many of the Soldiers of the AEF remained far from home, tasked with stabilizing regions of Europe and ensuring the peace. An earlier plan had been conceived by the War Department to sustain morale and strengthen the bond between Soldiers and their families as the thought that the war would have continued into 1919. Despite the end of the war the War Department introduced a unique initiative: the Christmas Package Coupon.



Each Soldier of the AEF was issued a coupon that could be sent to loved ones in the United States. Families used the coupon to mail one parcel completely free, to their Soldier overseas. The American Red Cross provided standard boxes and assisted with shipping, ensuring that every Soldier received at least one gift from home. Typical packages contained candy, tobacco, socks, small keepsakes and items that carried immense sentimental value. The coupon system not only managed the logistical burden of wartime mail but also guaranteed fairness, so that every Soldier could share in the comfort of a holiday remembrance.

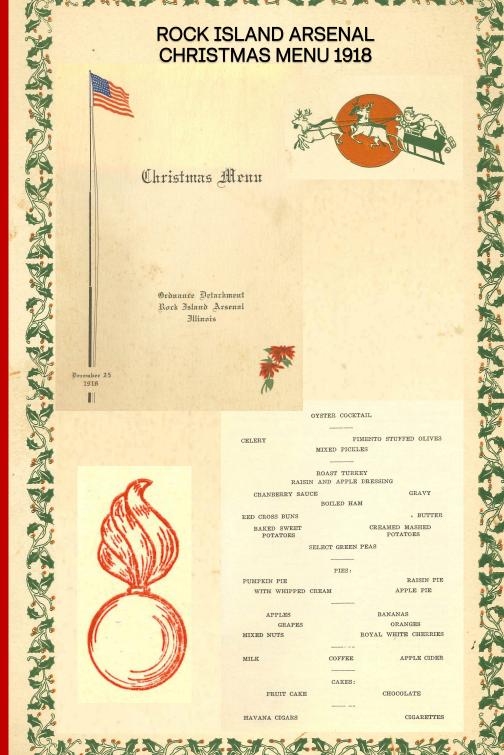


Red Cross Christmas Day Dinner in Paris 1918 (NARA Signal Corps Photo 165-WW-43C-018)

With Christmas packages in hand Soldiers across their billets and mess halls, marked Christmas with improvised decorations, carols, and special meals. Chaplains organized services and while units printed commemorative cards and programs adorned with regimental insignia. Turkey dinners, music, and fellowship provided a sense of normalcy after years of hardship. For many, these celebrations were tempered by solemn reflection on comrades who had fallen in battle, yet they also carried the joy of peace restored as well as the end to "the war to end all wars."

Christmas in 1918 was more than a holiday; it was a symbol of transition. The coupon parcels represented the enduring connection between Soldiers and their families, while the celebrations themselves embodied resilience and hope. For the AEF, this Christmas marked not only the birth of Christ but also the rebirth of peace after the Great War.

In the words of one Army chaplain, "The bells of Christmas ring more sweetly when the cannon are silent." For the Soldiers of the AEF, Christmas 1918 was a season of gratitude, remembrance, and anticipation of homecoming. Your History Office wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy Holidays.



- 1. What holiday staple often appeared in Army mess halls at Christmas?
- 2. What was the most common item sent to U.S. Soldiers in the Christmas packages?
- 3. What music became more popular in the U.S. following WWI?

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS

- 1. When was Thanksgiving made a national holiday?
 - President Lincoln officially declared Thanksgiving as the last Thursday of November.
- 2. When did the earliest Thanksgiving celebrations take place in the Army?
- Soldiers began celebrating Thanksgiving during the Civil War.
- 3. Who issued the first Thanksgiving proclamation?
 - President George Washington on 26 November 1789.



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