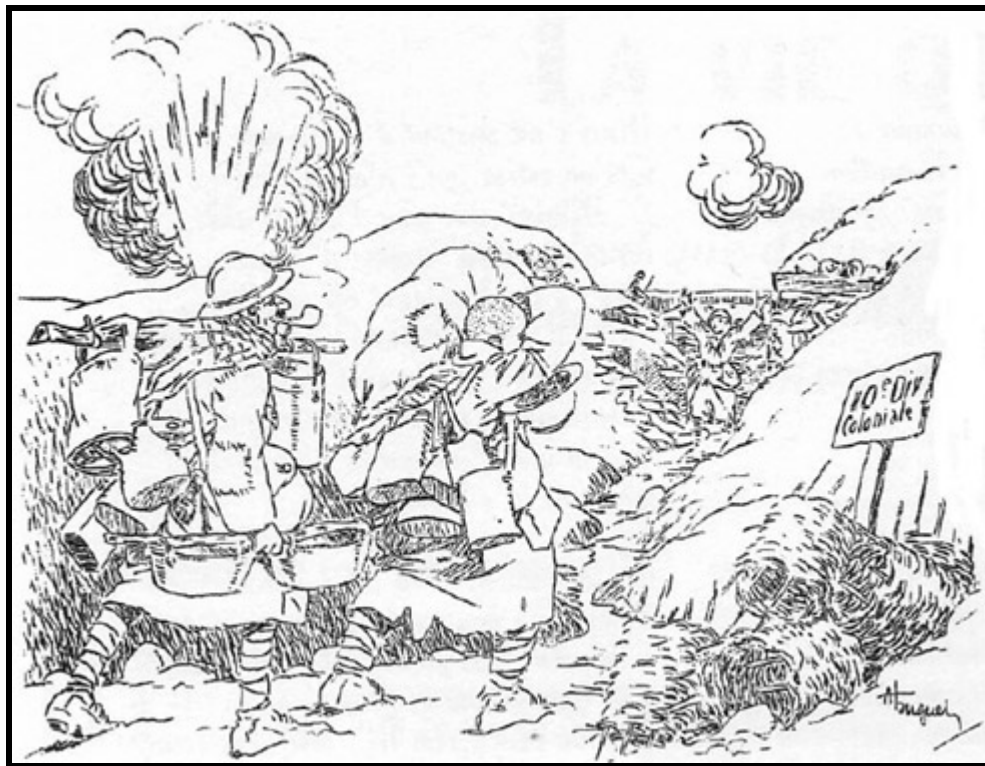


# French Transportation of Rations

by John Bracken

151 RLI



'Mess-Men,' A. Buguel, 'Le Petit Écho du 18e'

Theoretically, when a soldier went up into line he was carrying at least two days fresh rations and two days reserve rations on him. For transport, the fresh rations were placed in the mess-tin, with the bread and other small foods placed in the haversacks. The reserve rations were carried in the knapsack. These were distributed on the company level while still in the rear at the rest camps or billets. However, rations were still needed to be brought up to the line on a daily basis, as a unit's stay in the trenches was often a week or longer.

At the start of the war, most units (notably the reserve regiments) had a rotating cook position for each squad. In addition to his mess-tin, cup, spoon and fork, the soldier was also issued a squad camping implement for this purpose. In 1915, mobile field kitchens became the primary way of preparing food in the French army. Nicknamed *roulantes* ("rollers"), their incontestable advantage rendered certain camping implements superfluous. The rollers, stationed in the rear or support lines, were staffed by *cuistots* ("cookys") who stayed with the kitchens to prepare the meals.

Article: **French Transportation of Rations**

An article downloaded from the Great War Association's website at:

[www.great-war.org](http://www.great-war.org)

1 of 3 Updated: 3/30/2010



Nonetheless, the infantryman continued to carry the squad cooking implements throughout the entire war. For though the food was prepared by field kitchens, these were not capable of transporting the food to the front-line trenches themselves. This task fell to fatigue men organized into ration parties. Variously called *cuistots*, *ravitailleurs* or *hommes-soupes*, they brought up the rations on their backs to their waiting comrades. The cooked food, such as the soup, meat and vegetables, was usually placed in Bouthéon stew-pots. Their name was soon universally transformed by the logical assimilation to *bouteillon* ('bottle'). The large camp mess-pan called the *plat a quatre* ("plate for four") was also used for this purpose but were prone to letting in dirt and mud, a common complaint of the men. Though the food was hot when it was in the rear, by the time it arrived at the front it had already turned cold. The loaves of bread were brought up in several fashions: impaled onto either end of a stick which

was then supported on the shoulder; strung together with twine and worn as a bandolier around the shoulders; or simply thrown into a large canvas sack. Canned foods were carried either in haversacks or the large canvas distribution sacks.

Wine was generally transferred into the innumerable canteens the mess-men wore slung around their shoulders. Otherwise, it was brought up in whatever receptacles might be at hand. Canteens were relied on as well to transport coffee and water. Alternately, it was common for coffee to be brought up in the *bouteillons* and water in the squad canvas buckets or whatever other receptacles were available. One other means turned to in to help transport rations were mules. These would actually enter the



trenches and travel as far up as the support lines where their loads were then transferred onto the backs of men to carry the rest of the way.

---

Article: **French Transportation of Rations**

An article downloaded from the Great War Association's website at:

[www.great-war.org](http://www.great-war.org)

2 of 3 Updated: 3/30/2010



---

Article: **French Transportation of Rations**

An article downloaded from the Great War Association's website at:

**[www.great-war.org](http://www.great-war.org)**

3 of 3 Updated: 3/30/2010