

Operation Science: Supply Drop

Transcript

(Emily is stood on the stairs in the Museum)

Hello everyone, I'm Emily and I'm the Family Learning Producer here at the National Army Museum. Today, we're going to be getting in the festive spirit, exploring some Christmas-themed items in our collection, as well as investigating some of the different methods to deliver supplies to its troops. Throughout its history, the Army has been based in many different countries all over the world, including India, Egypt, Sudan, France and Belgium. During these times, the Army has had to think logistically to make sure essential supplies of weapons, ammunition and food get to the places where they are needed - not to mention soldiers' letters and Christmas presents. In the past, members of the Royal Family have arranged for gifts to be sent to soldiers serving overseas at Christmas time. Let's explore a few of these in our Handling Collection.

(Emily is seated at a table in front of a green camouflage backdrop, behind her is a mannequin wearing First World War uniform, on the table are two tins - one red and one gold)

Now, although these tins don't look like much, as we unpack the detail and story behind them, there is a bit more to them than first meets the eye.

(Emily picks up the red tin)

Does anybody recognise the royal on the front of this tin? This is Queen Victoria and she commissioned this tin to be filled with chocolate and sent to troops serving abroad during the Boer War. It has rounded edges so it would sit nicely inside a soldier's knapsack - like I said, it has chocolate inside and also a card which says, 'I wish you a Happy New Year'. Now to have these tins made and to have them filled with chocolate Queen Victoria asked the three leading sweets manufacturers of the day to help her with this. She asked Fry's, Rowntree and another company you might be familiar with from your Christmas selection boxes - Cadbury. However, the Cadburys were Quakers and therefore pacifists. This meant that they could not and would not accept any payment for the chocolate they produced because they would see this as profiting from war. Therefore, they created chocolate inside as a gift. Now, I've got a little bit of a surprise for you. If we open this tin up - we have got the original chocolate inside and that means that this chocolate is over one hundred years old!! I don't think that would be very tasty to eat this Christmas.

Later on, during the First World War, some Quakers registered as conscientious objectors. A conscientious objector is someone who refuses military service due to personal or religious beliefs. Now, the Cadbury family, they were Quakers, but Lawrence Cadbury, he wasn't a conscientious objector. He signed up to serve with the Friends Ambulance Unit, who were helping the wounded over in France. This meant he could serve his country during the First World War but in a way that aligned with his belief.

Now, this leads us nicely to our second object here.

(Emily picks up gold tin)

This is the Princess Mary Gift Tin that was produced during the First World War. Princess Mary was the daughter of King George V, the king at the time, and she wanted to do something for every soldier at the front and sailor afloat during the First World War.

Therefore, a campaign was started to have these tins made. So, we can see it's got Princess Mary on the front and it's also got the names of Britain's allies, people who were supporting them during the war. So, we've got France and also Russia on the other side. Now, what did this tin have

inside it? This is the unusual thing - these tins had lots of different combinations, so if you were a smoker you might receive a tin containing tobacco or cigarettes, non-smokers had a tin with pencil and notepaper in, and nurses received a tin containing chocolate. They even catered for people with different religions, so Sikhs serving in the British Armed Forces received a tin containing sweets and spices. This was really unusual for the time, to create something that was different rather than all being the same for everyone. By Christmas 1914, over 355,000 tins were successfully delivered.

(Emily is stood on the stairs in the Museum)

The Boer War and Princess Mary Gift Tins were delivered using traditional methods, but during the Second World War, the Army used something a little bit different to keep its troops supplied... parachutes!

During the Second World War, there was an operation called Operation Market Garden and this was an airborne operation, meaning that soldiers were parachuted behind enemy lines. They had to cross enemy territory, with the aim of securing river crossings across the Rhine and helping the Army to advance into Germany.

Now because an operation could potentially last up to three months, re-supply by parachute was supposed to happen roughly every two weeks - weather and security permitting. Supplies of food, weapons and ammunition were all dropped by parachute. We're going to have a go at making our own parachutes and putting them to the test here in the Museum today. But first - how do parachutes work? Well, when an object is falling through the air it has two forces acting on it - gravity and air resistance. Gravity is pulling an object closer to the ground whereas air resistance is helping to slow it down. When you have a parachute, you are widening your surface area, which means greater air resistance and helping to slow your descent. Now, we're going to have a go at doing our own supply drop here in the Museum and we have some very important cargo to send - everyone's favourite food - sprouts!

Let's have a go at making our own parachutes.

(Voiceover of Emily while sprouts are getting ready for the parachute jump)

We have three different designs of parachute, now it's time to put those to the test.

(Emily drops parachutes into the Museum atrium)

Paper Parachute - Square Shape

Cotton Parachute - Cross Shape

Plastic Parachute - Circular Shape

(Emily is stood on stairs in Museum)

Today, we've explored some Christmas presents from the Army's past, as well as made our own parachutes and put them to the test. Why not have a go at home at making your own parachute and delivering some supplies this Christmas. Thanks for watching and I hope to see you in the Museum sometime soon!

(Video ends)

Images from the National Army Museum Collection used in this video

- A soldier opening his Princess Mary Gift Tin, Christmas 1914
 - <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2007-03-7-134>
- Three American C-47s dropping parachutists and supply canisters on the outskirts of Arnhem, 17 September 1944
 - <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2005-12-38-67>
- Ammunition and supplies dropped to the troops at Arnhem, 18 September 1944
 - <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2005-12-38-53>

Other images used in this video

- MS327_C_2_3 Lawrence Cadbury in uniform, reproduced with permission of Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham