



# THE THREE-YEAR SANDWICH

Napoleon Bonaparte famously pointed out that an army travels on its stomach, a reference to the fact that soldiers in the field need to be supplied with food.

More than 200 years later, the need to provide the armed forces with healthy food is still a major concern — and one that has driven innovation in the shelf stable category. The military has unique food needs. Meals must stay fresh for extended periods without

refrigeration, be easy to prepare without heat, and must also be portable and easy to pack, ship and carry in a rucksack.

The U.S. military had been struggling for years to offer soldiers a staple of the American diet — the sandwich. But the humble combination of meat and bread had proved particularly difficult to develop.

Bread is sensitive to changes in moisture and the microbes that produce mold. And keeping meat fresh involves controlling the pH and oxygen inside the packaging.

Following the start of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military redoubled its efforts at making a sandwich for the troops. The directive to military food engineers was to make a sandwich that could stay fresh for two years and also survive being dropped from a helicopter.

The result was an innovative pocket sandwich that has a shelf life of 24 months when stored at 80 degrees. The sandwiches come in flavors including bacon cheddar, BBQ beef and pepperoni.

The sandwiches are grouped with other shelf stable foods into what the military is calling the First Strike Ration (FSR). The FSR is “a compact, eat-on-the-move assault ration designed for high intensity combat operations,” according to the Department of Defense’s Combat Feeding Directorate.

An FSR is designed contain a day’s worth of food and contains the same nutritional value as three standard army rations (“Meals, Ready to Eat” or MREs) but weighs only half as much.

A civilian version of the sandwich is sold by the Anaheim, Calif.-based Bridgford Foods. The company says its version of the sandwich stays fresh for up to 3 years if stored below 80 degrees and can last for six months when stored at 100 degrees.

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