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When Defense Workers Eat

Marjorie Beneke discusses cafeterias and mobile units used in feeding thousands of defense factory workers

FOOD experts were challenged when confronted with the problem of feeding the large armies of defense plant employees all over the country. It meant feeding often as many as 10,000 people at a single meal and yet keeping the workers in fast-moving, orderly shifts so that production at the plants would continue uninterrupted. It meant setting up makeshift equipment in a hurry or converting relatively limited facilities to accommodate large numbers of workers. Like the whole defense program, the food situation called for ingenuity and quick, efficient planning.

Now with the program approaching full swing, we begin to see results of that planning. More than 10,000 workers are fed at the Boeing Airplane Factory and the Associated Shipbuilders' Harbor Island Yard in Seattle. Located directly outside the plants are two canteens for factory workers where both hot and cold lunches and confectionery items are available. Between 75 and 100 workers are used in the canteen to serve the crowds at mealtime.

Office workers and senior and junior supervisors are accommodated in special dining rooms and a two-line cafeteria. The average check for workers going through the cafeteria line is 27 cents, and an average of 12 minutes is required to pass through it.

Equipment to cook food consumed by this large number of people is necessarily on a large scale. A 60-gallon steam kettle used for making soup stock, a two-oven electric range with 6,000-watt capacity, and an electric mixer with 140- and 124-quart mixer bowls give an idea of the quantity cookery equipment needed.

Near Fort Worth, Texas, where work crews must be shifted on a moment's notice from one part of the big construction project to another, perhaps a mile distant, the problem of feeding employees presented another problem. To solve it, portable lunch stands with skids were erected. Twelve stands are proposed for the project, and at least four have been completed. The stands are placed at strategic points where workmen are busiest. At first it was found difficult to place so few stands at the beginning of the day in locations where they could operate without being moved again. That's where the skids proved of value. When the crews move, a tractor simply backs up to one of the portable units, hooks on to a cable and drags the lunch stand to the new site.

To make full use of the floor space, equipment in the portable lunch stands must be well arranged and compact. Portable gas units attached to a lunch stand solve the problem of food for short orders. Candy and tobacco goods are found on a compact rack which is filled at the commissary in the main cafeteria building each day. A popular feature at the lunch stands is a box lunch of sandwiches, cookies, fruit and drink, sold at a low price.

In the main cafeteria building, a temporary structure, a large steam table keeps food warm in the cafeteria line. A variety of salads, meat dishes, vegetables and pies is offered.

Ford Motor Company at Detroit is now well into new expansion because of the defense program. A short time ago a new airplane factory was completed at River Rouge, Mich., and a few miles away, at Willow Run, a bomber assembly plant of enormous size is being constructed. The complexity and vastness of this great industrial plant make planning of food difficult.

Twelve to fifteen hundred men and women are served at the cafeteria each lunch hour. Use of the "stagger" system releases various departments for lunch at 15-minute intervals. In order that late-comers will not feel that they are eating at a second table, a new set-up comes with every shift of eaters. Partially emptied pans of food are replaced and tables cleared entirely.

Workers out in the plant get their food from specially designed trains of chuck wagons bearing steaming loads of food to the plant units. Tractors are used as the motive power, and as each wagon is dropped, it opens up like a table. An attendant is always on hand to assist with the serving.

Over at the airplane engine plant, a new cafeteria is being built. It will be air conditioned, lighted with fluorescent lamps. The best in modern equipment will meet the needs of about 80,000 men.

With such large numbers of people to accommodate with cafeteria service, it is evident that feeding the nation's forces at home will be no small job.