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Gastronomical Adventure in the Tropics

Kenneth Fulk, '39, describes experimental cookery at its best in the South Pacific

IF YOU are about to marry a former soldier, sailor or perhaps a marine, there are some things you should know about cooking. This repatriated companion of yours may want to fly away and live on one of the beautiful romantic Pacific Islands. So perhaps you should be familiar with Adventures in Eating in the SOPAC.

The first meal—In any type campaign this is the most vital meal of all; especially if several rainy days have been spent plowing up mountain trails, via caterpillar, to reach your mountain top retreat. A nourishing suggestion for this meal is slices of cold meat, sardine bits, pork and beans warmed by a smoky flame under a shelter half, toasty, crunchy hard tack and for drink, water bucket tea.

The first steps in making your hilltop manor more homelike are the constructing of a galley, acquiring equipment and securing more food.

To build the galley, or kitchen, suspend a tarpaulin (green duck, 22 by 20 feet, Model M1A2) from four trees. It is recommended that two of the trees be mahogany so that their solid, high, bladelike brace roots can be utilized as protection from the elements for a stove and for nailing slats across for easily constructed shelves. The other two trees should be a many-trunked banyan for storage and concealment. Split and scoop out the node tissue from a large bamboo pole, attach this to the lower side of the tarpaulin, run it over to a water bag (Bag, Liter, green canvas, Model M2A12, capacity 40 gallon) and you will have a good water supply during the rainy season.

Now for equipment—You could make out a requisition, but it will not be filled, so to avoid a delay, save large metal food containers of various shapes and sizes. Twenty gallon containers should suffice. Negotiate during his absence with a marine, there are some things you should know about cooking. This repatriated companion of yours may want to fly away and live on one of the beautiful romantic Pacific Islands. So perhaps you should be familiar with Adventures in Eating in the SOPAC.

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Now for equipment—You could make out a requisition, but it will not be filled, so to avoid a delay, save large metal food containers of various shapes and sizes. Twenty gallon containers should suffice. Negotiate during his absence with a French plantation owner, several miles away, for an old wood type cook stove. Some pottery can also be acquired by the stove technique. Later on, when you are more settled, it might be advisable to pick a truckload of wild lemons, take them to the airstrip 30 miles away and trade them to some thirsty army pilots for a good set of serviceable china. Army pilots have various methods for obtaining china and silver from the naval ships. They also have uses for lemons.

Your equipment will not be complete without an old felt campaign hat and a black mosquito net. The wide brim of the hat keeps the mosquito net away from your face, and the mosquito net keeps the large, black blowflies out of your mouth. Small flies and mosquitoes are negligible.

The most important step comes next—learning to cook. Of course, you would have had no room for cook books but would have to rely on scientific analysis, an adventurous spirit and a brave, considerate husband. Initially give the can system a go but you will find that the tin typed taste teasers soon grow tiresome.

Planning foods to prepare is very difficult and experience has proven that the best method is to close one’s eyes and dream of mother’s delectable dishes, revive mentally one of the flavors, then try to reproduce that flavor with the materials at hand. A few months later, when mail starts coming, magic recipes may be found in magazine advertisements.

For more appeal, go to pastries; these will really try your culinary aptitude. Here is a suggestion to beginners—be scientific. Remember that flour is bubbling with carbohydrates, lard with fat, salt gives flavor and strength, milk or water have cementing qualities and all mixed together may have bite quality, plus nourishment. Measure out 6 tablespoons of flour and deposit each on a long, clean board, numbering for future reference. Sprinkle each wee mound with salt; mix well with fingers. To the first mound add a little finger lump of lard—just the size of the end of your little finger. To the number 2 mound add a big finger of lard, to number 3 a thumb, to number 4 add two thumbs, and so on to six. Mix each one fairly well, then add enough liquid to obtain from each prodigal, a shapeable mass. Place each mess on a separate numbered tin in a fairly hot oven until done to your satisfaction. Now observe the results. You will undoubtedly find compounds for shingles and synthetic rubber, but in between you will also find a refugee from the piecrust family.

A PIE is merely a combination of any known food and a pie crust. Incidentally, you will be well repaid to locate your kitchen near a lemon tree, since it will save you a great number of steps adding a dash of lemon to apple pies.

For more glamorous cooking—repeat the experiment just outlined, but this time add baking powder in varying amounts, starting with a pinch. You will be perfectly amazed at the result and one will surely remind you of mother’s famous baking powder biscuits. If your husband is a Southerner and you are a Northerner, you are especially lucky. If you put too much lard in your baking powder biscuits, they will be crisp and crunchy, the way he likes them. If you do not put enough lard in them they will be ideal for you—light and fluffy.

As you advance, leave out the baking powder and substitute yeast, add some sugar, and make a pass at the mixture with some powdered eggs. Be sure the
mixture is moist to the extent that it will cling to your fingers like a man going down for the third time, but no moister. Make into small loaves, plop them into well greased pans, and set inside an old box near the fire until the loaves have risen. Sun will do. When the loaves have filled the pans bake until done. Modify this recipe with more sugar, raisins, cinnamon, other spices and it will pass for a cake. Doughnuts are nothing but chunks of sweet bread dough cooked in hot fat.

To obtain a doctor's degree, bake a cake. This is the same as baking powder biscuits but the mix is spicier and sweeter. Add several eggs; stir thoroughly and quickly; add chocolate for chocolate cake; and, oh yes, sift the flour.

When you have reached this stage of perfection you are almost ready to graduate and should build yourself a more serviceable stove from two gasoline drums, off dungeness and shark's teeth watch chains.

The energetic mind and neglected palate can dream up many special dishes. Chili can be concocted by thoroughly chopping Viennas or Spam and cooking with the little red hot peppers that thrive on the islands.

Barbecues are an ideal treat. Engage a wild boar or cow in combat, cut the meat in 5 or 10 pound chunks, broil over hot coals on beach netting, turn regularly and baste with barbecue sauce. The best barbecue sauce recipe was found in Pekin, China, by a Marine Mess Sergeant. It is sometimes referred to as the 3 part sauce. Use one part vinegar, one part tomato catsup, and one part olive oil. To this mixture add onion juice, chili powder, salt and all kinds of pepper to taste. It will not spoil in the tropics.

Other native foods which may be available in small quantities are papayas, coconuts, sweet potatoes and bananas. Taro is a root, very similar to potatoes, can be boiled and is very mealy when properly done. If boiled too much it quickly assumes the properties of scrapbook glue. Taro is probably best fried in an egg milk mixture like eggplant is commonly prepared.

Marine Kenneth Fulk bakes a cake at his Pacific radar outpost in this oven made by insulating a gasoline drum with airfield matting and covering it with cement.

Papayas are the best food of all—a fruit that reminds one of a cantaloupe grown in a tree—ideal for breakfast. Bananas are roughly of 3 types, very large, medium and small sweet. You will readily get to know them as horse, regular and sugar bananas.

Fruits which furnish both food and drink are limes, lemons and mandarines like a juicy, tempting orange. Keep the location of these fruits in mind when finding your house by the side of the road.

Life in the tropics will appeal to your inventive genius—and your desire to relax with ease. Life in the tropics can be romantic, be scenic, and its balmy breezes, its inspiring palms, and its ease of living will weave for you a graceful pattern of life which will more than repay you for no mail for months, no movies, no lights, no cars—No Nothin'.