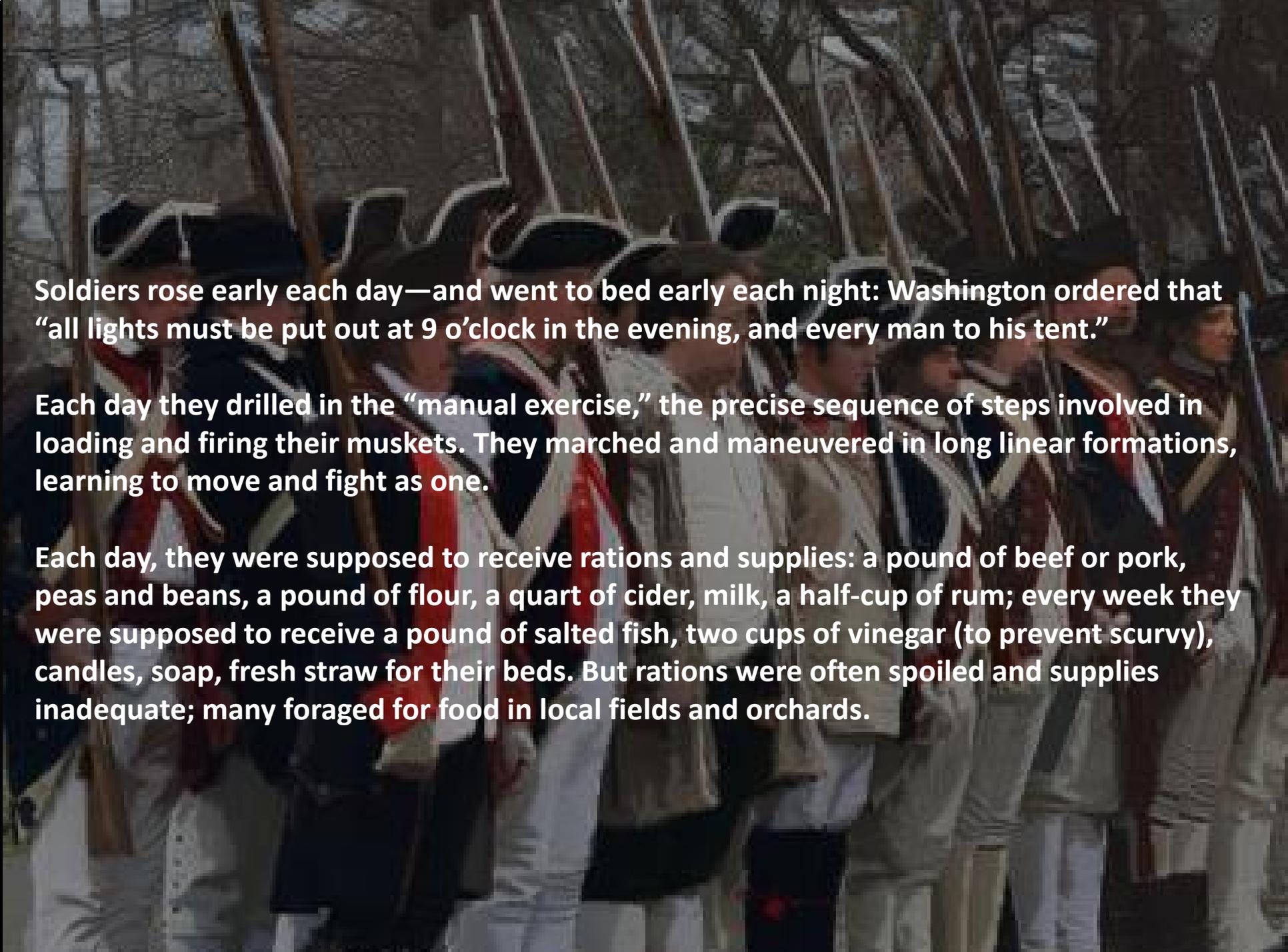


A Soldiers Fare



Feeding an Army



Soldiers rose early each day—and went to bed early each night: Washington ordered that “all lights must be put out at 9 o’clock in the evening, and every man to his tent.”

Each day they drilled in the “manual exercise,” the precise sequence of steps involved in loading and firing their muskets. They marched and maneuvered in long linear formations, learning to move and fight as one.

Each day, they were supposed to receive rations and supplies: a pound of beef or pork, peas and beans, a pound of flour, a quart of cider, milk, a half-cup of rum; every week they were supposed to receive a pound of salted fish, two cups of vinegar (to prevent scurvy), candles, soap, fresh straw for their beds. But rations were often spoiled and supplies inadequate; many foraged for food in local fields and orchards.

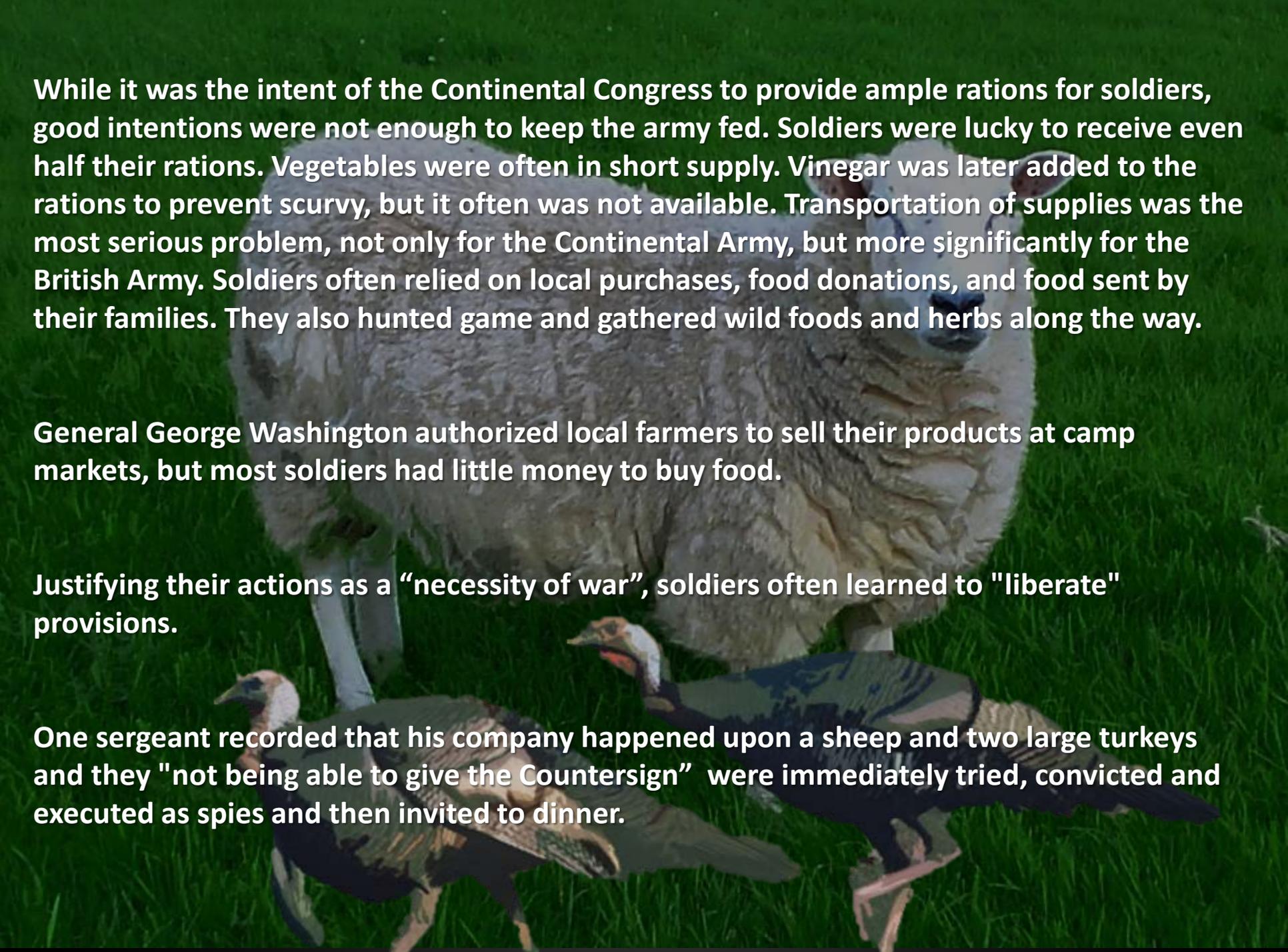
Issued Rations

The Continental Congress on June 16, 1775, authorized appointment of a quartermaster general and a commissary general of stores and provisions for the Continental Army.

Officially, soldiers were to be issued daily rations that were to include salted meat - beef or pork, bread, dry beans or peas, and a gill of rum or beer.

Salted and dried foods were necessary because there were no practical means of food preservation. Often soldiers boiled their dried beans or peas with the meat to make a stew. Many soldiers resorted to soaking their hard bread in warm water or stew to soften it. Milk, turnips, potatoes, onions, and fish might also appear on the menu.



A photograph of a white sheep standing in a green field. In the foreground, two large turkeys are visible, one facing left and one facing right. The background is a dense green field.

While it was the intent of the Continental Congress to provide ample rations for soldiers, good intentions were not enough to keep the army fed. Soldiers were lucky to receive even half their rations. Vegetables were often in short supply. Vinegar was later added to the rations to prevent scurvy, but it often was not available. Transportation of supplies was the most serious problem, not only for the Continental Army, but more significantly for the British Army. Soldiers often relied on local purchases, food donations, and food sent by their families. They also hunted game and gathered wild foods and herbs along the way.

General George Washington authorized local farmers to sell their products at camp markets, but most soldiers had little money to buy food.

Justifying their actions as a “necessity of war”, soldiers often learned to “liberate” provisions.

One sergeant recorded that his company happened upon a sheep and two large turkeys and they “not being able to give the Countersign” were immediately tried, convicted and executed as spies and then invited to dinner.

Foraged Foods



Can you name these forage foods

Cooking

Each soldier had a haversack, usually made of linen, to carry his food rations and eating utensils. The utensils usually included a fork made of wrought iron, a pewter or horn spoon, a knife, a plate, and a cup. He also had a canteen of wood, tin, or glass to carry water. A knapsack held extra clothing and other personal items such as a razor for shaving, a tinderbox with flint and steel for starting a fire, candle holders, a comb, and a mirror. Soldiers also often carried a fishhook and some twine so that they could catch some fish when they were near a lake, creek, or river.



Baggage wagons carried the provisions and rations in front of the soldiers as they marched. This was done so that when the campsite was reached, the men could pick up the rations from the wagons as they passed by.



Cooking utensils were necessary because food was issued in raw form. A set of cooking utensils was usually issued to every six or eight men. This included a kettle, cooking forks and spoons, and often a water bucket. Soldiers were not allowed to put any of their personal property in the baggage wagons when they were on the march. They had to carry their own blankets, kettles, and other personal items.