The idea that snacks are less wholesome options compared with the healthy, nutritious three square meals a day offered in military dining facilities may not necessarily be true these days.

Sure, dietitians and nutritionists can argue that snacks, such as chips, cookies or candy, may not exactly offer the most appealing options to sustain the strenuous lifestyle of service members when compared with fruit, yogurt or granola bars.

But it is the energy boost, and convenience factor, provided by snacks that make them attractive choices for service members who want a quick pick-me-up or a hunger pain to go away. When military personnel walk to a vending machine to make a selection, or grab something from a display or rack when on the go, snacks serve the role of complementing breakfast, lunch and dinner, any time of the day.

Alphonzo “Rick” Byrd, chief of the Quality Assurance Division, Joint Culinary Center for Excellence’s (JCCoE’s) Operations Directorate, pointed out that the Army Food

Removing the “UNHEALTHY” Tag

Nutritious Snacks Becoming More Commonplace in Military

BY CORY HARRIS
Associate Editor

Choosing healthier snack options, when available, is an important aspect when modifying one’s diet or improving physical performance. (U.S. Army Photo by Patricia Dale, CRDAMC Public Affairs)
The program is typically not focused on in-between snack dining, but rather works to provide the best quality in the breakfast, lunch and dinner experience.

“Soldiers do enjoy in-between meal items, but the primary sources are the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) vending machines and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) clubs, etc.,” he said.

Although the Army does not focus on snacks when preparing its 28-day cycle menus for dining facilities (DFACs) worldwide, Byrd noted that in dining facility feeding, there are items that some may call “snack” foods, but in every case the foods fit soldiers’ feeding patterns as desserts.

“Soldiers do on occasion carry fresh fruits out of the dining facility at mealtime for later consumption, and frankly it’s one of the best snacks available,” he said.

“The Army has focused on a program of Recovery Nutrition that provides a proper nutrition item that is a part of the strenuous activity associated with Initial Military Training. In concept, it was sometimes referred to as a recovery snack, but we quickly changed that to avoid abuse.

“Snacks are better if thought of as in-between mealtime nutrition and should be properly selected by the diner based on need and demand. Snacking unfortunately has always been identified with abuse of foodstuffs that, for the most part, did not support a nutrition plan.”

Educating soldiers as to the nutritional snack options available is an important aspect when modifying one’s diet or improving physical performance.

“In every category of food for meats to nuts, entrées to desserts, healthier items and healthier preparation methods are a forward objective in foods we select to serve, understanding, as food professionals, the foods that augment performance and health,” Byrd explained. “The major effort though has to be nutrition education so the diner will welcome and use the healthier foods and make careful selection of in-between meal snacks.”

With the implementation of the “Go for Green” program in military food service, in which a “traffic light” system of food labeling is used in DFACs to help soldiers select foods that enhance their physical performance, he classified the initiative as a “nutrition education posture.” Dessert uses in dining facilities are identified accordingly with this program. Our Web site and our dialogues with our industry partners always support the identification of standards for food choices and types.”

Byrd noted that soldiers do not request specific snacks to be added to DFACs, but rather the Army Food Program employs common desserts from cakes to cookies, puddings to parfaits, each properly identified where they fit in the nutrition plan.

Currently, the Army Food Program has no plans to use or increase snacks in dining facilities. “Proper desserts are always available for choice,” he said.

The impact that the revised guidelines outlined in Go for Green will have on the availability of certain snacks on the menu will be felt “only in the total scope of Initial Military Training,” Byrd said. “This is where one will find that the program addressed that need for a nutrition posture in vending that is headed by AAFES.

“To date, AAFES has marketed the ‘Fit Pick’ program, which assists the diner in selecting proper snacks at vending. AAFES will provide full disclosure of the program.”

Snacks have a place in soldiers’ diets, but Byrd pointed out that service members should be well informed before making their choices.

“Snacks have always been a part of a diner’s regiment,” he noted. “Snacks can be useful if chosen properly, and diner education is being used to inform of the usefulness of smart snacking.”

PROVIDING WHOLESOME FUEL

Military suppliers of snacks are offering healthier choices for service members looking for an energizing, nourishing nosh, without sacrificing deliciousness.

Kraft Foodservice has a number of brands that fit...
well with the military’s snacking needs, including Oreo, Planters, Fig Newtons, Nutter Butter and Ritz Crackers.

Military Business Development Manager Joe Kruszewski noted that most of the snack items the military purchases are packaged as single-serve offerings.

Among the Kraft snacks that have been popular choices for the military in recent years are Planters Fruit & Nut Trail Mix, which has stood out as a great item because of its filling and better-for-you qualities, according to Kruszewski. The classic Oreo cookies continue to be well received by military consumers.

“The Oreo cookies brand is celebrating its 100th birthday this year and is desired by military consumers because of its delicious and nostalgic snack appeal,” he said.

In regard to healthier options, Kraft Foodservice has a number of better-for-you snack options, including Snackwell’s and Back-to-Nature items, as well as top brands such as Oreo and Lorna Doone, packed in sensible 100-calorie servings. Kraft Foodservice also offers a line of Planters nuts that include substantial protein-filled, better-for-you snack options.

Kruszewski explained that the request for better-for-you snack options is an increasing desire from the military and other customers.

“Military consumers are looking for snacks that provide wholesome fuel that energizes and nourishes,” he said. “That being said, there is still a desire for offerings that are delicious, rewarding and fun. Having a balance is the key to providing snacking satisfaction.”

Kraft Foodservice has launched two new snacks in recent months, Ritz Crackerfuls Classic Cheddar crackers and Wheat Thins Sundried Tomato & Basil crackers, in single-serve packages.

“These new products not only taste great, but also include many snacking attributes military consumers are looking for,” Kruszewski pointed out. “For example, Ritz Crackerfuls Classic Cheddar crackers are made with real whole grains and real cheddar cheese. It is filling enough to satisfy between-meal hunger. Wheat Thins Sundried Tomato & Basil crackers have a big bold flavor crunch and provide 17 grams of whole grain per serving.”

SNACKS ON THE GO

Kellogg’s Food Away From Home offers a variety of popular and healthy snack products to keep servicemen and women happy throughout the day.

Marianne Working, business manager at Kellogg Co., noted that Pop-Tarts Toaster Pastries are made with whole grains and are an “excellent” source of fiber. They are available in a wide assortment of flavors, such as strawberry and cinnamon.

Nutri-Grain Cereal Bars are a great option for breakfast on the go, she said. “Kellogg’s Nutri-Grain Cereal Bars are as nutritious as they are popular with at least eight vitamins and minerals, 8 grams of whole grain and 20 percent Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of calcium. The cereal bars are available in strawberry, blueberry and apple cinnamon.

Special K Protein Meal Bars promote a reduced feeling of hunger by an increased intake of protein and fiber in flavor varieties, including chocolatey chip, chocolate peanut butter, double chocolate, chocolate caramel and strawberry. Each bar offers 10 grams of protein, 5 grams of fiber and 4.5 grams to 6 grams of fat per serving for a nutritious meal option on the go.

Famous Amos Chocolate Chip Cookies have a homemade taste appeal that elevates the product as a preferred snack choice, Working said. Kashi TLC Granola Bars feature a variety of flavors, including trail mix, honey almond flax, peanut butter and cherry dark chocolate for a wholesome product at any time of day.

Cheez-It Baked Snack Crackers, available in cheddar and white cheddar, satisfy savory cravings with real cheese baked into each bite and have at least 4.5 grams of fat per serving. “They are popular across all dayparts,” she noted.

Kellogg’s grab-and-go snack options bring troops hometown snack favorites that help support a health-conscious lifestyle. The nutritious mix of on-the-go snack items provide a valuable source of energy between meals, help fuel daily workouts, may help prevent overeating at mealtime and are portable for on-the-go consumption.

Working said that the military is interested in purchasing products that can be transported to places throughout the world, and Kellogg Co. is committed to providing the right solution of products following shelf life and food safety guidelines.

“From garrison feeding to field combat rations, Kellogg is proud that its brands help to ensure health of the U.S. military,” she stated. “Kellogg’s Food Away From Home offers a satisfying mix of nutritious snacks for servicemen and women on the go, while staying within necessary budgets and complying with Initial Military Training (IMT) standards. Kellogg’s innovative product lineup offers a solution for military personnel who seek nutritious products they can eat on the go.”

PROVIDING HEALTHY OPTIONS

Sara Lee Foodservice individually wrapped muffins, Danish, cinnamon rolls and cakes are popular snack items in the military, Military Sales Manager Paul Simmons said.
He pointed out that these snack options “feature attractive, see-through and safety-sealed packaging and extended shelf life of up to 28 days to ensure fresh-baked flavor and minimum waste. These Individually wrapped snacks are available in convenient self-merchandisers for easy and attractive grab-and-go displays.”

The muffins, Danish and cakes come in display-ready cases that can hold 12 items. Muffins are available in Cookie Dough, Banana Nut, Blueberry, Cheese Streusel, Cinnamon Pecan Coffeecake and the Ultimate Cinnamon Roll. Danish varieties are Iced Cheese, Red Raspberry, Apple Orchard, Cheese and Cheese Pastry. Cake choices are the Large Pound Cake and Chocolate Chocolate Chip Cake.

In regard to healthy choices, Simmons explained that across most foodservice segments there has been an increase in demand for products made with whole grains, are lower in calories and come in smaller formats.

This summer, Sara Lee will introduce a Wholesome Indulgence muffin selection made with whole grains, 0 grams added trans fat and distinctive new tulip-paper wraps, Simmons said. The Wholesome Indulgence variety pack will feature 1.5-ounce muffins in Blueberry, Banana Nut and Apple Cranberry flavors.

**BETTER-FOR-YOU OPTIONS**

Granola bars, potato chips and pretzels are popular snack items that PepsiCo Foodservice provides for military consumption.

Tim Berchtold, PepsiCo national sales manager, military foodservice and vending sales, continental United States (CONUS), noted that the top five snack SKUs geared toward the military are: Quaker Chewy Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Low-Fat Granola Bars — 120 count/.84-ounce bars in a case; Lay’s Variety Pack Potato Chips — 132 count/1-ounce bags in a case; Lay’s Variety Pack Potato Chips — 60 count/1.9-ounce bags in a case; Quaker Chewy Variety Pack Low-Fat Granola Bars — 120 count/.84-ounce bars in a case; and Rold Gold Hard Twists Pretzels — 88 count/1-ounce bags in a case.

Three of the top five SKUs — the two varieties of Quaker Chewy Granola Bars and the Rold Gold Hard Twists Pretzels, carried in military foodservice operations are considered to be “healthy” or “better for you” snacks. PepsiCo employs a number of marketing techniques to get the word out on these healthy snack options.

“We market these products to the military, as we do to non-military customers, through print and media advertising, face-to-face sales calls and at trade shows,” Berchtold said.

In addition to the healthy aspect of snacks, service members are asking for better-tasting options as well. “The military, like consumers in the non-military population, is asking for more, better-tasting healthier snack food options to serve the servicemen and women eating in their dining facilities,” he said.

Later this year, PepsiCo will launch a new line of Frito-Lay All-Natural snacks for both the military and civilian markets, All-Natural Smartfood Selects. The All-Natural Smartfood Selects line of products will include Popcorn, Puffed Corn, Popped Chips and Granola Popcorn, Berchtold explained.

“PepsiCo would like to say ‘Thank You’ to all the men and women of the U.S. military,” he said. “We are proud to serve PepsiCo products to those who serve our country.”

**WHOLE-GRAIN CHOICES**

Granola bars continue to be popular, healthy snack choices in the military.

General Mills Foodservice offers its line of Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars that come in a variety of flavors, including Oats ’n Honey, Peanut Butter, Chewy Oatmeal Raisin, Chewy Chocolate Chip and Sweet ’n Salty Peanut.

Military Sales Manager Greg Peters noted that Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars are a healthy option for military personnel because they are reduced-fat items.
In addition, General Mills offers Fiber One Chewy Bars that contain at least 20 percent of the daily value of fiber per serving and are widely sold to the military, according to Peters. They are available in Oats & Chocolate; Oats & Peanut Butter; Oats & Caramel, Oats & Strawberry; Chocolate Mocha; 90 Calorie Chocolate; and 90 Calorie Chocolate Caramel & Pretzel.

General Mills offers more than 70 items that are made with whole grain. “In addition to all General Mills cereals, other products that are made with whole grain include Simply Chex, Cocoa Puffs and Trix Cereal bars, Apple Frudels, Pillsbury Mini Pancakes and biscuits,” he said.

General Mills recently introduced a new whole-grain snack called Betty Crocker Oatmeal Bars that come in two flavors, Chocolate Chip and Butterscotch. The bars are made with 100 percent whole grain and provide a nutritious and delicious snack, Peters said.

Another new item that General Mills has introduced to the military is Mini Waffles that are available in two flavors, Blueberry and Maple. The mini waffles are made from 100 percent whole grain, contain no high-fructose corn syrup and, according to Peters, are a “delicious” snack item for troops on the go with no time to sit down for breakfast.

MEXICAN SNACKS

For those service members seeking snacks with a Mexican flavor, Ruiz Foods carries two lines of frozen Mexican snack items — El Monterey and Tornados — that when heated, provide a healthy in-between-meal option.

Ruiz Foods Chairman Kim Ruiz Beck highlighted the top six snack items spanning both lines that are marketed to the military. Tornados features 10 different SKUs, with flavors including French Toast and Sausage; Cheesy Pepper Jack; Egg, Bacon and Cheese; and Southwestern-Style Chicken.

El Monterey Butcher Wrapped Burritos are available in four different SKUs: Egg, Sausage, Potato and Cheese; Egg, Bacon, Cheese and Salsa; Chicken and Cheese; and Shredded Beef and Cheese.

El Monterey Family Pack Burritos come in five different SKUs: Beef and Been Chimichangas; Beef and Bean Burrito; Bean and Cheese Burritos; Beef and Bean Green Chili Burritos; and Beef and Bean Red Chili Burritos.

The El Monterey Snack Bag line features four Taquito SKUs: Chicken and Cheese Flour Taquitos; Steak and Cheese Flour Taquitos; Southwest Chicken Battered Taquitos; and Taco Beef and Cheese Taquitos. In addition, the Snack Bag line offers two Tamale SKUs — Beef Tamales and Chicken Tamales — and two Mini Chimi SKUs: Chicken and Cheese; and Nacho Cheese and Beef.

Another El Monterey line, Supreme Burritos, is available in four different SKUs: Egg, Cheese and Bacon Breakfast Burrito; Chicken and Cheese Chimichanga; Beef and Cheese Monterey Supreme Chimichanga; and Egg, Cheese, Sausage Breakfast Burrito.

El Monterey XXL Burritos come in six different SKUs: Beef and Bean Burrito; Spicy Red Hot Burrito; Bean and Cheese Burrito; Beef and Bean Green Chili Burrito; Spicy Red Hot Chimichanga; and Beef and Bean Red Chili Burrito.

Among the “healthier” snack options that Ruiz Foods provides are the El Monterey HD (Hearty and Delicious) Burritos available in both breakfast — Huevo Rancheros, and Egg, Turkey Sausage and Cheese Burritos — and all-day flavors — Chicken with Fire Roasted Veggies Burritos, and Steak with Fire Roasted Veggies Burritos.

“As a matter of fact, these new El Monterey HD Burritos were developed specifically in response to a request from the military for a ‘healthier’ Mexican food option formulated to specifically meet their nutritional requirements,” Ruiz Beck explained. “We are hopeful they will be accepted for military use in the fourth quarter 2012.”

She added that the four 5-ounce varieties, offering “excellent” flavor, feature preferred nutritional, whole-grain tortillas, 15 to 17 grams of protein each and are high in fiber and low in calories with reduced sodium.

“In fact, when compared with our regular El Monterey Family Pack Burritos, El Monterey HD Burritos are, on average, 7.25 percent lower in total fat when compared with our El Monterey 5-ounce burritos; 11.25 percent lower in saturated fat when compared with our El Monterey 5-ounce burritos; 14 percent higher in dietary fiber when compared with our El Monterey Supreme Burritos; and 26 percent lower in sodium when compared with our El Monterey Supreme Burritos.”

—GFS