

Feeding the American Army in Normandy France

Stephen Betts, Aroma Consultancy (UK)

Stephen's hobby involves taking part in realistic WWII re-enactment adventures as an 82nd Airborne American Paratrooper with the Living History Association. In the early part of his working life Stephen trained as a chef and he explained how his culinary skills were called upon back in 2007 following a catering disaster at an overseas weekend re-enactment event. Due to poor food safety practices on the part of the catering corps, a platoon of 93 out of 95 men were struck down and incapacitated by a particularly nasty bout of food poisoning. The caterers had been responsible for an evening meal for the troops on the Saturday night. Believing it would be too big a task to prepare the food on site, they had prepared the meal – chilli con carne - on the previous Friday morning. However, despite one of the caterers having had years of experience in food preparation, they had failed to refrigerate the chilli and left it in the back of the lorry – throughout the July heat of Friday and Saturday. Stephen was suspicious when he saw his chilli was bubbling and had a distinct sour smell so declined to eat it. He raised his concerns with the cooks but they went unheeded – with unpleasant consequences for all! Unfortunately, the cooking process had failed to kill off the heat-resistant bacteria, despite boiling the pots.

After the event Stephen was invited to manage the catering contract to fulfil the September overseas programme and he outlined the logistics involved in order to provide two hot meals a day, every day for 9 consecutive days for 100 men and up to 120 in the evenings – with limited cooking facilities and a catering crew of only 7!

As a pyrotechnic, Stephen also stages realistic 'battlefield' explosions and described some of the tricks/techniques which are also used in films for dramatic effect.