



Defense Personnel Support Center — Subsistence

DLA supplies religious rations to military services

Jewish and Muslim troops who are in combat situations or performing readiness exercises now can dine on complete meals that are kosher- or halal-certified.

DPSC awarded My Own Meals Inc., Deerfield, Ill., a three-year contract worth up to \$5 million to produce both kosher and halal rations. Like other meals, ready-to-eat, these rations require no refrigeration and can be eaten with no further preparation. Prior to this contract, only religious entrees, not entire meals, were available. As with other MREs, the Army and Marine Corps will be the primary users.

"We jointly created the product with the government," explains Mary Anne Jackson, president of My Own Meals Inc., whose other customers include hospitals, prisons, commissaries and direct mail orders from the general public. She says her company will be shipping as few as 15,000 to as many as 200,000 meals per year for three years.

Each religious meal consists of an entree packed in a flexible pouch, a full assortment of complimentary items in a plastic accessory packet and a flameless ration heater that provides the option of heating the meal, says Chuck Grabowski, chief of assembled rations for the readiness commodity business unit at DPSC.

A typical box of 12 individual religious meals includes four chicken entrees, two beef entrees, four vegetari-

an entrees, two dairy entrees and 12 accessory packs. The accessory packets include bagel chips, raisins, honey roasted peanuts (almonds may be substituted), double granola bars, cereal of various flavors/varieties, sugar free cocoa, a cream packet, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, a flameless ration heater, a moist towelette, a spoon and toilet tissue.

A rabbi certifies that rations are kosher and an imam makes sure that the meat in the halal entrees has been slaughtered to meet Muslim specifications. All other food components of halal rations are acceptable to the Islamic religious authority.

Vegetarian rations, which are certified as multi-faith, also are available. The vegetarian entrees include cheese tortellini and pasta with vegetables.

All of the food items are commercially available, and like the MREs, include brand name items like General Mills, Carnation, Nestle, Blue Diamond, etc.

The kosher and halal meals are priced the same. My Own Meals Inc. will ship as little as one case, which contains 12 meals, or up to as many as needed. The unit price of an order depends on the order quantity and the delivery destination. The company ships upon receipt of the signed delivery order; delivery is about 14 days CONUS and 21 days overseas. Cancellations will not be accepted after 48 hours.

The shelf life of the meals is dictated by the accessory packs. While shelf life may be as long as 10 months, expect a

remaining shelf life of three months; these rations are not for contingency storage. If a longer shelf life is required, communicate this with the delivery order.

The religious meals are more expensive than regular MREs due to the religious certification of the food. Also, "the production runs are not as economical because we're buying substantially fewer (religious) pouches than regular MREs at one time," said Pete LaVerghetta, the DPSC contract specialist for the religious rations.

Orders that have already been filled range from 10 to 240 cases, including shipments to Ft. Polk, La.; Ft. Gordon, Ga.; and Germany. The company is making direct vendor deliveries, meaning that they will ship orders directly to a unit's location.

Jackson says My Own Meals Inc. is still determining the demand for the religious rations in Bosnia and other contingency areas. She says she hopes the military chaplains will spearhead the effort to let the troops know the rations are available, and will put interested personnel in touch with their contracting officer. Contracting officers can place orders with DPSC by calling Tom Carlin at DSN 444-7348 or commercial (215) 737-7348.

— by Tara Jennings-May, public affairs specialist, DLA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs