

# A Real Kosher Mess

The U.S. now says its OK for GIs to eat MREs marked with a K.

That's K for kosher.

For the first time, armed forces mess halls will be distributing kosher MREs, or meals ready to eat, to servicemen and women who request them.

The Virginia-based Defense Logistics Agency, together with the Jewish Welfare Board's Chaplains Council, is spreading the word that joining the military need not be at the expense of a kosher diet. Following a long campaign by the Jewish chaplains, the government has entered into a three-year, \$5 million contract with My Own Meals Inc., of Deerfield, Ill., to provide up to 200,000 meals, packaged under the supervision of Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik of Chicago. The meals became available last July.

Previously, JWB has sent cases of kosher food at its own expense to be distributed by Jewish chaplains.

"It's a wonderful thing for the armed forces to be cognizant of the needs concerning kashrut," says Rabbi

David Lapp, director of the chaplains council.

A box of 12 individual meals includes four chicken entrees, two beef and four vegetarian as well as accessory packs with bagel chips, raisins, granola bars and other kosher goodies.

Rabbi Lapp pointed out that the pareve meals would be available to Muslims and Seventh Day Adventists, who also have dietary restrictions.

Mary Anne Jackson, president of My Own Meals, Inc., which also services hospitals and prisons, said she began processing the meals during the 1991 Gulf War, when hundreds of kosher-observant reservists, medical personnel and civilian technicians went overseas.

"Nobody else was willing to go the extra length," says Jackson, who lobbied to continue the temporary contract after the war ended. "We spent the next five years working with [the government] trying



**Rabbi David Lapp: Praises military action on kashrut.**

to tell them what it meant to develop kosher meals. Every time they said it wasn't necessary, we produced documents [from servicemen] showing that it was."

Jackson happens to be a cousin of Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, but she said he did not influence the contract.

"Did I write to him? Yes. But I wrote to every member of the Committee." Jackson said her congressman, John Porter (R-Ill.), had "demanded an investigation" into kosher food provision.

Rabbi Lapp said he had no estimate of the number of kashrut observant personnel in the armed forces, but predicted that demand among the non-observant would increase as word of availability spreads.

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