Food Air Force

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(Posted in numerous newslists and the White House Suggestion Web Site)

This is a simple idea for air dropping food to starving groups of people in places where no typical landing or drop zone is available or mobility is restricted because the area is under fire. The method might also be useful for supplying downed pilots without giving away a specific position or forcing the drop plane to come under close range fire. The method is also useful for obtaining a fairly uniform distribution of the food and thus avoiding complete domination of the supply by the strong at the expense of the weak.

The idea is to adapt some existing military Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) packaging techniques and recipes to use in small packages similar in size to ketchup, mayonnaise, or hot sauce squeeze packets. Such squeeze packets are typically 1.5 inches by 3 inches and about .25 inches thick. Clearly, lesser food technology than that for MRE's could be used as well. The important thing is to be able to air drop food accurately, cheaply, and uniformly over a designated area. Therefore, the use of a small enough packet to avoid the cost of parachutes, etc., is the key principle of this idea.

This idea has the following advantages:

1. The ratio of packing materials to food is reasonable, for both weight and cost.

2. No additional weight or expense is required for chutes, ruggedized pallets, etc., for dropping the small packets. The packets can be dropped as-is due to their terminal velocity being slow due to their small size. They can survive at a high rate in most conditions.

3. The likelihood of injury to people in the drop area is small provided they don't look up and get hit in the eye by a falling packet. Even then the risk of permanent injury is small, unlike the risk of being hit by a one ton pallet, or being trampled in a mad rush to a food container.

4. The food can be distributed over a wide area, like a city, or along a travel route. The wide area uniform distribution and subsequent wide area scavenging gives a more fair opportunity for everyone in the drop zone to obtain food. The uniform distribution also reduces the chances that the entire drop will be lost due to falling into an inaccessible or under fire area or by being damaged in the drop.

5. The packets will not tend to be caught in trees, as they would with shroud lines, but rather fall through to the ground.

6. A diverse range and mix of foods, vitamins, medicines, bandages, re-hydration fluids and electrolytes, baby food, etc. can be distributed

simultaneously in a single drop.

7. The drop can occur from high altitudes or low altitudes.

8. Such drops could be made by pilotless planes using GPS locating, or by remotely piloted aircraft.

9. Errors due to wind drift will be less than that for parachuted material due to the faster rate of fall.

10. The food would not require cooking or decontamination equipment.

11. The food would be useful for storage and for travel and would be in a convenient size for barter and rationing.

12. Packets can be made to float so they are not lost in swamps, streams, etc.

13. Packet visibility can be increased through use of fluorescent paint, aluminization, etc. It is not the packets lost to the enemy that is important, but the packets reaching the needy.

14. Packets can be attached in strings to increase the likelihood of finding a good mix.

The suggested technology might also be of use in supplying troops under fire. Having this technology available could have helped much in supplying civilians in the war torn areas of Ethiopia, where relief trucks were regularly hijacked or destroyed. It could have similarly saved lives in Chad, Somalia, the Balkans, Rawanda, and could even at this moment be used in Zaire.

I don't know who might actually attempt to use such an idea. If you do, please send this document to them or let me know how to contact them by emailing me at hheffner@anc.ak.net [now hheffner@mtaonlin.net]. Thanks for your consideration.