

# Sweets in wartime Britain

From the sweeties.net wiki

Twice in the 20th century, war came between the British and their sweets. Sugar was controlled, factories were given other work, and some well known sweets changed or disappeared for a while. For the details of the ration itself, see [sweet rationing in Britain](#)

## The First World War

In 1917, as German submarines tried to starve Britain into submission, voluntary rationing began, and compulsory rationing followed in stages. Ration books arrived in July 1918, covering butter, margarine, lard, meat and sugar.

Sweet makers felt the war in other ways. Mackintosh's of Halifax had its German factory confiscated, and in 1917 all its chocolate production stopped when a wartime conscription tribunal refused to exempt a key manager: see [John Mackintosh, the toffee king of Halifax](#)

When the war ended, Bassett's of Sheffield were making the jelly figures that became Jelly Babies, and they sold them as Peace Babies to mark the end of the war: see [what were Jelly Babies originally called?](#)

## The Second World War

Sugar was rationed from 8 January 1940, and sweets and chocolate followed on 26 July 1942. The Woolworths Museum records that by Christmas 1939 stocks were already low, as many factories had been requisitioned for war work, and that news of sweet rationing in 1942 brought long queues. With little to sell, Woolworths offered tinned fruit, tuna and salmon from its sweets department, and tinned peaches and cream as an alternative to pick and mix: see [Woolworths pick and mix, the story](#)

### Factories at war

- **Cadbury.** Parts of the Bournville factory were turned over to war work, making milling machines and seats for fighter aircraft.
- **Terry's.** The York factory was taken over by F. Hills and Sons of Manchester as a shadow factory, making and repairing aircraft propeller blades. Some confectionery carried on for other firms: jellies for Chivers and Sons, chocolate for Charbonnel et Walker, and chocolate for troop and lifeboat rations.
- **Swizzels.** The Blitz forced the London firm north in 1940, to a disused wick factory in New Mills, Derbyshire, where it still is.

### Sweets that changed or vanished

- **Kit Kat.** In the 1940s, wartime and post war shortages meant the bar was made with dark chocolate instead of milk, in a blue wrapper instead of red. After the war it returned to milk chocolate and red, and took the plain name Kit Kat.
- **Jelly Babies.** Production was suspended during the war because of shortages, and the sweets were relaunched as Jelly Babies in 1953.
- **Polo.** Rowntree's developed Polo in 1939, but its launch was delayed by the war. During the war, Rowntree's made Life Savers under licence, and Polo followed when that licence ran out, arriving in 1948: see [Polo mints](#)

## Chocolate for the forces

British bomber crews in RAF Bomber Command were regularly issued with Fry's Chocolate Cream before missions: see [Fry's Chocolate Cream](#). In the United States, M&M's were sold only to the military during the war, as a chocolate soldiers could carry in hot climates without it melting.

## After the war

Peace did not end rationing. Sweets stayed on the ration, apart from a few months in 1949, until February 1953: see [sweets in the 1950s](#)

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