

The Story Behind
by Rob Swanson

It is the best selling meat of all time.

Over 12 BILLION pounds are sold each year in the U.S. alone. The average family makes a meal of it at least three times a week, either dining in or out.

Chefs revile it, but while the taste may or may not be a selling factor, its versatility is only overcome by its convenience. The Chic-Fil-A cows are right to be concerned because ground beef – common hamburger – outsells chicken 10 to 1. While chicken is slowly gaining due to mistaken health beliefs, not even the e-coli scare could put more than a dent in hamburger sales.

One might think this ubiquitous beef creation sprang from the city of Hamburg, Germany. To be accurate, even the most famous of ground beef's incarnations didn't come out of Germany, but, if apocrypha can be believed, the Hamburger came from the heartland at the 1904 World's Fair. That makes the most famous sandwich in the world barely a centenarian. *Ground Beef* on the other hand, is over 800 years old.

Don't say Genghis Kahn never did anything for you. It was his Mongol hordes credited with the meat of the future, because, appropriately enough, they needed a *convenient* protein source.

The Golden Hordes, as Kahn's horseman were called, rode for hours and hours. Being warriors, of course, they would often get into battle at the end of the ride, having no time to stop at a handy fast-food iron kettle for lunch or dinner. Genghis Kahn had noticed his warriors fought better on protein-filled stomachs, so a steak was both the answer and a problem. Untying saddle bags were prohibitive while engaged in a mounted sword fight, and ripping off hunks of steak could be distracting.

The answer was, of course, ground beef. Handfuls of the stuff could be easily slammed into the warrior's mouth even while fighting. Except stopping to ground steak into beef was also prohibitive, and so was the storage problem.

One innovative solution solved both problems.

The warrior would take his slab of steak and slip it onto his horse's back under his saddle. Mile upon mile of riding adequately ground the steak into hamburger, and retrieval was simply a matter of reaching behind and under the saddle; an already practiced move, since Mongols strapped an extra sword in that very area. The hamburger was eaten, shall we say, *tar tar*, but, I'm sure, warmed by the heat of the animal and the friction of the grinding.

McDonald's anyone?