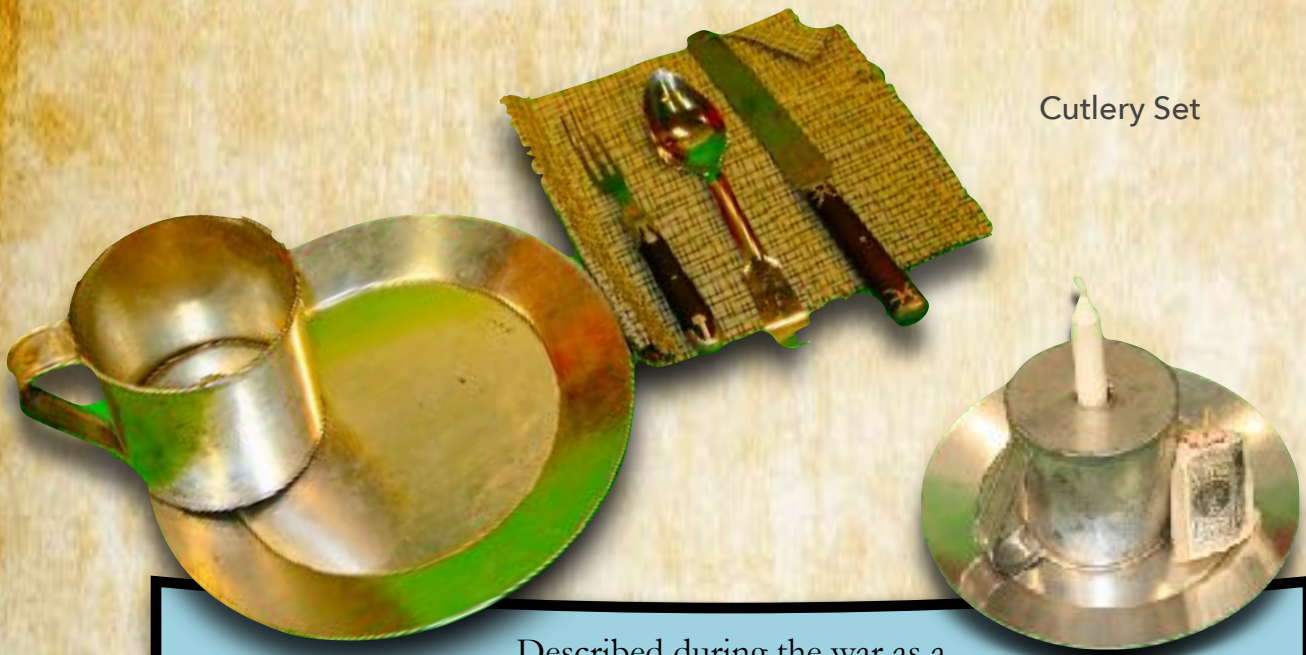


# THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY CIVIL WAR TRAIL

Sam Watkins, who enlisted as a private in the 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee regiment, wrote that the common soldier of the Civil War was the one who did the shooting and killing, the fortifying and ditching, the sweeping of the streets, the drilling, the standing guard, picket, and vedette, and who drew (or was to draw) eleven dollars per month and rations, and also drew the ramrod and tore the cartridge..." The majority of those who fought, and who felt deeply for their part in the struggle, were average citizens: farmers, and store owners, laborers and schoolteachers. While the daily schedule varied for each regiment, the men were typically awoken by the bugle blaring reveille; by six each morning, sleepy soldiers were lined up and roll call was taken to ensure that no one had deserted during the night. Per army regulations, the minimum age for enlistment was eighteen, and recruits under the age of 21 needed the consent of a parent. However, many teenage boys lied about their age to circumvent this requirement. Likewise, according to regulations, men over forty-five could not enlist, yet the rosters of many regiments show dozens of soldiers above this age.



Cutlery Set

Described during the war as a "boiler" or "dipper," this versatile piece of equipment was often strapped to the haversack so a soldier could easily grab it to brew his coffee or tea; boil a stew with beef, potatoes, and crushed hardtack; or, if they were in camp, cook baked beans flavored with salt pork. Made of tin-plated sheet iron, these cups quickly turned black over the fire. Sometimes a wire bail was attached to the cup so that it could be hung above campfires. Aside from the tin cup, eating utensils were usually limited to a tin plate, spoon, and pocketknife. The lightweight tin plate was also used to mix a dough of cornmeal or flour, or as a frying pan.

**Army Hardtack Recipe**  
Ingredients:  
• 4 cups flour (preferably whole wheat)  
• 4 teaspoons salt  
• Water (about 2 cups)  
Preheat oven to 375. Mix the flour and salt together in a bowl. Add just enough water (less than two cups) so that the mixture will stick together, producing a dough that won't stick to hands, rolling pin or pan.  
Mix the dough by hand. Roll the dough out, shaping it roughly into a rectangle.  
Cut into the dough into squares about 3 x 3 inches and 1/2 inch thick.  
After cutting the squares, press a pattern of four rows of four holes into each square, using a nail or other such object. Do not punch through the dough. The appearance you want is similar to that of a modern saltine cracker.  
Turn each square over and do the same thing to the other side.  
Place the squares on an ungreased cookie sheet in the oven and bake for 30 minutes. Turn each piece over and bake for another 30 minutes. The crackers should be slightly brown on both sides. Makes about 10 pieces.

Hardtack

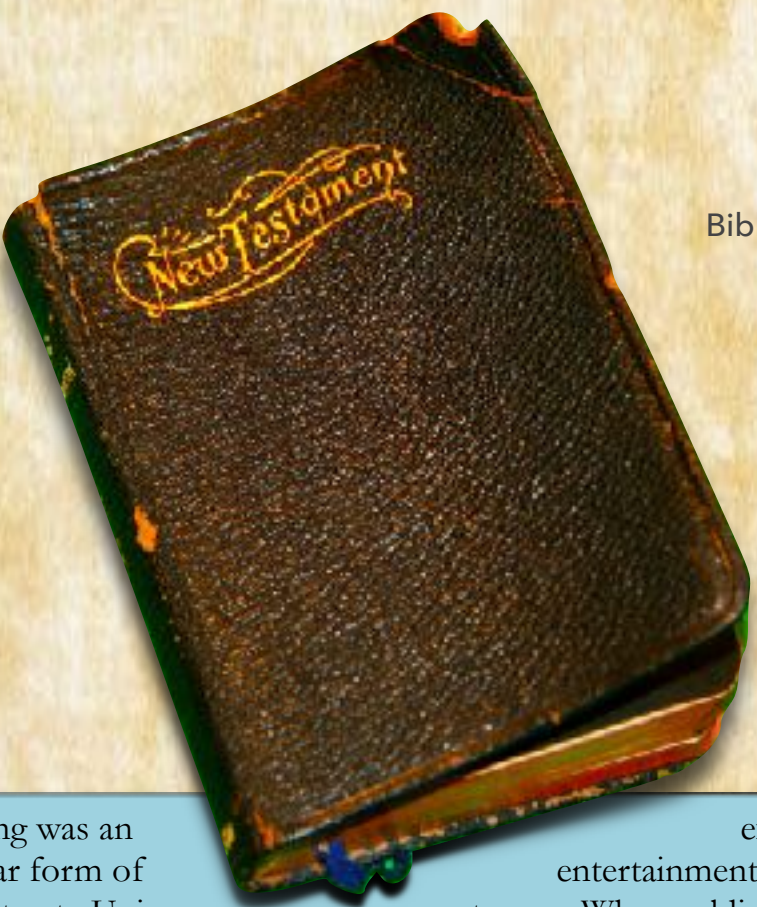


This legendary cracker, consisting of flour, water, and salt, was the main staple of the soldier's diet because, if kept dry, it could be preserved almost indefinitely. Before a campaign, troops were typically issued three day's worth of rations, including thirty pieces of hardtack that they somehow crammed into their haversacks. They were sometimes jokingly referred to as "tooth dullers" or "sheet iron." The preferred way to prepare them was to soften them in water then fry them in bacon grease, but on the march, soldiers ate them "raw" with a piece of salt pork, bacon, or some sugar.

Texas Confederate \$5 Bill & Confederacy State Bills



Although 1861 attempts at minting Confederate coins, for lack of metal, paper currency from Richmond became the standard early in the war. However, these paper bills were promissory notes guaranteeing payment "six months after the ratification of a treaty of peace with the United States of America." As the odds of victory waned and the value of the Confederate bills plummeted, many southerners preferred to place their faith in U.S. coins. A soldier's wage was only \$11 per month; less than half the average salary before the war. Pictured above is a \$5 Confederate Texas bill.



Bible

Reading was an extremely popular form of entertainment among the highly literate Union troops. When soldiers weren't studying one of the numerous infantry manuals published by high-ranking officers, they spent countless hours reading local and national newspapers. Harper's Weekly was richly illustrated with sketches from the front lines by talented artists such as Winslow Homer and Alfred Waud. Pocket books such as Beadle's Dime Novels, Bibles and religious publications were also popular. The Soldier's Prayer Book, specifically addressed the spiritual welfare of those who faced the terrifying prospect of combat and death on the battlefield.



Playing Cards

"In between our stated duties, we had some time in which we could amuse ourselves as we chose, and we had many means of entertainment. We had a chessboard, a set of quoits, dominos, and cards; and there was the highly intellectual game of push pin open to all corners." Soldiers spent much more time in camp than in combat. The U.S. Army Regulations of 1861 stipulated that any officer who disbursed pay and who was discovered to "bet at cards or any game of hazard" had to be suspended from duty and turn over all the public funds in his possession. The rule was seldom enforced and even officers took part in the games. It was one of the very few ways to pass time and relieve tension.



Housewife (Sewing Kit)

Soldiers had to mend their clothing to make it last, since new uniforms were only issued a few times a year at best. The makeshift kit shown here includes thread, a few sewing needles, and scissors and patches saved from discarded clothing.



Toiletry Set

The U.S. Army Regulation of 1861 stated that, where convenient, soldiers should bathe once or twice a week, but in the field, soldiers were a grimy group, splattered with blood, dirt, and gunpowder. When given the opportunity, they boiled their uniforms and bathed in rivers near camps. Many men carried small "ditty" bags in the knapsack containing soap, combs, toothbrushes, mirrors, tooth powder, and foot powder as pictured on the left.



Fire Starter Kit

Soldiers used steel charcoal and a magnifying glass to start fires to cook food or for other necessities during camp. A properly treated steel should give off thousands of sparks, if not millions, before being lost.



Jew's Harp

The army knew that soldiers needed a diversion or they would turn to drink or fisticuffs, or both. Music was an important part of soldiers' lives, whether it be singing on the march or by the campfires at night. The army issued to every regular soldier (not volunteer units) either a harmonica, a Jew's harp (jaw harp) or a tin whistle to make what passed for music and entertainment. As the war progressed, the government did not have money to continue this practice so many soldiers purchased the instruments from sutlers. Hundreds of harmonica and jaw harp fragments have been found at camp and battle sites, indicating their popularity.

## Voices of the Civil War

"It has rained for a week and the roads are muddy. After marching for twenty miles it is not pleasant to lie down at night in the wet without any cover. I am tired—in fact I never was so tired in my life. But Hurrah! 'It is all for the Union.'"

—Elisha Hunt Rhodes (Union),  
Second Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry

"Instead of growling and deserting, they laughed at their own bare feet [and] ragged clothes.... Weak, hungry, cold, wet, worried with vermin and itch, dirty, with no hope of reward or rest, [they] marched cheerfully to meet the well fed and warmly clad hosts of the enemy."

—Carlton McCarthy (Confederacy),  
Army of Northern Virginia

"I wish you could take a peep at us tonight in our snug, cosy quarters... about half are writing, some reading, and some building castles to live in when the war is over. We are a merry set of fellows having all the necessities of life and some of its luxuries. Now sir, I have yet to see the first soldier who does not get everything he needs in the way of rations or clothing."

—Anonymous (Union)  
5th New Hampshire Regiment

Sunday Sept. 21, 1862

Dear Folks,

On the 8th we struck up the refrain of "Maryland, My Maryland!" and camped in an apple orchard. We went hungry, for six days not a morsel of bread or meat had gone in our stomachs - and our menu consisted of apple; and corn. We toasted, we burned, we stewed, we boiled, we roasted these two together, and singly, until there was not a man whose form had not caved in, and who had not a bad attack of diarrhea. Our under-clothes were foul and hanging in strips, our socks worn out, and half of the men were bare-footed, many were lame and were sent to the rear; others, of sterner stuff, hobbled along and managed to keep up, while gangs from every company went off in the surrounding country looking for food. . . Many became ill from exposure and starvation, and were left on the road. The ambulances were full, and the whole route was marked with a sick, lame, limping lot, that straggled to the farmhouses that lined the way, and who, in all cases, succored and cared for them. . .

—Alexander Hunter (Union)

"Ate my whole's day ration at one meal. Slim, very slim. But half loaf is better than no bread."

—Berry Benson, (Confederacy)  
Georgia



Once ground was chosen for an army corps, a vast perimeter was ringed with fortified outposts and pickets guarding nearby roads and hills. Squads of 5 to 10 men worked together to build shelters. The usual structure was little more than a lean-to known as a Merrimac in which two heavy forks of trees were posted in the group, and across the forks was laid a stout horizontal pole. Leaning against this pole were set other poles or fence rails, the lower ends resting on the ground. The roof thus formed was covered first with leaves, then with dirt on top of the leaves. Beds were made by stuffing hay between two logs covered with an oil cloth.