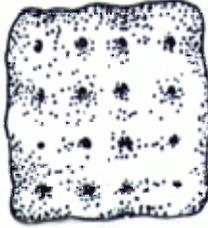


What Is Hardtack?



Hardtack is a cracker-like biscuit made of flour, salt, and water and was one of the most typical rations issued to soldiers by the U. S. government because it was fairly nutritious and unlikely to spoil. This hard bread was made in government bakeries located in cities and shipped in barrels to the troops. Hardtack had to be tough to withstand the trip. Many Civil War soldiers complained about this ration, noting the extreme hardness of the biscuits (sometimes called "teeth-dullers"), which at times had to be broken with a rifle "butt" or a "blow of the fist" to prepare for eating. Soldiers sometimes softened the pieces by soaking them in coffee, frying them in bacon grease, or crumbling them in soup.

Hardtack could become infested with insects in the government storehouses or during the soldier's travels. One disappointed soldier claimed that "All the fresh meat we had came in the hard bread!"

Courtesy of the Office of Historic Alexandria.

The basic ingredients are: flour, salt, and water (although quantity differs). General directions are also similar: Dissolve salt in water and work into flour with your hands. Dough should be firm and pliable, but not sticky or too dry. Flatten onto a cookie sheet to about 1/4 inch thick, and cut into squares 3 inches by 3 inches. Pierce each square with 16 holes about 1/2 inches apart. Bake in oven until edges are brown or dough is hard.

- Preheat oven to 400° F
- For each cup of flour add 1 tsp. of salt
- Mix salt and flour with just enough water to bind.
- Bake 20-25 minutes.
- The longer you bake the hardtack, the more authentic it will appear.

Soup Meat

To make the soup very good, the meat (of which there should be a large proportion, rather more than a pound to a quart of water) must remain in until it drops entirely from the bones and is boiled to rags. But none of these fragments and shreds should be found in the tureen when the soup is sent to table; they should all be kept at the bottom of the pot, pressing down the ladle hard upon them when you are dipping out the soup. If any are seen in the soup after it is taken up, let them be carefully removed with a spoon. To send the soup to table with bits of bone and shreds of meat in it is a slovenly, disgusting, and vulgar practice, and should be strictly forbidden, as some indifferent cooks will do so to save themselves the trouble of removing it. A mass of shreds left at the bottom of the

tureen absorbs so much of the liquid as to diminish the quantity of the soup; and if eaten, is very unwholesome, all the nourishment being boiled out of it.