



Cooking Up Some

**AMERICAN**

★ **HISTORY** ★

**Civil War  
Recipes**



# Soldiers' Mess: The Civil War

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Union and Confederate soldiers of the Civil War faced a common enemy: hunger. Although many officers dined well on food prepared for them, common soldiers had to cook their own meals from what limited rations were provided.

Mostly, soldiers were provided with flour or cornmeal, salt beef, salt pork, beans or peas, and dried fruit. Union soldiers were also issued biscuits called hardtack. These foods were chosen because they would not spoil, and so could be shipped to and carried with armies on the march.

To liven up their monotonous diets, soldiers would hunt and gather wild plants when they could. Foraging food from private homes and farms was rampant in both armies. Union soldiers could also purchase treats liked canned fruit or sugar from civilian-run shops at camps. These shopkeepers were called “sutlers.”

Letters written home by both Union and Confederate soldiers often mention food—and how the soldier missed a nice home-cooked meal!

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# Hardtack

## Watch Out for Your Teeth!

Like the Firecake of the Revolutionary War, both the North and the South provided the soldiers with a food that was filling if not tasty. Hardtack became a joke with the Union (Northern) troops, who called the biscuits “tooth dullers” and “sheet iron crackers”.

**Classroom Connection** Hardtack had some nicknames because of how hard it is. Write a short story about how Hardtack could have gotten one of these nicknames. *[Answers will vary. Encourage student creativity.]*

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### Hardtack

- 2 cups of flour
- ½ to ¾ cup water
- 1 tablespoon vegetable shortening or vegetable fat
- 6 pinches of salt

Mix all the ingredient together into a stiff batter. Knead several times and roll the dough out flat to ½ inch thickness on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake for ½ hour at 400 degrees. Remove from the oven, cut dough into 3 inch squares, and punch 4 rows of holes, 4 holes per row into each square. Flip the dough over, return to oven and bake another ½ hour. Turn oven off and keep door closed. Leave dough in oven until cool.

