

Hard Crackers Come No More

Written by [John Wedeward](#)

The following uses of hardtack were taken from Recollections of a Drummer -Boy by Harry Kiefer. He served with the 150th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers.

The innocent-looking cracker is about the size and has the general appearance of an ordinary soda biscuit, though you will find it somewhat heavier. If you could reduce it to a fine powder, you would find that it would absorb considerably more water than equal weight of flour: showing that in the making of hardtack the chief object in view is to stow away away the greatest amount of nourishment in the smallest amount of space.

Our hardtack was very hard; you could scarcely break it with your teeth - some you could not fracture with your fist. Still, there' was an immense amount of nourishment stowed away in them, as we soon discovered once we had learned the secret of getting at it. It required some experience and no little hunger to enable one to appreciate hardtack, and it demanded no small amount of inventive power to understand how to cook hardtack as they ought to be cooked. Our section of the army had not less than fifteen different ways of preparing them.

On the march they were usually not cooked at all, but eaten in the raw state. In order, however, to make them somewhat palatable, a thin slice of nice fat pork was cut down and laid on the cracker, and a spoonful of good brown sugar put on top of the pork, and you had a dish fit for a soldier. When we were halted for coffee, we sometimes had fricasseed hardtack - prepared by toasting them before the hot coals, thus making them soft and spongy. If there was time for frying, we either dropped them into the fat in a dry state and did them brown to a turn, or soaked them in cold water and fried them, or pounded them into a powder, mixed this with boiled rice or wheat flour and made griddlecakes and honey - minus the honey. When, as was generally the case on the march, our hardtack had been broken into small pieces in our haversacks, we soaked these in water and fried them in pork fat, stirring well and seasoning with salt and sutler's pepper, thus making what was commonly known as "hishy-hashy", or a hot fried stew. But the great triumph of the culinary art in camp was a hardtack pudding. This was made by placing the biscuit in a stout canvas bag, and pounding bag and contents with a club and a log, until the hardtack was reduced to a fine powder. Then you added a little wheat flour, the more the better, and made a stiff dough, which was rolled over on a cracker box lid, like a pie crust. Then you covered this all over with a preparation of stewed dried apples, dropping in here and there a raisin or two. The whole was then nailed all over together, wrapped in a cloth, boiled for an hour or so, and eaten with wine sauce. The wine was, however, usually omitted, and hunger inserted instead.

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