

# Ship's Biscuit

Ship's biscuit was a hard piece of bread that *Constitution's* sailors ate at nearly every meal. The biscuit was baked on land, stored on board the ship, and then sent out to sea with the sailors. Sailors soaked the rock-hard biscuit in their stew to soften it before taking a bite. If you bake a ship's biscuit and would like to taste it, make sure you follow the sailors' example and soak it in water or stew before eating!

## Ingredients

2 cups stone ground whole wheat flour	wooden mallet or rolling pin
½ teaspoon salt	greased baking sheet
½ cup water	lightly floured work surface

## Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit
2. Combine flour and salt on work surface.
3. Add the water.
4. Beat with mallet or rolling pin until ½ inch thick.
5. Fold and repeat several times.
6. Cut the dough into cookie-sized pieces.
7. Place on baking sheet and cook for 30 minutes.

**Serves 5, at 5-inch round biscuits.**



## \* History Note

William Burney, in *A New Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (London, T. Cadell & W. Davies: 1815), gives the best description of the process of making ship's biscuit:

The process of biscuit-making for the navy is simple and ingenious, and is nearly as follows. A large lump of dough, consisting merely of flower and water, is mixed up together, and placed exactly in the centre of a raised platform, where a man sits upon a machine, called a horse, and literally rides up and down throughout its whole circular direction, till the dough is equally indented, and this is repeated till the dough is sufficiently kneaded. In this state it is handed over to a second workman, who, with a large knife, puts it in a proper state for the use of those bakers who more immediately attend the oven. They are five in number; and their different departments are well calculated for expedition and exactness. The first man on the farthest side of a large table moulds the dough, till it has the appearance of muffins, and which he does two together, with each hand; and then delivers them over to the man on the other side of the table, who stamps them on both sides with a mark, and throws them on a smaller table, where stands the third workman, whose business is merely to separate the different pieces into two, and place them under the hand of him who supplies the oven, whose work of throwing or

chucking the biscuits on the peel must be performed with the greatest exactness and regularity. The fifth arranges them in the oven, and is so expert, that though the different biscuits are thrown to him at the rate of seventy in a minute, the peel is always disengaged in time to receive them separately. So much critical exactness and neat activity occur in the exercise of this labour, that it is difficult to decide whether the palm of excellence is due to the moulder, the maker, the splitter, the chucker, or the depositor; all of them, like the wheels of a machine, seeming to be actuated by the same principle. The business is to deposit in the oven seventy biscuits in a minute; and this is accomplished with the regularity of a clock; the clack of the peel, during its motion in the oven, operating like the pendulum. The biscuits thus baked are kept in repositories, which receive warmth from being placed in drying lofts over the ovens, till they are sufficiently dry to be packed into bags, without danger of getting mouldy; and when in such a state, they are then packed into bags, of an hundred weight each, and removed into store-house for immediate use. At Deptford the bake-house belonging to the victualling-office has twelve ovens; each of which bakes twenty shoots daily; the quantity of flour used for each shoot is two bushels, or 112 pounds; which baked, produce 102 pounds of biscuit. Ten pounds are regularly allowed on each shoot for shrinkage, &c. The allowance of biscuit in the navy is, one pound for each man per day; so that, at Deptford alone, they can furnish bread, daily, for 24,480 men, independent of Portsmouth and Plymouth.