

Poilu Recipes

by John Bracken

151 RLI

Soldiers in the French army, like any other, had to make due with only rudimentary ingredients and cooking arrangements. Nonetheless, they struggled to make their meals as appetizing as possible, occasionally using great inventiveness in their preparation. Soup or ragout constituted the foundation of any meal in the French army, both in the rear and at the front. Generally, it was comprised of a meat base (beef or pork) with vegetables. Beans and rice were the most commonly employed vegetables, though potatoes, onions, lentils and split peas were also used. If there were any spices added to the soup, salt and pepper were normally the only ones on hand. After all, this was army soup not haute cuisine. Again though, if more options were available, the soldiers were sure to make use of them. Some examples of more specialized recipes are posted below:

Rata:

Rata is short for *ratatouille*, which is simply a term for the common French ragout. Like the word *soupe*, it has come to be synonymous with the word "grub."

1. Fill a large stew-pot with water and mix in whatever vegetables are available (potatoes, carrots, rice, navy beans) and whatever meat is available (pork, beef, "monkey" [canned corned beef]).
2. Let it simmer for several hours, stirring occasionally. If desired, red wine, chocolate, and salt and pepper can be added.

Salt-Pork Soup or Ragout

Here is a way to accommodate salt pork in the soup or in the ragout as done by the 118th Territorials, and approved by Lieutenant-Colonel Nanta.

Soup:

1. Desalinate the meat in water.
2. Scrub strongly before cooking.
3. Put the meat in cold water over a fire.
4. Let sit for 50 minutes, 30 minutes of which it is boiling.
5. Remove the meat and throw out the water.
6. Next, fill stew-pot with cold water and add the meat. Add vegetables to make a pot-au-feu.
7. Cook for approximately two hours. Do not salt.

Ragout:

1. to 6. Same as above.
7. Having put the meat in the second batch of cold water, add vegetables (such as beans or lentils or split-peas) and necessary spices (thyme, laurel, onion, etc.).
8. Cook for approximately two hours. Do not salt.

Article: **Poilu Recipes**

An article downloaded from the Great War Association's website at:

www.great-war.org

1 of 3 Updated: 3/30/2010

Beef à la Mode

This recipe is meant to feed roughly ten men. It was originally published during the war in a newspaper under the heading "Trooper Cuisine"

1. Cut four or five large onions into quarters and cut some carrots into thin slices. If possible, get some bay leaves, a small bunch of thyme and two garlic cloves.
2. Cut up the beef into chunks.
3. In a camp mess-tin [*plat-à-quatre*], heat some lard (200 gm or 7 oz) [one can even utilize the fat skimmed off the soup the day before]. When the lard is sizzling, toss in the beef, onions, carrots, garlic, thyme and bay leaves.
4. Let these cook until browned (15 mins), stirring around with a spoon.
5. At this time, sprinkle with flour (approx. 150 gm or 2/3 cup).
6. Mix well and roast this for five minutes, stirring occasionally to avoid clumping.
7. Pour in water to make a sauce (two or three liters), enough to cover up the meat and vegetables.
8. Add two spoonfuls of salt, cooking over a moderate but sustained fire, stirring occasionally, and bring to a boil.
9. Let the soup cook for an indefinite amount of time (i.e. to taste).

English Beef Ragout

This recipe requires roughly 4.5 lbs of beef. It was originally published during the war in a newspaper under the heading "Trooper Cuisine"

1. Cut two or three large onions into thin slices and, if possible, some carrots or turnips.
2. Cut up the beef into chunks. Place into a camp mess-tin [*plat-à-quatre*] and cover over the meat and vegetables with water.
3. Add a standard spoonful of salt and bring to a boil.
4. Allow the soup to boil for an hour.
5. During this time, peel some potatoes and cut into quarters or eighths, depending on their size.
6. Add the potatoes, adding more water if necessary to ensure the ingredients remain covered up.
7. Taste, adding salt and pepper if needed and allow to boil on a moderate fire for 30 mins.

Note: If time is short, the meat can be dressed in the following way: Cut into thin pieces, beating it with an instrument (e.g. the back of a hatchet or the flat face of a spade-shovel), season (with salt and pepper) and quickly saute it in lard.

Sweet Fried Hardtack:

Here is an example of how to serve a more delectable version of hardtack, as prepared by the "cook," Louis Martin.

1. Soak the hardtack in water (or in condensed milk) thoroughly so that they swell up.
2. Remove them carefully so as not to break them.
3. Drain the hardtack biscuits completely.
4. Next, deep-fry them in grease, making sure that they're completely bathed.
5. Remove the biscuits, sprinkle them with sugar and rum, kirsch (cherry brandy) or Madeira (similar to port or sherry). Serve warm.