

Everyday speech from sailors of yesterday

Navy Blue Dark blue has not always been called “navy blue.” The phrase was first used when the British Royal Navy adopted the color for its new uniforms in 1748. Several British naval officers were requesting the Admiralty to adopt new uniforms for officers. (Regular seamen didn’t wear a standard uniform until 1857. Even then, they had to supply or make their own; it wasn’t until after 1900 that the navy supplied its sailors with uniforms.) When the first sea lord had narrowed it down to a few choices, he then went to the king to make the final decision. King George II had trouble deciding, but he eventually picked a blue uniform with white trim because they were the favorite colors of the first lord’s wife, Duchess of Bedford. The style of the US Navy’s uniforms followed British traditions.



Aloof Today, we use the word “aloof” to describe a person who stands apart from what is happening or from other people, often because he/she feels superior or disapproving. The word, however, comes from the Dutch word “loef,” which means “windward.” English sailors began using the term in the 16th and 17th centuries to describe a ship traveling along a lee shore that sails to windward to avoid getting too close to shore. Sailors also used the term to describe a ship that sails to windward of other ships in a fleet, sailing aloof, or at a distance, from the other ships.

Hot from the Galley

In the age of sail, ships put to sea for months, sometimes years, at a time. Whatever food they took with them had to last a long time without spoiling. Ships even carried live animals on deck so they could kill them later and have fresh meat during the voyage. Sailors have always complained about the food onboard ships.

The most famous of all shipboard foods was **Hard Tack**, which was a dried sort of biscuit that could be kept for more than a year, as long as it was kept dry. The ingredients were few and simple, basically flour and water with a bit of salt mixed in, kneaded, and kneaded again, and then baked until it was as hard as a brick. It was too hard to chew by itself, but sometimes sailors crushed it by pounding it with something very hard and then mixed the crumbs with something else—whatever was on hand (bacon fat, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, jams, etc.)—to make a sort of mush. Sailors oftentimes complained that their hard tack was infested with weevils, worms, or maggots. With no other choices available, they’d just bang their hard tack on the table to knock out any bugs before they ate it.

If hard tack doesn’t seem tasty enough to try, give **Hermit** cookies a shot. Hermits originated in New England. Made with spices from the Indies and molasses from the Caribbean and packed with dried fruit, hermits went to sea with lucky

sailors whose wives, mothers, and sisters were thoughtful enough to bake these treats and pack them away in tin canisters for their seafaring loved ones. Sailors liked them because they never got hard—their texture is somewhere between a brownie and cake. They are easy to make, but you won’t find a mix in any store. You’ll have to make them from scratch.

- 1-3/4 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1 large egg
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 2/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup raisins

Hermits



In a bowl mix well the flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and the cloves. In another bowl, cream the butter with the brown sugar, then beat in the egg and molasses. Mix with the flour mixture, then stir in the raisins. Spread the batter in a buttered and floured 13- x 9-inch baking pan and bake it in a preheated 350° oven for 15 to 20 minutes. When cool, cut into squares. ⚓