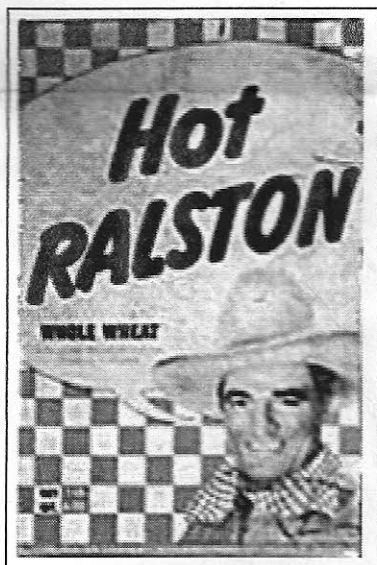


## "Ralston Revisited"

by Jack French

With the exception of Jim Harmon and Gary Yoggy, I'm probably the most fervent fan of radio's "Tom Mix Ralston Straight-Shooters." Despite that, like many other OTR fans, I've harbored unhappy childhood memories of trying to get Hot Ralston down my gullet in order to obtain the box tops for the radio premiums Tom was anxious to send me. To this youngster, growing up in Kaukauna, WI, that bowl of gray, tasteless mush was a far cry from its description (by announcer Don Gordon) as "DEE-licious!"

About the time I was in 6th grade, Ralston brought out Shredded Ralston, a cold cereal for warm weather seasons, and I was delighted with the choice. This crisp cereal, later to be re-named Wheat Chex, made it easier for me to accumulate the required box tops. Therefore I could get the decoder pins, whistling sheriff's badge, arrowhead compass, etc. with greater ease.



Then some 60 years later, I'm ambling through a country store near Frederick, MD when I chanced to spot Ralston in bright red and yellow boxes on the shelf. Grabbing one, I flip it over and on the back is Tom Mix winking at me. (Not any of radio's Tom Mix's, but the cowboy movie star.) Included is a brief history of Ralston (originated 1896) superimposed over a U.S. history (i.e. "The 50s gave rise to television.")

I bought two boxes; one to consume at home (if I could) and a second to donate to the raffle prizes at FOTR Newark. And today, with an inch of snow on

my northern Virginia lawn, I break out the Ralston and follow the microwave directions. As I carry the steaming bowl to the breakfast nook, I have a box of brown sugar and a jug of maple syrup standing by, if they are needed.

I take my first bite and SURPRISE; it doesn't taste bad at all. Another spoonful and my amazement continues. My Ralston has a pleasing, nut-like flavor, quite different from my memories of childhood. Has Ralston (now Ralcorp Holdings, Inc) changed the recipe or improved the flavor? Or are my 70 year old taste buds betraying me? I dunno, but hot Ralston now tastes darn good. My wife's theory is that as a kid we like our cereal "sweet" so Hot Ralston appealed to few. I'm not sure that's the reason, since my folks wouldn't put sweetened cereals on our table. We willingly ate un-sweetened Cheerios and Kix (for Lone Ranger premiums) and Kellogg's Pep (for Superman prizes) but I don't recall any pre-sweetened breakfast food at our house.



This modern hot Ralston, Jim Harmon tells me, has been distributed sparingly for several years. Ralston used to sell it directly from St. Louis, MO to consumers at the amazingly low price of \$ 8.50 for six boxes. But now it's only available on-line or in a few retail stores. Neither Safeway nor Giant carry it in my area. The Maryland store where I bought my two boxes is a small chain in Maryland and Pennsylvania called Weis Foods; they sell it for about \$ 2.75 a box. The Vermont Country Store, with its user-unfriendly web site at [www.vermontcountrystore.com](http://www.vermontcountrystore.com), sells Ralston too, but only in batches of three boxes for \$ 12.90, plus S & H.

Other former Straight-Shooters are invited to replicate my discovery....