

CIVIL WAR ERA SLANG AND TERMS

A Writer's Guide for the American Civil war

The terms and phrases I have gathered here are found all over the internet, thus I cannot claim any ownership or even any particular wit for finding them. Therefore, I am simply offering this compilation as a complement to you.

Acknowledge the Corn - to admit the truth, to confess a lie, or acknowledge an obvious personal shortcoming

Arkansas Toothpick - a long, sharp knife

A.W.O.L. - Absent With Out Leave

Bad Egg - bad person, good for nothing

Balderdash - nonsense

Bark Juice, Red Eye, O Be Joyful - liquor

Beat the Dutch - if that don't beat all

Bluff - trick or deceive

Been Through the Mill - been through a lot, seen it all

Bellyache - complain

Bivouac - to camp without formal shelter or in temporary circumstances

Blowhard - braggart, bully

Bread Basket - stomach

Bully - exclamation meaning, '&terrific!' or 'hurrah!' or “good for you”

Bummer – malingerer, someone who deliberately lags behind to forage or steal on his own shrift

Bummer's Cap - regulation army cap with a high/deep crown, so-called because it could be filled with gathered foodstuffs

Camp canard - tall tale circulating around camp as gossip

Cashier - to dismiss from the army dishonorably

Chief Cook and Bottle Washer - person in charge, or someone who can do anything

Company Q - fictitious unit designation for the sick list

Connption Fit - hysterics, temper tantrum

Contraband - escaped slaves who sought refuge behind Union lines

Copperhead - Northern person with Southern, anti-Union sympathies

Cracker Line - supply line for troops on the move

Deadbeat - useless person, malingerer

Desecrated Vegetables - Union, dehydrated (desiccated) vegetables formed into yellowish squares

Dog Robber - soldier detailed from the ranks to act as cook

Duds - clothing

Embalmed Beef - canned meat

Forage - to hunt for food, live off the land; also came to mean plundering enemy property for sustenance

Fit as a fiddle - in good shape

Fit to be tied - angry

French Leave - to go absent without leave

Fresh Fish - new recruits

Go Boil Your Shirt - take a hike, get lost, bug off

Greenbacks - money

Grey Backs - lice, also derogatory term for Confederate soldiers

Grit - courage, toughness

Goobers - peanuts

Hanker - a strong wish or want

Hard Case - tough guy

Hard Knocks - hard times, ill use

Hardtack - unleavened bread in the form of ¼ inch thick crackers issued by the army

Haversack - canvas bag about one foot square, which was slung over the shoulder and used to carry a soldier's rations when on the march

High-falutin - highbrow, fancy

Horse Sense - common sense, good judgement

Hospital Rat - someone who fakes illness to get out of duty

Housewife - sewing kit

In a Huff - angry, irritated

Humbug - nonsense, a sham, a hoax

Hunkey Dorey - very good, all is well

Jailbird - criminal

Jawing - talking

John Barleycorn - beer

Jonah - someone who is or brings bad luck

Knock into a Cocked Hat - to knock someone senseless or thoroughly shock him

Let 'er Rip - let it happen, bring it on

Likely - serviceable, able-bodied

Light Out - leave in haste

Long Sweetening - molasses

Lucifers - matches

Muggins - a scoundrel

Mustered Out – wry term meaning killed in action

No Account - worthless

Opening the Ball - starting the battle

Peacock About - strut around

Peaked - pronounced peak-ed; weak or sickly

Pie Eater - country boy, a rustic

Pig Sticker - knife or bayonet

Picket - sentries posted around a camp or bivouac to guard approaches

Play Old Soldier - pretend sickness to avoid combat

Played Out - worn out, exhausted

Robber's Row - the place where sutlers set up to do business

Row - a fight

Salt Horse - salted meat

Sawbones - surgeon

Scarce as Hen's Teeth - exceedingly rare or hard to find

Secesh - derogatory term for Confederates and Southerners: secessionists

Shakes - malaria

Sheet Iron Crackers - hard tack

Shoddy - an inferior weave of wool used to make uniforms early in the war; later came to mean any clothing or equipment of substandard quality

Sing Out - call out, yell

Skedaddle - run away, escape

Slouch Hat - a wide-brimmed felt hat

Snug as a Bug - very comfortable

Somebody's Darling - comment when observing a dead soldier

Sparking - courting a girl

Sunday Soldiers / Parlor Soldiers - derogatory terms for unsuitable soldiers

Take an Image - have a photograph taken

Tennessee or Virginia Quick Step - diarrhea

Tight - drunk

Toe the Mark - do as told, follow orders

Top Rail - first class, top quality

Traps - equipment, belongings

Tuckered Out - exhausted

Uppity - arrogant

Wallpapered - drunk

Whipped - beaten

Wrathy - angry

Zu Zu - Zouaves, soldiers whose units wore colorful uniforms in a flamboyant French style with baggy trousers, known for bravery