

Civil War Slang

What if you could talk to someone who lived during the Civil War? You would probably have a hard time understanding some of what they would say. The list below has some words and phrases used during the Civil War. The words on the right are the meanings. Where did the terms come from? Which ones are still in use? What new words do we use today that mean the same thing?

Chief Cook and Bottle Washer	person capable of doing many things
Sheet Iron Crackers	hardtack biscuits
Sardine Box	cap box (part of a soldier's ammunition)
Bread Basket	your stomach
Greenbacks	money
Graybacks	name for southern soldiers or lice
Arkansas Toothpick	a very long, large knife
Pepperbox	a pistol (hand gun)
Fit To Be Tied	to be angry
Horse Sense	being smart, on the ball
Top Rail #1	being first class, the best
Hunkey Dorey	being great, really nice
Greenhorn, Bugger	officers (men in command)
Snug As A Bug	very comfortable, cozy
Sawbones	doctors or surgeons
Skedaddle	to run away, scatter
Hornets	bullets
Bully	hurrah! yeah!
Possum	buddy, pal
Blowhard	a big shot, a show off

Fit As A Fiddle	in good shape, healthy
Uppity	conceited, stuck up
Scarce As Hens' Teeth	rare or scarce
Grab A Root	have dinner, potato
Hard Case	tough or difficult
Bluff	person who cheats
Jailbird	person who is a criminal
Hard Knocks	tough times, beaten up in fights etc.
Been Through The Mill	has done a lot
Quick-Step, Trots	sick with diarrhea
Played Out	tired and worn out
Toeing The Mark	doing the job
Jonah	bad luck
Goobers	peanuts
Fresh Fish	raw recruits, rookies
Whipped	beaten, defeated

Sources: “The Life of Johnny Reb” and “The Life of Billy Yank” by Bell Irwin Wiley