

Words, Names and Symbols Coined by Soldiers

<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>

As part of the socialization, the training for entry into the military social system, soldiers learned new words and ideas and symbols that conveyed information not generally used in civilian life.

The Federal troops chose navy blue as the color of their uniforms, while the South adopted gray as their color. However, because of shortages of material, many Southern soldiers dyed their own clothes at home before enlisting. This dye turned their clothes a dull yellow-brown color. Hence, Southern soldiers became known as “Butternuts.” Both sides adopted the same trio of colors to indicate the branch of service to which a man belonged. Red trim and striping on the trousers indicated artillery, blue infantry, and yellow cavalry.

At the first Battle of Bull Run in 1861, the colors of combatants’ uniforms were not yet standardized. Some Confederate units wore blue uniforms, while some Northern units wore gray uniforms. Needless to say, the typical confusion of battle exacerbated even further, and several units fired upon their own men.

Southern soldiers had many nicknames, each according to what state he was from.

Virginia	<i>Tobacco Worms</i>
Tennessee	<i>Hog Drivers</i>
Kentucky	<i>Corn Crackers</i>
Texas	<i>Cow Boys</i>
Arkansas	<i>Tooth-picks</i>
Mississippi	<i>Sand Lappers</i>
Louisiana	<i>Tigers</i>
Alabama	<i>Yaller Hammers</i>
Georgia	<i>Goober Grabbers</i>
North Carolina	<i>Tar Heels</i>

South Carolina	<i>Rice Birds</i>
Florida	<i>Gophers</i>
Missouri	<i>Border Ruffians</i>

Civil War soldiers created their own slang for many terms. The following is a brief sample accompanied by definitions:

<i>bread basket</i>	stomach
<i>greenbacks</i>	money
<i>graybacks</i>	Southern soldiers, lice
<i>pepperbox</i>	pistol
<i>horse sense</i>	smart
<i>top rail #1</i>	first class
<i>hunkey dorey</i>	great
<i>bugger, skunk</i>	officer
<i>snug as a bug</i>	comfortable
<i>sawbones</i>	surgeon
<i>possum</i>	buddy, pal
<i>quick-step</i>	diarrhea
<i>Jonah</i>	bad luck
<i>goobers</i>	peanuts
<i>fresh fish</i>	new recruits
<i>bluebellies</i>	Yankees

A good, reliable horse proved to be invaluable during the war. Some famous ones and their owners include:

King Philip	Nathan Bedford Forrest, CSA
Little Sorrel	Stonewall Jackson, CSA
Dixie	Patrick Cleburne, CSA
Cincinnati	Ulysses S. Grant, USA
Baldy	George Meade, USA
Traveller	Robert E. Lee, CSA
Moscow	Philip Kearny, USA
Virginia	Jeb Stuart, CSA
Rienzi	Philip Sheridan, USA

A number of colorful Civil War personalities gave rise to a bevy of nicknames on both sides of the fighting:

Gray Fox	Robert E. Lee, CSA
Little Mac	George McClellan, USA

Bulldog Grant	Ulysses S. Grant, USA
Rock of Chickamauga	George Thomas, USA
Stonewall	Thomas Jackson, CSA
Old Peter	James Longstreet, CSA
That Devil Forrest	Nathan Bedford Forrest, CSA
Bull Head	Edwin Sumner, USA
Little Phil	Philip Henry Sheridan, USA