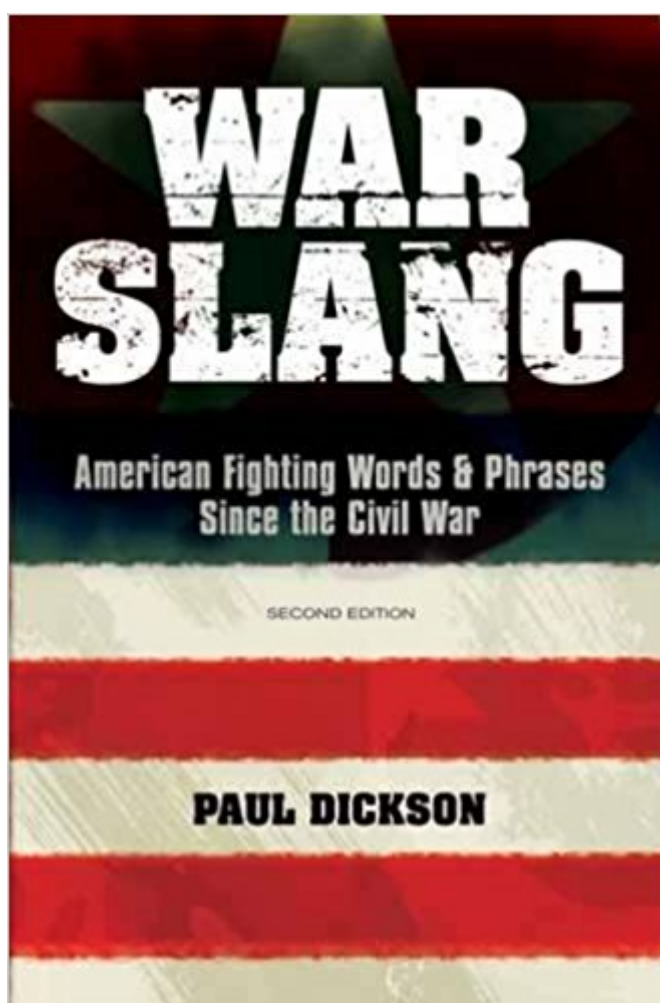


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# War Slang: American Fighting Words & Phrases Since The Civil War, Third Edition



## Synopsis

From the homegrown "boodle" of the 19th century to current "misunderstandistan" in the Middle East, America's foremost expert on slang reveals military lingo at its most colorful, innovative, brutal, and ironic. Author Paul Dickson introduces some of the "new words and phrases born of conflict, boredom, good humor, bad food, new technology, and the pure horror of war." This newly updated reference extends to the post-9/11 world and the American military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recommended by William Safire in his "On Language" column of The New York Times, it features dictionary-style entries, arranged chronologically by conflict, with helpful introductions to each section and an index for convenient reference. "Paul Dickson is a national treasure who deserves a wide audience," declared Library Journal. The author of more than 50 books, Dickson has written extensively on language. This expanded edition of War Slang features new material by journalist Ben Lando, Iraq Bureau Chief for Iraq Oil Report and a regular contributor to The Wall Street Journal and Time. It serves language lovers and military historians alike by adding an eloquent new dimension to our understanding of war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I bought this book primarily for the section on WWI, which is fairly good sized (about 75 pages), so that is the only section I've read. If someone is considering this book for historical research on that period, I found the information to be accurate and well backed up with period sources. It's a pretty sanitized selection of words, however; there are a couple examples of expletives but hardly representative of WWI military personnel's full vocabulary. Part of the issue was probably the fact

that the original period sources that the author relied on such as newspaper articles and war slang dictionaries published in the 1920s weren't allowed to print some of the saltier terms; the author could have therefore thrown the net wider and looked original plays from the period (which weren't censored) such as *The Big Parade* and *What Price Glory?* (which was notoriously profane!; both were made into films in 1925 and 1926 respectively and though not reflected in the inter-titles, lip readers can see the characters on screen clearly using some of that colorful soldier language) or the unexpurgated version Frederick Manning's WWI novel *Her Privates We* (1930). But, as far as what is included: I find it to be helpful and the bibliography (there is one for each section) will be very useful.

In "War Slang", Paul Dickson tries to address the unique lexicon of those under arms in a way similar to those who play baseball in his earlier book "The Hidden Language of Baseball. Those who have served (or spent time with those who have served) will recognize many of the terms presented here, and those who haven't --but who appreciate the lexical texture that arises from a community of discourse-- should both enjoy this book. The terms used here come variously from the mundane (the initials of acronyms) the profane and the tragicomic filters of those who face both rapid danger and burdensome bureaucracy. Especially in the 3rd edition's updates on Afghanistan and Iraq, the book contains a few entries that are either erroneous or need additional research. The book presents "ate up" as somebody unconcerned with the appearance of uniforms and shoes. In my experience, while also pejorative, it means exactly the opposite (and includes being overly concerned with superficial matters... possibly to the exclusion of legitimate concern for combat readiness). The book also defines "CENTCOM" as US Central Command in "Qatar". While CENTCOM has a forward HQ in Qatar, its actual HQ is in Tampa, FL. Attentive readers may find other lapses in research or disputes with real-world usage.

Paul Dickson is a superb etymologist of language who has compiled many books over the years relating to how we use words and phrases. His baseball dictionary is famous for its compilation of sayings and their use and evolution. "War Slang" is another example of this master's efforts in understanding the English language and how it changes over time, this time related to wartime phrases. This work is organized by war and proceeds chronologically from the Civil War to the present. Each war is a discrete chapter in the book, but there is a strong index that helps researchers find what they are looking for. It updates the last edition, published in 2004, and includes updates from the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is both fun and illuminating to read

this as a work from cover to cover, but it is also a fine reference work for searching individual phrases and learning how and why they were first used in this way. I'm well familiar with such terms as "Archie," WWI slang for antiaircraft fire, and "check six," looking directly behind you for enemies, from the cold war era. Some of the newer terms were both funny and interesting. There are "penguins," Air Force personnel who do not fly. Other terms for them are "ground hogs," "wing weenies," and "chairborne rangers." There are also ROAD soldiers, "Retired On Active Duty"; Canoe U., the U.S. Naval Academy; and WAGs, wild-ass guesses, and SWAGs, scientific wild-ass guesses. This is a fascinating book.

Fascinating and thorough. I thought I had "heard" it all when it came to military slang, but WAR SLANG was a revelation.

This book is perfect for historical writers. It is organized well and full of great information.

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