

► *Our uniformed men borrow  
from jive for their lingo.*

## SERVICE MEN'S SLANG

BY ALBERT A. OSTROW

WHEN a man changes from *civvies* to a uniform he not only enters upon a different life but a different vocabulary. He finds there is a jargon in his new job of fighting that goes along naturally with his helmet, his weapon and his roomy shoes.

The time-honored lingo of the regular Army and Navy and the auxiliary services built up by preceding generations of warriors forms the basis of the modern American fighting man's lexicon, but he has brought it up to date with apt and colorful additions of his own. Made gag-wise by the radio and the movies he is a slicker phrase coiner than his predecessors and likes his slang punchy. For his taste it must also be unsentimental, disrespectful and like all strictly male talk, hard-boiled.

The education of the service man in the language of his new *trade* begins the moment he arrives at training camp. If he's in the Army he's referred to as a *yardbird*, often abbreviated to *YB*, an old Army term for camp-con-

fined newcomers. Or he may be called a *John*, from the "John Doe" on the sample recruiting forms — the British "Tommy Atkins" got his nickname the same way. If he's a naval recruit he's a *boot*, from the leggings he wears during training. And his camp is a *boot camp*.

Marines are *bellhops* and *girenes* to the bluejackets. Sailors are *swab jockies* and *seaweeds* to soldiers. While the men in khaki are *dog-faces* to those in the naval services. The infantry is *walkin' hell* and an infantryman a *blisterfoot*. Cavalrymen are *bowlegs* and members of the Air Force *skywinders*.

The recruit learns right off that the articles of war and the regulations are known as *the bible*, that a *housewife* is his sewing kit; a *nappy*, the camp barber; *cueballs*, the barber's clients; and a *chili bowl* or *G.I. trim*, a regulation haircut.

*G.I.*, which stands for Government Issue is a popular phrase and generally means "regulation" or "Army approved." Girls provided for Army dances are *G.I. girls* and the dance itself a *G.I. hop*. The

standard yellow soap used for *policing* (cleaning-up) is *G.I. soap*. Ashcans are *G.I. cans*. Water is *G.I. lemonade*.

Food or *chow* has traditionally been the cause of the man-in-uniform's loudest *gripes* (complaints). Though the quality of food is much better in this war than it ever has been, there's no hint of the improvement in the extensive glossary that covers the subject.

A cook has actually received a decoration for "distinguished service in the kitchen," but the odds are he's still known as a *belly robber*, *hashburner*, *slumburner* or *greasepot* to his grateful comrades. The fellow who usually manages to be at or near the head of the *chow line* is a *chow hound*. The mess hall is *the ptomaine domain* or *the Waldorf*.

Eating utensils are *mess gear*. Cream and sugar are *sidearms*; pepper and salt shakers, *lighthouses*; salt and pepper, *sand and dirt* or *sand and specks*; canned milk, *armored cow*, *armored heifer* or *city cow*; and ketchup, *blood*, *redeye*, *redlead* or *transfusion*.

Coffee is known variously as *battery acid*, *paint remover*, *Joe*, *blanko water*, *blackout*, *ink*, *bootleg* or *mud*. Bread is *punk* even when tasty. Stew is *slumgullion*, *slum* or *shackles*. And when it comes along

too often it's *S O S*, same old stew. Hash is *kennel rations*; creamed beef or chicken on toast, *cream on a shingle*; canned corn beef, still *corn willie* as in the last war; chicken, *crow* or *buzzard*; and turkey, *seagull*.

Other chow terms in popular use are: *baby food* for cereal; *blankets* or *collision mats* for pancakes; *cackle jelly* for eggs; *cat beer* for milk; *goldfish* for canned salmon; *grass* for salad; *hand grenades* or *wimpies* for hamburgers; *Irish grapes* for potatoes; *popeye* for spinach; *salve* for butter; *shimmy pudding* or *shivering liz* for jello; *side slip* for bread and butter; *strawberries* for prunes; *swamp seed* for rice; and *turkey* for practically any meat course.

The fellow who has a habit of stopping a plate *en route* to someone else and helping himself first is a *short stop*. Dishwashers are *china clippers*, *bubble dancers* or *pearl divers*. A *pot massager* helps the cook clean up. *Dirt bags* or *G-men* gather the garbage which is picked up by a *honey wagon*.

## II

*Eagle day* is a big day because that's when *money bags* (the paymaster) makes his rounds with the *scandal sheet* (payroll). *Buscar* (borrowed

money) is paid off, nobody is *hurtin'* (broke) and everybody is *heeled* (solvent) again with a pocketful of *pocket lettuce*, *happy cabbage* or *soft money* (paper currency) and *white money* or *iron* (silver coins).

All look forward to *mail call*, hoping for *fan mail* (any kind of mail) but particularly a *sugar report* (a letter from the one and only). Waiting for mail is *sweatin'*. In the services you don't worry or wait, you *sweat* — for pay, leave, promotion, etc.

The new and proud possessor of chevrons is a *chevron polisher* or *dust dust*. The bearer of more than one stripe is known as a *zebra* and is said to be *stripe heavy*. Sergeants are also known as *third-lieutenants* and acting corporals as *Hollywood corporals* or *whistle jerks*.

The shoulder insignia of commissioned officers are *shoulder hardware*; the gold bars of a second-lieutenant, *didie pins*; a colonel's silver eagles, *chickens*. High ranking officers are *higher brass*. Identification tags are *dog tags*; service stripes, *hash marks*; and medals, *chest hardware*.

Every outfit has its *earbangers* (yes men), *buckers* or *handshakers* (those who try to curry favor with superiors), and *guardhouse lawyers* (those who hand out free advice). The recipient of that advice usu-

ally lands in *Barracks 13*, the *brig*, *mill*, *bull pen*, *playhouse* or *wire city* — all of which mean the guard house.

Hypochondriacs are *moaners* who make frequent visits to the *pill roller* (doctor), hoping to get sent to the *butcher shop* (hospital) or *ride the sickbook* (get soft duty). *Goldbricks* loaf on an assignment and generally scheme to get by the easy way. Tear-jerking alibis are *Mother Machrees* and complainers are advised to *tell it to the chaplain*. The chaplain's office is known as *the wailing wall* and the chaplain as *Holy Joe* or *sympathy issuer*.

Getting together for a talk is known as *batting the gums* or *shooting the breeze*. A guy who *sounds off* (talks too much) is told to *knock it off*. And if he is the hypercritical type he is said to be *slipping the clutch*. *She did?* means *say that over again*; and *got me pushed* is another way of saying *I don't know*.

The only enjoyable *fatigue duty* (hard work) in the Army is *bunk fatigue* (going to bed), also known as *spinning in*. Sleep is *blanket drill* — *sack drill* in the Navy, where a *sack* is a bed.

When he's free to *take off* (go to town) the service man changes into his *swanks* (best clothing). He may go on a *skirt patrol* or *play the fems* (hunt feminine company). If he

finds a *gadget* or *biddie* (girl) he likes they usually *shake a shimba* (go to a dance). There he tries a *snow job* on her (hands her a line) and if she falls for it she's been *snowed under*.

Or he may prefer to get together with his buddies and go to a *gas-house* (beer joint) and drink *tiger sweat* (beer). Later he *hits the road* (gets going) back to quarters so that he can get some *flying time* (still another expression for sleep) by the time the *blow boy* or *wind-jammer* (bugler) wakes him up for *jubilee* (reveille).

### III

The teamwork of the services in combined operations has resulted in many of the slang expressions becoming common property. Many of those already mentioned are familiar to members of all the armed forces. Army lingo has gained a wider circulation than those of the naval services (Navy, Marines and Coast Guard) or the Air Force, which are more technical.

Here is some typical slang of the naval services: *Going salty* — trying to act like an old-timer; *snipes* — firemen; *woodbutcher* — carpenter's mate; *sun dodger* — sailmaker; *hooligan navy* — the Coast Guard; *sand pounder*, *dune leaper*, *bugalow*

*sailor* — a Coast Guardsman on shore duty; *freckles* — tobacco; *scuttlebut* — rumor; *scupper* — a lady of easy virtue; *ridge runner* — a Southerner; *German pomp* — a short haircut; *clamp down* — clean up; *going over the side* — liberty without a pass; *not very cozy* — unfriendly; *vessel man* — pot washer; *skivvies* — underwear; *can* — destroyer; *battilewagon* — battleship; *pig boat* — submarine; *tin fish* — torpedo; *hack driver* — chief petty officer; *pelican* — a big eater; *gedunk* — ice cream; *pogey bait* — candy; *airedale* — naval aviator; *Snafu* — politely translated as "situation normal; all fouled up," to indicate that things are not going too well.

American flying talk is heavily RAF in origin and also borrows from our enemies. *Strafe* (to attack troops from the air) and *flak* (anti-aircraft fire) are German.

Other popular expressions are: *ack-ack* — anti-aircraft fire; *scatter gun*, *shotgun* or *chatterbox* — anti-aircraft machine gun; *archies* — heavy anti-aircraft guns; *fireworks* — any anti-aircraft fire; *bend the throttle* — fly above normal cruising speed; *bandits* — enemy fighters; *Chinese landing* — a one wing low landing; *cockpit trouble* — when a wreck is the pilot's fault; *dodo*, *penguin* — a cadet who hasn't as

yet flown; *dopey crate* — a bum plane; *iron beam* — a railroad used as a guide; *wet beam* — a river used as a guide; *hangar pilot* — one who talks a good flight on the ground; *heap, bus, crate, job* — a plane; *hit the silk, bail out* — to make a parachute jump; *hot pilot, goopher, eagle* — a fighter pilot who is having success against the enemy; *hot*

*crate, soup job* — a fast plane; *hot-house* — turret; *office* — cockpit; *roger* — "okay, I get you"; *wash out* — to flunk a flying course; *prang* — a crash that could have been avoided. An *order of the prang* has been established for pilots who lose planes through carelessness. *Prang* has also come to mean a devastating air raid.



## DARLING, THIS MUCH

BY KAYE STARBIRD

DARLING, this much I've learned to understand,  
 And it has taken me a long, strange year,  
 A year I reached but could not touch your hand  
 And listened for your voice but could not hear.  
 Often I walked along our road in spring,  
 Silently asking strength, that I might bear  
 To watch the leaves and flowers unravelling  
 And feel the rain we loved and you not there.  
 I thought I walked alone and wept that you  
 Walked somewhere far as lonely and alone.  
 I am much wiser now the year is through  
 And you are still away. I should have known  
 As I do now, there is no road or weather,  
 However dark, we do not walk together.