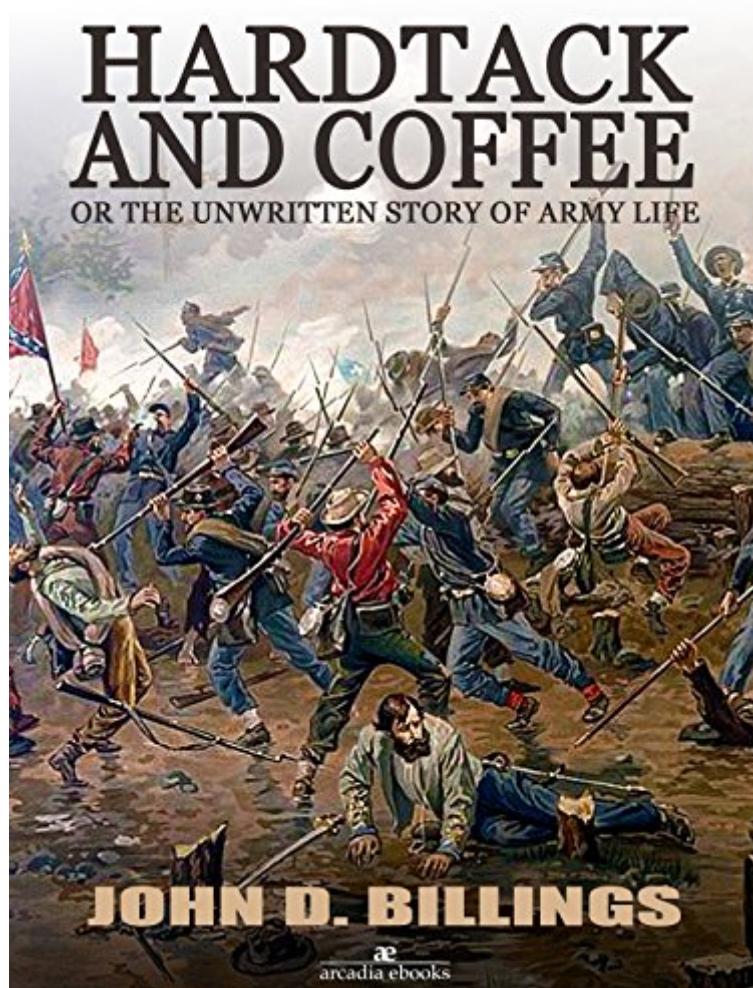


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# Hardtack And Coffee Or The Unwritten Story Of Army Life



## **Synopsis**

Hardtack and Coffee or The Unwritten Story of Army Life (1887) is a memoir by John D. Billings. Billings was a veteran of the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Light Artillery Battery in the American Civil War. Originally published in 1888, Hard Tack and Coffee quickly became a best seller, and is now considered one of the most important books written by a Civil War veteran. "Hard Tack and Coffee" is not about battles, but rather about how the common Union soldiers of the Civil War lived in camp and on the march. What would otherwise be a mundane subject is enlivened by Billings' humorous prose.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

There are numerous histories of the Civil War and some have become classics. Most of these focus on battles and great heroes. Billings, however, a Civil War veteran, writes about the daily life of the average soldier. We learn about the soldier's motivation to fight, camp discipline, diet, housing, medical care, recreation and just about everything else that comprised the life of the Civil War era soldier. Billings' book is serious yet he manages to write in a lighthearted tone, replete with levity. This is a great book to round out a Civil War buff's study of the great conflict.

I teach a university class on the experience of the American Civil War, and I use sections of this book to illustrate camp life and the life of the average soldier. Billings tells his story as a humanist and has a real eye for detail. His descriptions (and the illustrations) are invaluable. This book is not for someone with only a passing interest in the American Civil War; one must know something of the era to appreciate it. It is a must-read for a true fanatic.

This interesting little book, written in the 1880s, was only 99 cents on Kindle. The author was an artilleryman in the Army of the Potomac. This is not an account of battles, strategy and combat, but rather everyday life for the union soldier. It details food, shelter, clothing, animals, hospitals, the different types of men in ranks, and much more of the mundane usually over-looked by historians. I was surprised how much matched my experience in the Marines a hundred years later: shelter halves, wall tents, barracks, making a coffee cup from a can and wire (I had one at Khe Sanh!), the troops' jokes, shirks, etc. I loved the more erudite language of the times: "To enter (a tent) ... of a rainy morning from the outer air, and encounter the night's accumulation of nauseating exhalations from the bodies of 12 men (differing widely in their habits of personal cleanliness) was an experience no old soldier has been known to recall with any great enthusiasm." I think veterans, history buffs and Civil war enthusiasts will all lie this book. My wife, who has been watching the TV series "Mercy Street" about a Civil War hospital, was interested to read that chapter. Robert A. Hall  
Author: The Coming Collapse of the American Republic

I would have loved to had this book when I was a child. The non-linearity of the chapters makes it a perfect "browser's book" -- a book which you can pick up and flip open to any page and read interesting, amusing and humorous accounts of day to day life in the Civil War army. This is one of the most fun books I've picked up in a long time.

I'm one of those men with the "Civil War Itch" who can't get enough reading, can't get enough time on the battlefields. This book is hands-down one of my favorites in my extensive collection, re-read several times and dog-eared. It's something I always put in my bag for air-travel reading, because you can pick it up and put it down when you need to...the author and the illustrator both were participants in the Conflict, so you know it's accurate. The content is educational but not stuffy, since it was written to explain to soldiers' families what exactly Union Army life was like...and the humor still carries through to this day. After you've read the historical studies or walked a battlefield, THIS

is the book you want to read to put yourself in the shoes of the everyday soldier--and it's easy to do with the author's skills. For me, the best chuckles are the chapters "Jonahs and Beats", and "The Army Mule". A must-read for those wanting more than just a general's biography or an order of battle.

Hardtack and Coffee provides an excellent picture of Army life in the mid-nineteenth century. The sketches illustrate the text superbly. This is a useful handbook for students and teachers as well as an intriguing introduction to the Civil War.

Really was not my cup of coffee. I don't know what I was looking for in this book, but what ever it was, I did not find it. I felt a little lost as the main character jumped around from situation to situation. I felt a little lost from time to time, this may have been my problem.

Lots of detail that I found pretty dull for the most part... author goes on and on and on about the tents issued by the Union army, for example. He does make it clear that the bureaucratic parts of the military were alive and well then... just like they are today.

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