

# Comrade

The term ***comrade*** is used to mean "friend", "mate", "colleague", or "ally", and derives from the Iberian Romance language term *camarada*,<sup>[1]</sup> literally meaning "chamber mate", from Latin *camera* "chamber" or "room".<sup>[2]</sup> A political use of the term was inspired by the French Revolution, after which it grew into a form of address between socialists and workers. Ever since the Russian Revolution, popular media in the Western World have often associated it with Communism.



World War I poster in the Library of Congress

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## Background

Upon abolishing the titles of nobility in France, and the terms *monsieur* and *madame* (literally, "my lord" and "my lady"), the revolutionaries employed the term *citoyen* for men and *citoyenne* for women (both meaning "citizen") to refer to each other.<sup>[3]</sup> The deposed King Louis XVI, for instance, was referred to as *Citoyen Louis Capet* to emphasize his loss of privilege.<sup>[4]</sup>

When the socialist movement gained momentum in the mid-19th century, socialists elsewhere began to look for a similar egalitarian alternative to terms like "Mister", "Miss", or "Missus". In German, the word *Kamerad* had long been used as an affectionate form of address among people linked by some strong common interest, such as a sport, a college, a profession (notably as a soldier), or simply friendship.<sup>[5]</sup> The term was often used with political overtones in the revolutions of 1848 and was subsequently borrowed by French and English. In English, the first known use of the word "comrade" with this meaning was in 1884 in the socialist magazine *Justice*.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Russian usage

In the late 19th century Russian Marxists and other leftist revolutionaries adopted as a translation of the word "Kamerad" the Russian word *tovarishch* (Russian: *Товарищ*) (from Old Turkic *tavar ishchi*; abbreviated *tov.*), whose original meaning was "business companion" or "travel (or other adventure) mate", deriving from the noun товар (*tovar*, i.e., 'merchandise')<sup>[7][8]</sup> as a form of address in international (especially German)Social Democracy and in the associated parts of the workers' movement. For instance, one might be referred to as *Comrade Plekhanov* or *Comrade Chairman*, or simply as *Comrade*. After the Russian Revolution, translations of the term in different languages were adopted by Communists worldwide. As a result, even though many other socialists would continue

to use "Comrade" among themselves (e.g., German and Austrian social-democrats and, to this day, members of the British Labour Party), it became most strongly associated in public consciousness with Communism as known in the Soviet Union. This is exemplified in its mocking use in stereotypical portrayals of the Soviet Union in Cold War films and books.

In the early years of Soviet power, the Bolsheviks used "Comrade" when addressing or referring to people assumed sympathetic to the revolution and to the Soviet state, such as members of the Communist party (and originally of other pro-revolution leftist formations such as the Left SR) and people from the "working masses". The more neutral republican form of address would translate as "Citizen". Accordingly, supporters of the White movement in the Russian Civil War would use "Comrades" mockingly as a derogatory term for their enemies – although at the same time, the various socialist anti-Bolshevik forces such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks also used "Comrade" among themselves.

By the mid-1920s, the form of address "Comrade" became so commonplace in the Soviet Union that it was used indiscriminately in essentially the same way as terms like "Mister" and "Sir" are employed in English. That use persisted until the fall of the Soviet Union. Still, the original meaning partly re-surfaced in some contexts: criminals and suspects were only addressed as "Citizens" and not as "Comrades", and expressly refusing to address someone as "Comrade" would generally be perceived as a hostile act or, in Stalinist times, even as an accusation of being 'Anti-Soviet'.<sup>[9]</sup>

The term is not used often in contemporary Russian society, but it is still the standard form of address in the armed forces and police, where officers and soldiers are normally addressed as "Comrade Colonel", "Comrade General", "Comrade Sergeant", or the like. The term is also used as part of idioms e.g., *tovarishch po neschast'yu* (*fellow-sufferer*, from German *Leidensgenosse*) or *boyevoy tovarishch* ([war] buddy), or as a part of such words as *tovarishchestvo* (partnership) that do not associate with communism.

## Chinese usage

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In Chinese, the translation of *comrade* is "同志" (pinyin: *tóng zhì*), literally meaning "(people with) the same spirit, goal, ambition, etc." It was first introduced in the political sense by Sun Yat-sen to refer to his followers.

The Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), which was co-founded by Sun Yat-Sen, has a long tradition of using the term *Tongzhi* (*comrade*) to refer to its members, usually as a noun rather than a title; for example, a KMT member would say "Mr. Chang is a loyal and reliable comrade."<sup>[10]</sup>

Nevertheless, the term was promoted most actively by the Communist Party of China during its struggle for power. It was used both as a noun and as a title for basically anyone in mainland China after the People's Republic of China was founded. For example, women were *nü tongzhi* (female comrade), children were *xiao tongzhi* (little comrade) and seniors were *lao tongzhi* (old comrade). However, after the 1980s and the onset of China's market-oriented reforms, this term has been moving out of such daily usage. It remains in use as a respectful term of public address among middle-aged Chinese and members of the Communist Party of China. Within the Communist Party, failure to address a fellow member as *tóng zhì* is seen as a subtle but unmistakable sign of disrespect and enmity.

At party or civil meetings, the usage of the term has been retained. Officials often address each other as *Tongzhi*, and thus the usage here is not limited to Communist Party members alone. In addition, *Tongzhi* is the term of preference to address any national leader when their titles are not attached (e.g., *Comrade Mao Zedong*, *Comrade Deng Xiaoping*).

In October 2016, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued a directive urging all 90 million party members to keep calling each other "comrades" instead of less egalitarian terms.<sup>[11][12]</sup> It is also in the regulations of the Chinese Armed Forces as one of three appropriate ways to formally address another member of the military ("comrade" plus rank or position, as in "Comrade Colonel", or simply "comrade/s" when lacking information about the person's rank, or talking to several servicepeople.)<sup>[13]</sup>

Chinese territories such as Hong Kong and Macau do not have comrade in its popular vernacular due to longtime administration by foreign Western powers which instilled a different language paradigm in the natives of those regions.

## South African usage

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During the 1970s and 1980s, *comrade* emerged as a popular revolutionary form of address in South Africa among those involved in anti-apartheid political activities.<sup>[14]</sup> For example, members of the African National Congress and South African Communist Party frequently referred to each other as *comrade*.<sup>[15]</sup>

Among poor residents of the country's segregated townships, it was also used to specifically denote members of militant youth organisations.<sup>[16]</sup> These radical activists led consumer boycotts, organised anti-apartheid rallies and demonstrations, and intimidated those suspected of having ties to the South African government or security forces.<sup>[16]</sup> In this particular context, the English title *comrades* was also used interchangeably with the Xhosa term *amabutho*.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Zimbabwean usage

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In Zimbabwe, the term is used for persons affiliated with the ZANU (PF) political party.<sup>[17][18]</sup> The state media also use *Cde* as short for *comrade*.<sup>[19][20]</sup> Members of other political parties mainly the Movement for Democratic Change are often referred by their names or Mr, Mrs or Prof.

The revived Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) members also call themselves comrades.

## South Sudanese usage

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Members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army call each other 'Comrade'.<sup>[21]</sup>

## In other languages

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- In Albanian, the word *shok* (meaning *friend*, from Latin *socius*) was used within communist circles.
- The Arabic, Urdu and Persian word رفیق (*Rafiq*) (meaning *friend*) is used with the same political connotation as "comrade." The term is used both among Arab communists as well as within the Ba'ath movement and the Lebanese Forces. The term predates modern political usage, and is an Arabic male proper name. Iranian communists use the same term. In Pakistan, the term is sometimes used to refer to members of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami).
- The Armenian word for comrade is ընկեր (unger) for boys and men and ընկերուհի (ungerouhi) for girls and women. This word literally translates as "friend". It is used by members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Ramgavar and Social Democrat Hunchakian Party when addressing other members of the party. The term is also used by the Armenian Communist Party.
- The Azerbaijani word for comrade is *Yoldaş* (literally "co-traveller").
- In Balochistan, the term comrade can be translated as *Sangat* (in Balochi and Brahvi), and is often used by left-wing political activists and guerillas who are waging war against the Pakistani state.
- The Belarusian word for comrade is *таварыш* (tavyaryś), with the same origin as the Russian word. It is usually used only with a political or historical meaning in connection with the Communists.
- The Bengali word কমরেড (Komred) is used by all leftist groups especially by the Communist Party of Bangladesh (বাংলাদেশের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি-সিপিবি), Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and other Communist Parties in India (especially in the States of West Bengal and Tripura) and Socialist Party of Bangladesh, SPB, Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal-JSD (Bangladesh) etc.
- The Bosnian word *drug* is used as an equivalent to comrade. For females *drugarica* is used. It is also used commonly for as a word for friend.
- The Burmese word *yèbaw* is used in the Communist Party of Burma.
- The Bulgarian word for comrade is *drugar* (female *drugarka*). It translates as friend or colleague. In Communist times, it was the general form of address, also used in reference to school teachers etc.
- In Catalan, the word for comrade is *company* for males, *companya* for females. It is still in widespread use among communist and anarchist organisations, but it also occurs often in everyday speech to refer to neutral relationships such as classmates or flatmates with no political connotation.
- In Chinese, the word 同志 (pinyin: Tóngzhì) is used. The meaning of the word refers to a like-minded person. It is, through usage, associated with Communism, however it may be used as a friendly epithet between friends or colleagues, mostly of the older generation.

- The Croatian equivalent to comrade is *isdrug* for males and *drugarica* for females. In the period between World War II and Josip Broz Tito's death in socialist Yugoslavia it was applied to almost everybody: teachers, officials, etc. Today it is not used commonly. It may be used with the meaning of *friend* as in Serbian, but this use is far less frequent in Croatian. It is still used among far left organization members, and calling someone *drug/drugarica* may also be used ironically to denote someone's perceived radical leftism.
- The Czech word for comrade is *soudruh* (m.) and *soudružka* (f.). In 19th century Czech, it was a poetic word, meaning "fellow". As elsewhere in Europe, the term was originally introduced by the Czech Social Democrats and subsequently carried over to Czech Communists as well when these split from the Social Democrats. After the Communist Party gained power in 1948, the word displaced all prior titles like *pan*, *paní* ("Mister", "Madam") and became the title used generally for everyone. Nowadays, it is used only in (actual or more often, ironic) Communist context. After the Velvet Revolution, an attempt was made in the Czech Social Democratic Party to replace *soudruh* with *přítel* ("friend") as a form of an address, but it didn't catch on. A cognate to English word "comrade" *kamarád*, means "friend" in Czech. It is a very commonly used word and it has no political connotations. A cognate (now obsolete) to the Russian word *tovarishch*, *tovaryš*, means "journeyman" in Czech and has no political connotations (cf. *Tovaryšstvo Ježíšovo* lit. "Jesus' Journeyman").
- The Dutch word is *kameraad*. In Common Dutch the word is mostly reminiscent of communists whereas in informal speech and dialects it can be used to indicate friends or acquaintances. It was used as a form of address in the Communist Party of the Netherlands as well as in the pre-war National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands the latter also using the female neologism *kameraadske*.<sup>[22]</sup> The pseudo-Russian word *kameraadski* is used informally as a sobriquet for a person with leftist sympathies.
- The Danish word is *kammerat* (plural *kammerater*) which literally translates as "mate," or "buddy". It is normally used to refer to someone's childhood friend or friends, but can also be used interchangeably with *ven*, which means *friend*.
- The Esperanto word for comrade is *iskamarado* either in the sense of a friend or a political fellow-traveller. In the latter case, when used in writing, it is often abbreviated to *K-do*. It is the preferred form of address among members of *Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda*. The word *samideano*, literally "same-thinker", usually refers to a fellow Esperantist.<sup>[23]</sup>
- The Estonian word is *seltsimees* which originally comes from German *Geselle*. Having initially a neutral meaning, the term was later adapted by local communists. Today it has an ironical meaning, referring to Soviet times.
- The Finnish word is *toveri* which literally translates as "companion".
- The French word is *camarade*. It is mainly used by communists and can apply to classmates or friends.
- The Georgian word is *ამხანაგი* *amkhanagi*.
- In German, the word is *Kamerad* for a male, or *Kameradin* for a female. The meaning is that of a fellow or a companion or an associate. Since 'Kamerad' is the usual term for a fellow soldier in German military language, the word is associated with the right-wing scene instead of left-wing groups. Communists and socialists, especially party members of the *SED* and *SPD* use the word *Genosse* resp. *Genossin* with the socialist association that 'comrade' has in English.
- The Greek word is *σύντροφος* (*syntrophos*, m.) and *συντρόφισσα* (*syntrophissa*, f.), used by communists, socialists and other left-wing groups. Other meanings of this word are: mate, pal, friend, companion, even partner or associate etc.
- The Hebrew equivalent is *Chaver* (חבר), a word which can mean both "friend" and "member" (of a group or organization). During the time of Socialist Zionist political and ideological dominance of the 1930s to the 1960s, the word in a sense similar to English "comrade" was in widespread use, in the *Kibbutz* movement, the *Histadrut* trade unions, the driver-owned bus companies etc. At present, its political use is considered old-fashioned, mainly restricted to Israeli Communists; the same word exists also in *Yiddish*, which is one possible origin of the colloquial Australian word "cobber".) The Hebrew *Chaver* and the female *Chavera* are still widely used in a non-political sense, as meaning simply "friend" (in certain contexts also meaning "boyfriend/girlfriend").
- The Hindi equivalent for comrade or "Saghave" is *iskaamred* (कामरेड) or *saathi* (साथी). It is widely used among all leftist (communist) parties of India, e.g. *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, *Communist Party of India Revolutionary Socialist Party (India)*, *Forward Bloc* and others.
- The Hungarian word for comrade is *elvtárs*. *elv* means "principle" or "tenet" while *társ* means "fellow". As the Hungarian Working People's Party gradually gained power after the Second World War, the word displaced all prior titles like *úr* ("Mister") and became the title used generally for everyone except for people who were obviously not "tenet fellows" e.g. those who committed political crime against the socialist state. After the democratic transition the word became obsolete and it is used derogatorily to address politicians on the political left.
- The Icelandic word for comrade is *félagi*. It is used as a less intimate alternative to *vinur* (friend). It is also the word used for a "member" of club or association. When used as a title to precede a name (i.e. *félagi Tító* or *félagi Dimitroff*) it has a communist implication.
- In Indonesian, the words *Komrad*, *Kawan*, or *Kamerad* are used by communist, socialist, and nationalist political parties.
- In Irish the word for comrade is *chara* or *comrádaí*. Both phrases are used largely by Irish Republicans, Irish Nationalists, Communists and Socialists in Ireland.
- The Italian word for comrade is *compagno* (male) or *compagna* (female), meaning "companion". This word is in widespread use among left-wing circles, including not just communists but also many socialists. The literal translation of the word comrade is *camerata*, with the specific meaning of "comrade-in-arms" or "fellow soldier": it is

used by nationalist and militarist right-wing groups. Using one word or the other is a quick way to announce one's political views.

- The Japanese word for comrade is "同志 (*dōshi*)", using the same Han characters as in Chinese. The word is used to refer to like-minded persons and the usage is not necessarily limited to Communists, though the word is to some extent associated with Communism. The word should not be confused with a homonym 同士, which is a more commonly used postfix to show people sharing a certain property
- In Kannada, the word ಗೆಲೆಯದೇ, ಗೆಲೆಯ (Geleya) is used among communist people's while addressing its people.
- In Khmer, the word "comrade" (Khmer: សមគំរិត *Samakmit*) was used by members of the Khmer Rouge during the communist rule of Pol Pot in 1975–1979 and by the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation during the People's Republic of Kampuchea era.
- In Korean, a good equivalent of the word would be 동무 (*tongmu*) or "동지" (*tongji*, senior comrade). Although the word was originally used by Korean people all over the Korean Peninsula, people living south of the 38th Parallel began avoiding using the word after a communist state was set up in the north. In North Korea, the word *tongmu* replaced all prior social titles and earned a new meaning as "a fellow man fighting for the revolution". The word originally meant "friend".
- In Kurdish, the word *Heval* ("friend" or "companion on a long journey") is widely used among Kurdish political parties and organizations.
- In Macedonian, the word is другар (*drugar*) for males and другарка (*drugarka*) for females.
- In Malay, the words *Komrad*, *Kawan* and *Sahabat* are used among socialist organizations.
- In Malayalam, the word സഖാവ് (*sakhavu*) is used among communist organizations while addressing fellow members.
- In Mexico, the word is *camarada* (*camrade*) and *compañero* can be (and often is) used with no political connotation.
- In Mongolian, the word is *нөхөр* (*nökhör*). It is still in use but less than before.
- The Nepali equivalent for comrade is *kaamred* (कामरेड) or *saathi* (साथी) as in Hindi. It is used by communists in Nepal such as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) Janamorcha Nepal and others.
- In Norwegian, the word is spelled *Kamerat*. It can be associated with communist lingo, but is more commonly used to refer to a less close friend, a co-worker (*arbeidskamerat*) or a classmate in school (*klassekamerat* or *skolekamerat*). In everyday use, the word *kamerat* on its own is considered a masculine term, referring to boys/men. For girls/women, the term *venninne* (female form of *venn* friend) is used instead. When joined with other words, such as *klassekamerat*, the word is gender neutral. (Although Norwegians would understand what is meant by *klassevenninne*, it would also sound awkward and somewhat archaic.)
- In the Philippines, communist and left-leaning activists prefer the term *kasama* (roughly, companion), and the short form, *Ka* before the name (e.g. *Ka Bel*). Protestant (usually Evangelical) clerics and members of the Iglesia ni Cristo also use *Ka* before names or nicknames, but as a contraction of *kapatid* ("brother"/"sister"), denoting spiritual brotherhood. Practitioners of law informally use the Spanish term *compañero/compañera* when referring to each other, albeit without any socio-political connotation.
- In the Pashto language, the word for comrade is *malgury*. It is used by and refers to communists, socialists, or supporters of the communist system across the Durand Line (i.e. in Afghanistan and Pakistan) by Pashto speakers. For the last decade or so it has also been used by the nationalists. The word is also used by common people both male and female for a very close friend.
- In Poland, the word is *towarzysz*, which has the same origin as the Russian word. In non-political sense, it means "companion".
- In Portugal and Brazil, the word is *camarada*, now being commonly employed to refer to communists or supporters of the communist system (result of the overusage of the term in the post-revolutionary society). It is also prevalent in the army, and has been gaining popularity among nationalist movements. The term used among socialist activists nowadays tends to be *companheiro/ companheira* although in Portugal *camarada* is still commonly used. Brazilian president Lula is widely known for addressing his political mates and supporters as *companheiro*, however this decreased during the last years of his presidential term, while it was very popular during the elections, often imitated by comedians who satirized Lula's idiosyncratic manners. The terms *samarada* and *companheiro(s)/companheira(s)* are also used without political connotations, meaning *mate*, *partner*, *fella*.
- In the Punjabi language the word for comrade is *Saathi* (ਸਾਥੀ). However, the word "Comrade" itself, *ਕਾਮਰੇਡ*, is used to refer to a communist or communist party member and is often used as a more linguistically acceptable replacement for the word "communist," with the communist party often being called "The Comrades" or communist thought being called "Comrade Sochni."
- In the Romani language the word for comrade is *Dosti* as seen in the phrase *Te vestinel o dosti Tito, te vestinena o jugoslovenske manusha* or *Long live comrade Tito and long live the Yugoslav people*.
- In Romanian the exact translation is *camarad*, a neologism introduced from French in the 19th century which does not bear a political connotation, referring mainly to wartime allies and friends. During the communist era an older term, *tovarăş*, derived from a Slavic source, was used to convey the political meaning.

- The Serbian word for comrade is *isdrug* (друг) for males and *drugarica* (другарица) for females; it's also a regular word for 'friend'.
- The Slovak word for comrade is *issúdruh* (m.) and *súдруžka* (f.). The term *kamarát* is used too, but it is normally translated as friend.
- The Slovenian word for comrade is *istovariš* (m.) and *tovarišica* (f.), first attested in the 16th century. After the Second World War it was also colloquially used for 'teacher' (as an elliptical form of the official *tovariš učitelj* (m.), *tovarišica učiteljica* (f.) 'comrade teacher'). After 1991 it rapidly fell out of use as a general term of address, but is still used when expressing *comradeship* among individuals.
- The Sindhi word for comrade is *Sangat* سنگت; it is normally translated as friend.
- The Somali word for comrade is *jaalle*; it is normally translated as friend. It was widely used by the erstwhile Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (1969-1991). The word fell out of use after the fall of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party.
- In Spain, the word is *compañero / compañera* ("companion"); the term *camarada* ("comrade") has also been used, but it is more associated with the communist and Falange tradition. In Spain the word *compañero* can be (and often is) used with no political connotation.
  - The standard form in Cuba is *compañero / compañera*, as it was in socialist Nicaragua and Chile. In some parts of Latin America, *camarada* is the more frequent word, except in Peru, where the term is commonly associated with the nom de guerre of members of far left groups *Shining Path* and MRTA, while members of the social-democrat party APRA as well as other left parties or left-leaning organizations employ *compañero* to refer to fellow members. The term *camarada* is the more normal among Spanish Communists.
- In Sinhala, the word is සහෝදරයා *sahōḍarayaa*, which means brother. It is also a condescending term used by the elite (usually academics) to lure the underprivileged into the cause.
- In Swahili, the equivalent word is *ndugu* for brother-in-arms, *ordada* for a female comrade. The word *ndugu* is still used in formerly socialist Tanzania as a way of showing (political) solidarity.
- The Swedish word is spelled *Kamrat*. Although it can be associated with communist lingo, it may just as well be used to refer to a friend, a co-worker (*arbetskamrat*) or a classmate in school (*klasskamrat* or *skolkamrat*). Unlike in Norwegian, the term is commonly used for both boys and girls in non-communist usage. See also rottsföreningen Kamraterna.
- The Tamil word for comrade is *Thozhar* (தோழர்) and is a regular word for 'friend'.
- In Tetun, the national language of Timor Leste, the word *camarada* is used – a direct loan from the language of the former colonial power, Portugal. During the '70s the word was a common term of address within the left leaning Fretilin party, and after the Indonesian invasion, continued to be used by the Fretilin associated guerillas waging a war of resistance in the jungle. Though largely falling out of use since 1999 Fretilin politicians and veterans of the guerillas struggle continue to use the term to refer to each other.
- The Thai word *sahai* (สหาย) was used in the communist movement.
- The Turkish word *Yoldaş* (literally co-traveller) has become used within the communist movement. In the climate of harsh anticommunist repression the word largely disappeared from common usage. "Yoldaş" is also a male name in Turkish.
- In the United Kingdom, the term *comrade* is strongly associated with both Communism and Fascism. However it is still used as an informal form of address among some Labour Party members, and in a more serious manner by many smaller parties of the left. On the right "comrade" was the standard form of address between members of the British Union of Fascists and featured widely in their publications and marching songs. Use of the term is generally restricted to people with whom the speaker agrees politically. It is usually written in full, the abbreviation "Cde" being associated with southern African usage. The honorific terms "sister" and "brother", also declining in usage, are more politically inclusive, encompassing everyone from the centre-left to the far-left, without necessarily indicating complete political agreement. All three terms are occasionally used in a mocking or patronising manner by political opponents.
- In the United States, the word "comrade" carries a strong connotation with Communism, Marxism–Leninism and the former Soviet Union. Especially during the Cold War, to address someone as "comrade" marked either the speaker person addressed, or both as suspected communist sympathizers. It is frequently used ironically in that way. In addition, it is still used in its generic context by some American socialists. Despite this, it has been adopted into the U.S. Army Soldier's Creed in the statement "I will never leave a fallen comrade." It is also used at meetings of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to address a fellow member.
- The Vietnamese word is *đồng chí*, which is derived from Chinese.

## In literature

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In George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, the animals all refer to each other as comrade, as the story is a satirical look at the Russian Revolution. Also in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, party members in Oceania refer to each other as comrade.

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