

Pay for the 18th century soldier

The amount paid to soldiers in regiments of the British Establishment was set by Parliament in the 1660s, and did not change for another 100 years.

The monetary units used in 18th century Britain and its colonies were pounds, shillings, and pence (which was the plural of *penny*). The pound was the main denomination, like (but not equal to) our dollar. There were 12 shillings to a pound, and 20 pence to a shilling. (A pound therefore contained 240 pence.) They were written in sequence; thus 1.2.4 1/2 was one pound, two shillings, four and a half pence. Abbreviations were £ for pound, *s* or *sh* for shilling, and *d* for pence (the *d* comes from *denarius*, a common Roman coin). Sequences frequently added the *d*, so 0.3.6d would be three shillings, six pence. (Modernizations, too late for our period, changed the *d* to *p* and made the shilling worth 5 pence and the pound worth 20 shillings, so that the pound contained 100 pence.)

For a private, the pay rate set by Parliament in 1660 was 8 pence per day, but a soldier never got his full pay and often did not get anything. Out of his pay, Parliament authorized withholdings called *stoppages*. Two pence were legally taken for subsistence (food and issue), also known as *off reckoning*. The soldier's regimental commander was also entitled to additional stoppages. Some of these were 2 1/2 pence for field provisions, 1 penny for baking of flour in the regiment's bakery, and 3/10 penny for bed linen and laundering. There could be other stoppages for loss of issue or "additional issue" such as cockades. A hospitalized soldier had 4 pence a day stoppage for his food and care. The usual amount left over was one or two pence out of the eight.

Officers usually saw that a soldier got at least a few pence each month to keep him from grumbling and to allow him to buy additional food. The soldier of course would rather spend the pence on whores, booze, or gambling (or all three), which is why the officers tried to keep him almost broke!

Pay differences between the ranks (per day after the basic 2 pence subsistence stoppage):

Private	0.0.6d
Corporal	0.0.8d
Drummer	0.0.8d
Sergeant	0.1.0
Ensign	0.3.0
Lieutenant	0.3.6d
Captain	0.7.6d
Major	0.11.6d

At this time a skilled worker earned 0.1.6d per day but had to feed, clothe, and house himself.

In addition to his pay, a soldier received the following fringe benefits: Free postage, 20 days leave per six months served, pillage and prize money (when allowed), and extra work assignments on public works at an additional nine pence per day (while on leave or by permission after the duty day was finished). He also got free quarters (be that as they may), and a daily issue of rum, beer, or both. He might also receive occasional pensions and charity for

wounds. He was supposed to receive medical attention at no cost other than the stoppage mentioned above. Notably, the soldier had the very important knowledge that the army would feed him on a more or less regular basis (something that could not be said for the civilian population).

By pooling his pence with his messmates, a soldier could buy extra booze, food, or support a camp follower. All in all, it was a better life than most would have as a civilian.

Adapted from an article by Kim Stacy in the Newsletter of the 2nd Battalion, 84th Regiment of Foot (Royal Highland Emigrants).

[Editor's note: Members of Butler's Rangers, not being officially part of the British Establishment, received very high pay rates. Privates were paid the astounding amount of two shillings per day, and privates in the first two companies (who were required to be familiar with native languages and customs) were paid four shillings per day. However, Rangers were expected to pay for their own uniforms, arms, and supplies (although there were exceptions). There are a number of dispatches on record in which various Crown officers complain about the enormous expense of maintaining Butler's Rangers as opposed to conventional regiments.]