
Defense Report

AUSA



How much Should We Pay a Soldier?

The Department of Defense has just issued a nine-volume report prepared by the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation. In its various volumes the report touches on every aspect of military pay and benefits from recruiting bonuses to burial in a military cemetery. One of the unusual aspects of this mammoth two-year study was an effort to quantify the distinctive aspects of military service and to establish a basis for compensating military personnel for their special kind of employment. The study group called this the "X-factor."

The study didn't uncover any aspects of military life that had not been considered before but it examined the known factors in a way that strengthens arguments for adjustments based on the X-factor. It established two levels of military activity that are unique: Combat, which is found nowhere except in the military, and; the almost-totally unique experiences like having one's activities closely controlled, being told how to get your hair cut, being ordered to move frequently and not being able to quit if you are unhappy.

There was an effort, too, to evaluate the long-term loss to the military careerist who never stays in one place long enough to buy a home and accumulate capital in that manner. Questions were asked about the impact on a military family of having long separations; with children growing up with only sporadic exposure to a father figure.

The group recognized intangible compensations for military service such as the strength derived from membership in historic units and the vicarious reward from ceremonies and awards that tend to partially offset the negative factors. Citing experience with Alaska Pipeline construction crews the study concluded that in spite of high pay there was no group cohesiveness. This lack of dedication to working under unpleasant conditions caused the contractors to hire 16,000 people in 1974 for a work force totalling only 6,000.

Both the Canadian and British armies add an X-factor to their computation of military pay and there is precedent for it being done on U.S. civilian payrolls. In Vietnam, U.S. civilian helicopter pilots flying "non-combat" missions were paid a base wage of three to four times as much as the U.S. Army warrant officers flying both support and combat missions.

The Quadrennial Review staff recommended that the X-factor be reflected either in cash adjustments to future military pay scales or in increases to the fringe benefits such as commissary support and health care. There has been no final report or recommendations from the Department of Defense but the X-factor deserves careful attention in all future military pay decisions.