
Defense Report

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Military Pay—More Proof That It Is Inadequate in Today's Inflated World

Recently the General Accounting Office declared that reports of as many as 100,000 military families being eligible for food stamps were exaggerated. According to the GAO's own study, *only* about 25,500 families were in that category of deprivation. Unquestionably, the GAO announcement took some of the heat off Congress to move quickly toward restoring military pay to comparability with the civilian sector.

But now we have further evidence that the military compensation system continues to fall behind. Army Emergency Relief, a private, nonprofit organization set up to help the Army "take care of its own," has experienced a substantial growth in the assistance it has had to provide for soldiers in economic distress. In 1980 AER disbursed over \$9 million in help to active-duty soldiers and their families—more than in any year since 1943, when the Army was several times larger than it is now. In 1980, too, the total amount of money paid out in assistance climbed by a whopping 25 percent over the previous year.

While the General Accounting Office might have found some comfort in its discovery that *just* 25,500 military families were eligible for food stamps, the Army Emergency Relief annual report shows that 30 percent of its awards were for the purchase of food. If military pay were truly adequate, there might still be a few food payments to soldiers who were unable to manage their finances properly but they would be far less frequent. The AER found that money to pay rent was the second largest segment of their payments (29 percent) and that assistance for official moves from station to station was third (19 percent). The latter figure is a reflection of the fact that the U.S. Defense Department is one of the few employers in our country that does not provide adequate support for the employees it orders to move.

President Reagan has recently agreed to delay a military pay adjustment scheduled for July. At the same time he called for still another study of military manpower problems, including compensation, that have been studied and restudied by the three previous administrations, with little action taken to correct the shortcomings found. Hopefully, the present Administration will not fall into the same trap. Studies don't put beans on the table or pay the rent unless they are acted upon.