



By Dr. John Wands Sacca

**A**lthough a soldier's cash pay was historically low, practically everyone in the Army, most of whom were single, was provided in-kind benefits of free food, uniforms and accommodations—the proverbial three hots and a cot.

The U.S. Army's present system of basic pay grades and allowances, tax advantages, special pay and fringe benefits is a legacy of the small, relatively unskilled cadre-type force that characterized the Army before World War II.

In the 1800s, the Army pay came only every two or three months. Payday was known as the day the eagle flew. During at least one period in the mid-1870s, soldiers didn't get paid at all because Congress failed to pass any appropriations legislation. When Congress finally passed an appropriations bill in November 1877, the Army had to cut special orders for paymasters to make torturous treks across the Western states to pay troops. There were fewer paymasters than posts, so each had to visit as many as five forts in succession before every-

one got paid. Cold weather slowed several paymasters as they struggled to reach remote Army posts.

Later, as the country industrialized, senior NCOs could earn more than triple their military pay as superintendents and foremen in private industry. Post NCOs—such as hospital stewards, ordnance, quartermaster and commissary sergeants—could more than double their Army pay. A line corporal might quadruple his pay. Still, the prospect of a retirement pension after 30 years kept many men in uniform.

Growth in the size, composition and technology of the Army from World War II through the Cold War led to pay increases comparable with federal civilian pay. Fringe benefits, the principle incentives to NCOs, increased dramatically.

With the modern, all-volunteer force in the early 1970s, equalization of military and civilian pay became the goal. Today, the Army competes with the civilian sector in the labor market. ■

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## Some military pay milestones

1790: The Army re-organized with the following monthly pay for enlisted soldiers: sergeants major and quartermaster sergeants, \$7; sergeants and musicians, \$6; corporals, \$5; and privates, \$3.

1833: The position of company first sergeant received special recognition with pay of \$15 per month.

1851: The Soldiers Home was established in Washington, DC and financed through fines, stoppages, forfeitures and a 12-1/2-cent deduction from monthly pay.

1864: Introduction of longevity bonuses or fogies—periodic increases in basic pay based on years served—starting with the first year of re-enlistment.

1861: Pay for NCOs during the Civil War increased, but purchasing power dropped due the loss in value of the currency paid to them.

1866: Extra duty pay was offered to soldiers detailed for more than 10 consecutive days in the quartermaster and commissary departments.

1872: A savings deposit system with the paymaster was established at 4 percent interest.

The pay of hospital stewards (\$45) exceeded that of a line NCO for the first time. The pay of privates decreased from \$18 to \$13. A first sergeant's monthly pay of \$22 was not quite 19 percent of a lieutenant's \$116.67.

1885: A pension at three-quarters pay was finally offered to 30-year veterans.

1896: The paymaster general reported that for the first time in its existence Army personnel had been paid monthly throughout the year.

1907: Soldiers received a pay raise for the first time in nearly two decades.

1922: Master sergeants and first sergeants were given six and four times, respectively, the base pay of privates. No further pay increases were given until 1942.

1941-1944: Overseas pay (20 percent of base pay) and combat pay (not to exceed \$50), to include flying, gliding and parachuting, was first given.

1945: Voluntary retirement was permitted after 20 years of service.

1957: Military personnel were fully covered under the social security system.

1958: Proficiency pay was reintroduced for enlisted personnel designated as possessing special proficiency in a military skill. Super grades E-8 and E-9 were created.

1971: Legislation increased pay for NCOs and enlisted soldiers in the wake of a move from the draft to an all-volunteer force.