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Rifle Match, subsistence of the militia in the
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THE NATIONAL GUARD MAGAZINE

Volume X.

JANUARY, 1913

Number 1

What May Government Expect of Militia After Pay Bill Becomes Law

MAJOR WALDO E. AYRE, U. S. A. *

FOR the purposes I have in view to day the
provisions of the Militia Pay Bill may be
broadly divided into two classes:

1. Those which obtain after the Militia has
been called out and incorporated as a part of
the army in the field; and,

2. Those provisions which pertain to the
time antedating such call.

It is the latter class with which I shall deal
mainly today. The first four sections of the
bill are taken up with provisions for the peace-
pay of officers and enlisted men and with the
conditions they must meet in order to secure
that pay. I shall have no reason to touch upon
the amounts of pay to be given the several
grades under the bill, but in the conditions im-
posed and in the influence those conditions will
exert upon the officers and men I find much
which is interesting to me. Let us first rapidly
recapitulate those conditions as enumerated in
the bill. Later we will try to translate those
conditions into the daily life of the Guard and
endeavor to ascertain just what they mean.

The first condition is contained in the first
proviso to Section 2, in which 45 drills are
made necessary to receive the full pay author-
ized, a minimum of 20 drills to receive any
pay at all. The second proviso prescribes the
methods of computing the number of drills
under various contingencies, while the third
proviso says that any periods of actual military
duty equivalent to the drills prescribed, except
those periods of service when their pay be-
comes that of like grades in the Army, may
be accepted by the Secretary of War in lieu
of the drills prescribed.

Section 3 of the bill prescribes that the dis-
bursements under the bill shall be made by
the officers or agents of the Army Pay Depart-
ment and provides for a stoppage against the
pay of officers and men.

Section 4 prescribes an age limit, that no
money can be paid under the bill to any person
who fails to qualify for military service and
who has not agreed to serve the United States
if called upon.

Taking these conditions as a whole, we find
them few in number and very innocent looking.
But in my opinion they will revolutionize the
Guard, at least in many places. I shall take
up these conditions in what I conceive to be
their order of importance.

Let us then first turn to Section 3 of the
bill, the section showing who are to make the
payments and providing for stoppages. I can
imagine no language better calculated to work
revolutionary results in the Guard than is that
of the paragraph under discussion. One of the
first things which strikes a regular soldier
when with the men of the National Guard is
the difference of viewpoint in caring for gov-
ernment property. The Regular soldier has
always had to pay for property lost or injured
through his own neglect or carelessness. The
result has been that he has acquired a habit
of carefulness which never leaves him. I do
not need to say to you Guardsmen that the
same compelling habit is wanting in your men.
With you, unless a man is careful and pains-
taking by nature, there has so far been wanting
a compelling force to prick his conscience. The
present bill supplies that compelling force and
does so by using the same means which ex-
perience has proven effective in the Regular
service.

I prophesy that the first effect of this one
condition will be to reduce very materially the
amount of property lost and destroyed annu-
ally. As secondary effects, it will train your
men to exercise care and attention, qualities
which will be useful in other ways. Then, too,
you will be put in position to utilize the
amounts now annually used to replace lost
stores in the work of training higher the men
whose mental alertness and carefulness have
been sharpened to receive it. To my thinking
this one feature of the bill will result in a
general improvement of the enlisted men, in
greater satisfaction to his officers and in higher
efficiency and greater economy as the net gain
accruing to the general government.

These, surely, are results worth working for.
But the list is not yet exhausted. I have not
yet touched upon the influence of the cause in
question upon the commissioned personnel,
upon the company commanders and the staff
officers who handle and are accountable for
public property. With these gentlemen the
mental attitude toward the care of public prop-
erty being different from that of the enlisted
men, the effect of Section 3 of the new law will
be different in kind. Being the accountable
officer, his interest and attention will be at
once aroused, in cases of loss and damage, in
seeing to it that the causes of such loss or
damage are promptly ascertained, that respon-
sibility therefor is completely determined, and
that the methods authorized and prescribed to
set forth these facts so that they will pass
muster with the accounting officer of the treas-
ury are fully and accurately set forth. In case
of any lapse in these matters on the part of an
accounting officer, he will find that the pro-
vision for his own payment through Army pay-
masters will provide him with a painful re-
minder of his lapse.

All this means a more careful study of Army
and Militia regulations and better posted offi-
cers generally. But, above all, this will be the
influence these requirements exert upon com-
pany commanders as recruiting officers.

An enlisted man who is constitutionally and
unalterably careless in the use of public prop-
erty will not only become discouraged and drop
out of the service of his own initiative, but he
will by that time have so annoyed his com-
pany commander that the latter will make easy
his separation from the service. And when the
question of replacing that man arises, do you
for a moment suppose that that company com-
mander will be content with any man not dis-
tinctly superior to the one displaced? No.
Had the pay bill in question contained only the
provisions for the pay of officers and men and
the present phraseology of Section 3, it would,
in my opinion, work such great and advan-
tageous changes in the Guard that the general
government might well be the power pressing
for the enactment of this legislation.

And now I turn to another feature of the
bill. A feature which I take up with some
hesitation and diffidence. My feelings in this
matter will be sufficiently explained when I
confess that I am not clear in my own mind
just what the language used in the bill may
be interpreted to mean. And I take up the
subject now mainly because its discussion will
develop a topic which I desire to discuss briefly
and which chiefly was in my mind when I
started out to write this paper.

The feature of the bill which I now have in
mind is found in Section 4 and reads as fol-
lows:

That no money shall be paid to any per-
son * * * who fails to qualify as to
fitness for military service under such
regulations as the Secretary of War, after
conference with the National Militia
Board, shall prescribe.

What does this language mean? More
specifically, what does the phrase "qualify as
to fitness" mean? Please notice that that term
"fitness" is not limited or qualified in any way.
And not being limited in any sense, it may be
interpreted to mean much or little, according
to the will or view of those interpreting it.

In delightful uncertainty as to the meaning
which the constituted authorities—the Secre-
tary of War and the National Militia Board—
will put upon it, let us attempt to make an
interpretation for the purpose of discussion and
of clarifying our own views in the matter. To
me the phrase "fitness for military service"
suggests physical, intellectual and moral quali-
ties trained uniformly, or according to a fixed
system, for the work of fighting the nation's
battles. It means that every person accepted
as "fit," from private to Major General, should
have the physical, moral and intellectual quali-
ties—barring such frailties and weaknesses as
all flesh is heir to—adequately trained accord-
ing to a common system for the work of the
grade he holds. This spells perfect fitness—
perfection—an end impossible of attainment in
the National Guard or anywhere else. This
brief analysis goes far enough to show that we
must qualify that word fitness, whether we
want to or not. We shall have to stop short of
perfection. But where? With the object of
furnishing a basis of discussion, I will suggest
the word "reasonable" as a qualifier for that
word fitness in the act, and then go on and
indicate in outline what seems to me "reason-
able" fitness. And pray do not condemn me
for reading into the act the word "reasonable."
Remember that I am but following the example
of the Supreme Court in the liberty I take.

If, now, I am correct in assuming that "fit-
ness for military service" comprises the posses-
sion of certain qualities, physical, moral and
intellectual, trained in a uniform way for
specific ends, our further task of fixing upon
details is made considerably easier. We at
least have a tentative definition of what we
are trying to define, even if it does suffer from
the accusation of extreme generality.

Let us begin then with physical qualities.
What is a reasonable physique to demand of
the Guardsman? I hold that he should have a
normal frame with vital organs healthy. To
demand more, to require that he shall at all
times possess a physique trained up to the
abnormal, or even to the normal, demands
upon it which active service in the field im-
poses, seems to me to push our demands into
the realm of the unreasonable. This much-
desired condition of developed toughness can
be reasonably expected only after weeks and
months of continuous training. And such
weeks of continuous training are not possible
to many Guardsmen. That he shall possess
the elements from which this condition may
surely and easily be developed, yes; that he
shall actually be in this condition, no.

*Read before the National Guard Association at Norfolk, Va.