



2016-04

Life on a Royal Navy Ship—Pay

The pay for officers and men of the Royal Navy was the same for the period 1600 to 1793. It only changed somewhat after 1797 as the result of the Nore and Spithead mutinies.

The pay scales for most ranks (officers, warrant officers and petty officers) were based on the rating of the respective ship. There was also a difference in pay for some of the warrant positions based on the number of years experience. Below in the table are the rates of pay (based on 1686 establishments) for a 4th rate 50 gun ship of the line, which was the standard in the early 1740's.



The Rating System was updated in 1714, 1721, 1760, 1782, 1801 and 1817. Prior to 1760, ships of the line were generally under 74 guns and before 1748 normally under 60 guns.

For those not familiar with English currency, 20 shillings are equal to a pound. It also must be noted that food or keep, which is what is today called rations and quarters were provided in addition to the pay. However, a seaman was expected to pay for a portion of his clothing and all 'luxuries'. In 1745, the sailor was issued his bedding. In later years (by the Napoleonic Wars), the sailor had to purchase the bedding.

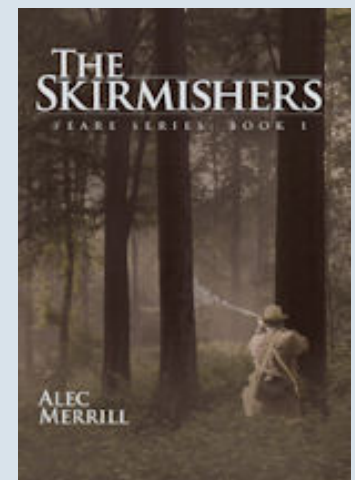
All purchases in the Royal Navy were generally completed through the purser because the Royal Navy was always at least six months behind in their pay. The reason for this was the Admiralty believed that desertion was reduced if the men had no money. The purser used this advantage to line his own pockets at the men's expense. You will note that the Purser did not receive any pay. He was expected to earn enough from the provisioning of the ship to more than make up for this lack of pay.

Royal Navy pay for an ordinary seaman was reasonable when it was put in place in 1686. By the time the next pay raise occurred in 1797, the pay was approximately ¼ what could be made outside the navy. Add to that the Royal Navy had the legal right to force you into service and punish you up to the death penalty for deserting that position. One wonders why it took until 1797 for the mutiny to occur!

Position / Skill Set	RN Pay per month
Captain	£10
Lieutenant	70 shillings
Master	77 shillings
Surgeon	50 shillings
Boatswain, Gunner, Carpenter	45 shillings
Midshipmen	30 shillings
Master's Mates	42 shillings
Carpenter's Mate	32 shillings
Yeoman of the Powder, Surgeon's Mate, Captain's Clerk	30 shillings
Quartermaster, Boatswain's Mate, Corporal, Gunner's Mate	28 shillings
Yeoman of the Sheets, Coxswain, Quartermaster's Mates	26 shillings
Cook, Quarter Gunner, Ordinary Carpenter	25 shillings
Coxswain's Mate, Armourer	24 shillings
Steward	20 shillings
Able Seaman (average three years of service)	24 shillings
Ordinary Seaman (normally one year service)	19 shillings
Landsman	15 shillings



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