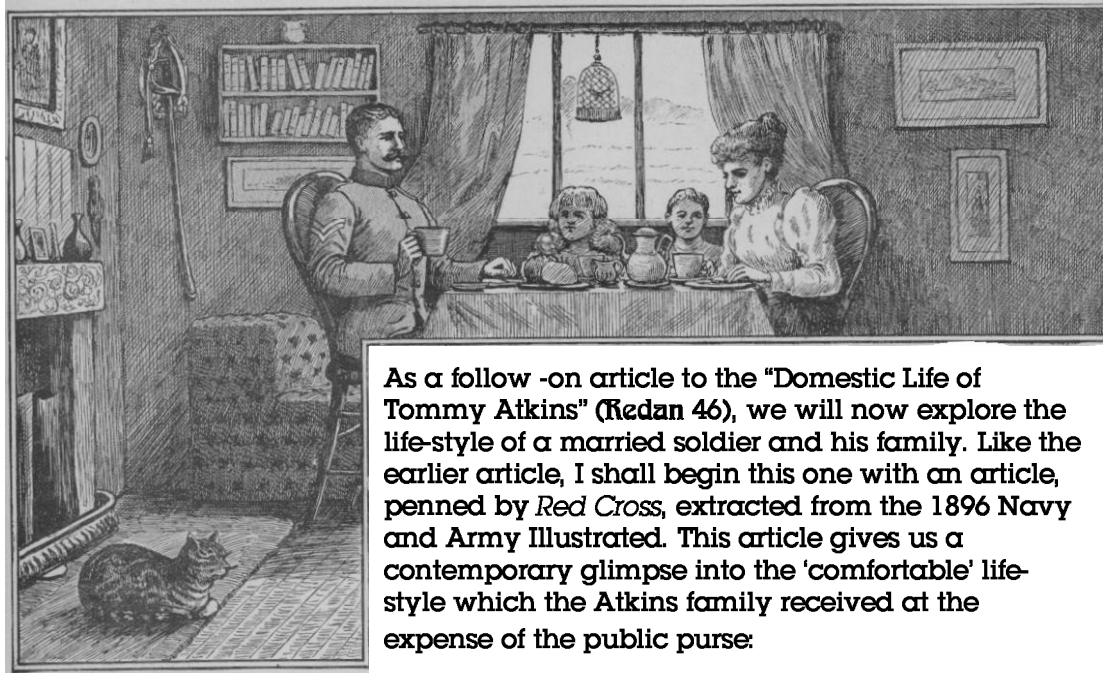


## TOMMY ATKINS MARRIED

Duncan Williams



As a follow -on article to the "Domestic Life of Tommy Atkins" (Redan 46), we will now explore the life-style of a married soldier and his family. Like the earlier article, I shall begin this one with an article, penned by Red Cross, extracted from the 1896 Navy and Army Illustrated. This article gives us a contemporary glimpse into the 'comfortable' life-style which the Atkins family received at the expense of the public purse:

*That the wearers of the red coat have always had a warm corner in the hearts of the bonnie daughters of these islands, is a fact too well known to admit of question : and many a high-born damsel, and many a lass of low degree, has thereby incurred the wrath of a haughty mother or purse-proud father with other views in life for their offspring than a husband with more gold on his coat than in his pocket.*

*Theoretically no soldier should be married, no matter what his rank, and it was hoped that the introduction of short service would tend to reduce the "Married Roll" to a minimum. Up to the present time, however, there has been little or no diminution in the number of men married with leave, but the practice of marrying without leave has, happily, very considerably declined. The time is probably within the memory of people still living when a girl who married a soldier was almost considered to have cut herself adrift from respectable society; and, considering the accommodation then afforded for married women in the Army, it is not to be wondered at that even the most charitably-minded should hesitate to believe it possible that any woman could retain modesty and delicacy of feeling amid such surroundings.*

*Notwithstanding, however, the drawbacks under which she laboured and the hardships of a life into which few comforts entered, the soldier's wife was ever noted for an honest, true devotion to the man with whom she had thrown in her lot. Under a rough exterior she carried a warm heart, and though her tongue was frequently rough as a nutmeg grater, many a young fellow has been kept straight by her well-timed motherly advice and kindly sympathy.*

*After her "own man" her one thought was the honour and credit of the old regiment, and many an instance is on record, when already worn out with fatigue of weary marching, she has toiled the long night through, with tenderest pity, helping the wounded and soothing the dying, aye! and not infrequently giving her own life freely, nor considering it a sacrifice.*

*The improvements in the soldier's condition have been, though slow, sure, and the same way, perhaps even in a greater degree, be said of those of the soldier's wife. The present writer well recollects when it was nothing unusual for several families to be bundled into a large barrack-room, which they had to screen off as best they could, and wonderfully ingenious, albeit saddening, were the devices to which they were driven in their endeavours to maintain decent privacy.*

*But the march of improvement has of late years made giant strides in the amelioration of the condition of the married soldier and his family.*

*first, as regards his quarters, Tommy Atkins the Benedict, would be hard to please if he were dissatisfied with those now placed at his disposal. They are usually built in blocks, close to but distinct from the barracks occupied by the single men. They are bright and airy, well ventilated, gas and water laid on. In almost every case a family, even without children, are given a two-room quarter, the number of rooms being increased in proportion to the number of children; thus, where there are five children, the regulation provides for four rooms and a scullery. The kitchen is fitted with a cooking range, small but thoroughly effective, and which delights the heart of every housewife, an abundance of shelves and cupboards. I may say that every living room must have a cubic space of 1800 feet.*

*Government provides all absolutely necessary articles of furniture, with beds and bedding, but nothing is provided in the way of adornment, and it is simply astonishing how home-like and comfortable a soldier's wife manages to make her surroundings. When it is considered that regiments seldom remain more than one or two years at a station, and that a two or three hundredweight represents the quantity of baggage allowed to be taken, it may easily be conceived that it would be injudicious to spend money, even if it could be afforded on furniture which it would be impossible to carry about.*

*Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties which have to be contended with, the married soldier's quarter is invariably neat and tidy, almost always cheerful and cosy, and often shows evidence of an artistic feeling found deficient in the homes of people who would consider themselves very much higher in the social scale. Seven years' service, at least one good conduct badge, and five pounds in the savings' bank. These are the conditions which must be complied with before a soldier is eligible to receive his commanding officer's permission to marry. But it by no means follows that because he is eligible he will receive it. The number of married men on the strength of a regiment is limited, in the case of rank and file, to four percent ; in the case of sergeants, to fifty percent. The commanding officer therefore withholds his consent until a vacancy occurs,*

*permission in anticipation of vacancies never being given.*

*This, however, is not all, the commanding officer must be thoroughly satisfied as to the respectability of the lady, and no young woman whose antecedents would not admit of the fullest investigation need hope for admission to the "married strength".*

*"But", someone may say, "how can a man possibly keep a wife and family on a shilling a day?" And to this I am bound to reply that it would indeed be difficult. Happily, however, the private soldier's wife has many ways of adding to her income. Officers' servants, grooms, mess waiters, are all usually married men, in the first place because they are steady, and secondly because they are making the Army their home. These, in addition to their extra pay, have numerous little perquisites, which add materially to the family comfort. The washing of the single men of the company is divided amongst the wives of the rank and file, a half-penny per man per day in the infantry, and a penny in the mounted services and departmental corps, being the rate of remuneration. The sergeants make their own arrangements, their bills adding considerably to the total.*

*In almost all barracks now Government provides laundries, fitted up with washing and wringing machines, mangles, drying chambers etc., and when I add that the fuel also is provided, it will be seen that the work is done with the maximum of comfort at the minimum of cost.*

*It was not always so, however, and formerly the washing had frequently to be done under conditions neither sanitary nor comfortable. In those days a visit to the washhouse was a common practical joke played on young subalterns on orderly duty. The washhouse was usually simply a barrack-room extemporized with coppers and washing tubs, and was a sort of club for the old campaigners who heartily enjoyed their gossip, dearly loved of ladies in all ranks of life. "'Tention!" shouts the N.C. officer accompanying the orderly officer round the barracks, at the same time throwing open the door. "Any compl--! Good heav--!! What the ---!!!" stammers the youngster following closely on the sergeant's heels, on finding himself enveloped in a cloud of steam. "Ah! me darlin'! Come here till oi kiss ye." "Sure isn't he a handsome bhoy!" "Is it me ye want, me jewel?"*



*follows thick and fast 'midst peals of laughter, and the poor lad flustered by his unexpected welcome, and utterly unable to recognize where the voices come from, beats a hasty retreat. Of course it is of little use to abuse the sergeant, who is always ready with - "Very sorry, Sir, couldn't tell one door from another, Sir."*

*It is a source of good-humoured amusement to the soldier's wife going to a foreign station for the first time, to find, that when in England with good healthy appetites, with the exception of the husband's pound of bread and three-quarters of a pound of beef, all food had to be purchased, in their new home not only the wife but even the week old infant is supplier with a Government ration. If we suppose a family of five children, we can find a joint weighing 5½-lbs. laid on the table every second day! Yes it is, but when the heat makes you feel with Douglas Jerrold<sup>d</sup> that you would like to throw your flesh and sit in your bones, a large joint of meat does not appeal to one quite in the same way as it would at home in England.*

*In most garrisons, both at home and abroad, each married soldier has a piece of ground in which he cultivates potatoes and other vegetables sufficient for his family, a small space being almost always reserved for flowers, without which no soldier's wife would be happy.*

*In the foregoing I have confined myself to the wives of the rank and file. If I have succeeded in shewing that their life in the Service is fairly comfortable, it may be readily understood that the wife of a staff-sergeant leaves little to be desired in this respect. Not only is her husband's pay sufficient to maintain her in comparative luxury, but from the position which he holds, she has higher status - which she*

*jealously guards - than the wife of a man of lower rank.*

*Of course this precludes her from any share in the company washing, and indeed she usually employs a women to do her own. Her husband is required to keep a batman, who not infrequently assists her in the rougher work of keeping her quarters clean. Of course her husband cannot be employed in any menial capacity to increase his pay, but there are quite a number of well-paid appointments reserved for sergeants alone. Amongst these, keeping the canteen accounts, library accounts, and officers' mess accounts may be mentioned.*

*A marked feature of life in barracks is the strong interest shown by the wives of the officers in the comfort and well-being of the wives of the N.C. officers and men. Much tact is necessary to prevent anything like an idea that the visit of Colonel's wife is made to see that the quarters are in good order and the children clean, but the strong sympathy between one soldier's wife and another soon sweeps away all misconceptions, and the gentle courtesy always shown by an officer's wife to her humble sisters, soon renders the visit a pleasure to be looked forward to rather than an ordeal to be dreaded.*

*As the class from which the soldier of to-day is drawn is not the class from which he was drawn thirty years ago, it naturally follows that the class from which he selects his wife should not be the same. As a result we find the soldier's wife of to-day quiet in manner and deportment, well dressed and lady-like. Should any reader feel disposed to doubt this statement, it is only necessary for him to take his stand at the door of any garrison church after evening service, to have his doubts dispelled.*

*There was a time, however, when even his duties matrimonial did not prevent Tommy Atkins getting drunk, and when no question of lady-like refinement of conduct prevented his punishment in form severer than the Colonel would inflict.*

*Private Tim O'Leary paraded for guard mounting one morning with a splendid pair of black eyes. Of course he was "cast guard", that is not allowed to mount. As this, however, entitled another man mounting in his place, he was in accordance with the practice in the regiment made a prisoner. This was before the days of company offices, and Tim appeared before the Colonel.*

"How did you get that black eye, Sir?" enquired the Colonel. Tim hummed and ha'd a good deal about it, but at last confessed that Mrs. O'Leary had hit him with the poker, "but it was an axident, sure your 'onor Colonel".

"Send for Mrs. O'Leary." Mrs. O'Leary was sent for and duly appeared. The anger which had raged in her breast had now turned to tenderness, and throwing herself on her husband's neck, she commenced to sob vehemently, rocking herself to and fro. "Ohone! Me darlin', an' is it here oi've brought you, Ohone! Ohone!".

"Stop that my good women, and tell me how this occurred."

"Arrah! Colonel jewel! Sure yesterday was pay day, and Tim, the wretch, stayed in the canteen, bad 'cess to it, instead of comin' home to me an' the childer, and when oi spoke the word to 'm he landed me one with his fist, and thin sure mi timper got the better av mean' oi hit him wid the poker and sorry oi am this day."

"If he hit you as you say, why did you not send and have him confined?"

"An' is it me own darlin' man oi'd have confined, Colonel jewel. Sure oi niver forgive myself for the black-hearted treachery."

"Well! well! Go away both of you" cried the Colonel, "and don't come before me again." And away they went like two doves.

Married soldiers frequently have large families, and it is here, perhaps, that the wonderful management, which I have referred to as being characteristic of the soldier's wife, is brought into greater prominence. Clean, sturdy, healthy little urchins, soldier's children are almost always well dressed and overflowing with happiness. And indeed they would be very ungrateful youngsters were it otherwise, for life is very pleasant for them. They are made much of, for everybody, from the Colonel downwards, take a pride in the children of the regiment, and no sport or entertainment takes place without due provision being made for their share in it. Regimental picnics and outings are of frequent occurrence, and I need hardly say, accompanied as they are by the regimental band, they are heartily enjoyed.

I may here refer to a pretty custom prevalent in many regiments, i.e. drinking the health of the daughter of the regiment. The eldest girl resident in the regiment and who was born in the regiment, has the honour of being toasted by the officers in their mess-room and the

sergeants in theirs, on the anniversary of her birth.

Soldiers' children amongst their other advantages, have the benefit of excellent schools. Here they are given a thoroughly sound English education, the girls in addition being well grounded in needlework, darning, etc. Music, both in theory and practice, is taught and well taught, and a concert by soldiers' children is frequently a treat worth going some distance to enjoy. I had the pleasure about two years ago of being present at a concert given in the Royal Opera House in Malta, by the combined schools of the Garrison. Upwards of three hundred children took part, and no prettier sight have I ever witnessed than the appearance on the stage of the little ones<sup>2</sup>. The programme consisted of solos, part songs, and glees, interspersed with fan drill and other beautiful movements, the whole of which was admirably executed.

But if the life of the soldier married with leave is a decidedly comfortable one, that of the unfortunate who has violated the Regulations of the Service by marrying without permission, is misery indeed, and although societies exist amongst the ladies in most Garrison towns with the view of assisting the wives off the strength, and much kindness is shewn them by the ladies of the regiment which is their husband's but not theirs, the usual periodical moves entail much suffering, while the departure for foreign service causes a rupture which in many cases is never healed, and with breaking hearts husband and wife separate, in many, too many instances, never to meet again.

**Now that the article by Red Cross has set the scene of a married soldiers life in the 1890's, I will expand upon some of the points mentioned in the article:**

#### **Short Service and the Cardwell Reforms.**

When Edward T. Cardwell became Secretary of State for War in 1868, he undertook a massive reform of the British Army. Cardwell's objectives were to thoroughly modernise the Army. As well as reducing the cost of the Army to the Exchequer, Cardwell also aimed to increase the rate of recruitment and staff turnover within the Army. By putting more men

through military training, Cardwell hoped that the Army would reflect the methods used by European countries such as Prussia, who in a state of crisis could call upon a large reserve of trained men.

To make the savings necessary, Cardwell proposed to reduce the Army abroad (posted all over the Empire) from 50,000 to 26,000 men (saving £2,330,800). He also proposed reorganising the formations of the Army into a larger number of smaller units; instead of 97 artillery batteries, 16 cavalry regiments and 46 infantry battalions; he proposed 105 batteries, 19 cavalry regiments and 86 infantry battalions, all of a smaller size. With the change in formation of Army units, Cardwell introduced 'localisation' to try and introduce an affinity between a county and a regiment, this he hoped would increase recruitment.

Another proposal to increase recruitment was 'Short Service'. Short Service enlistment was a split period of enlistment where the recruit was expected to sign-up for a twelve year period, but instead of all twelve years being spent with the Colours, the recruit would only spend the first six years with the Colours and the final six years he would serve in the Reserves. The idea of this was to reduce the pension list, the number of married soldiers and hopefully attract a better class of man who would possibly consider 6 years commitment rather than the full 12 years. This Reserve Army, anticipated to be 178,00 men by 1883, could rapidly provide great numbers of trained men in the event of a national emergency.

Despite opposition from some of the Army commanders Cardwell's reforms were executed with only a few modifications, but his reforms did not provide all that was anticipated of them. There was not the great improvement in the quality of recruitment anticipated (rates of pay could have had a lot to do with this - see below). Although recruitment rates

did increase, to provide a Reserve of 80,000 men by 1899, which proved their worth in the Boar War and later the Great War. These increased recruitment rates were sometimes achieved in the infantry regiments by lowering the minimum standards<sup>3</sup> to accept men who were slightly under and could be improved with the better army life and diet!

#### **More Gold on his Coat than in his Pocket.**

A shilling<sup>4</sup> a day, was one of the promises made by the recruiting sergeant to the new recruit of the Victorian British Army. In 1869, when Cardwell entered office, the rate of pay for the basic infantryman had just risen to the princely sum of one and tuppence a day, plus a beer supplement of a penny a day. This guaranteed rate of pay sounds quite fine, except when compared to an unskilled labourer, who in London during 1867 could expect an average weekly wage of 22 shillings and threepence! One of the important points which the recruitment Sergeant stressed was the 'shilling a day' was guaranteed what ever the season or state of weather, which is why most of the recruits to the Army came from the poor rural areas of the British Isles, where work was spasmodic and steady pay was not guaranteed.

Once the recruit had accepted the Queens Shilling he was then told about stoppages. Stoppages included all manner of expenses which the government did not provide. One of the stoppages which Cardwell removed was the fourpence ha'penny stoppage for bread, meat and potatoes, he also reduced the medical care stoppage from nine pence to seven pence a day. As an additional incentive to recruitment Cardwell also introduced Good Conduct Badges<sup>5</sup> with an additional payment of a penny per stripe per day. But to pay for these extras Cardwell removed the additional twopence pay rise and also the beer allowance! The stoppages were always the biggest grumble for

the British Tommy, a typical list of stoppages in 1890 included:

- Tailoring - repair & alterations to clothes, personnel markings etc.
- Cobblers - repair to boots.
- Repairs to arms & accoutrements.
- Necessaries.<sup>6</sup>
- Barrack Damages.
- Laundry.
- Hair Cuts.
- Library.
- Fines.
- Extra rations (such as vegetables!).

These stoppages would on average remove just over a third of the soldiers pay. The army had to issue a regulation, for extreme cases, that a soldier should be left with at least a penny a day after stoppages! As well as Good Conduct badges the soldier could supplement his pay by taking on additional duties. Duties such as an officers servant paid the infantryman a regulation additional shilling and sixpence a week. The skilled Artillerymen and Engineer could earn additional 'working pay' of up to two shillings a day for activities such as gun and carriage maintenance, road building, bridge repairs or surveying.

Promotion, of course, also paid extra. In 1876 an infantry Corporal could earn an additional fourpence a day, and a Sergeant a massive shilling and a penny more than the infantryman. But promotion could also lead to a reduction in overall pay because NCOs above Lance Corporal<sup>7</sup> received no Good Conduct pay, and as well as the regulation stoppages they also had to pay other men to carry out some of their cleaning duties. Sergeants also had additional expenses for joining the Sergeants mess. So in some cases promotion was not an attractive prospect.

During the 1890's with problems in recruitment and problems with maintaining a solid cadre of NCOs, the war office raised the daily rates. In 1896 the daily rates for Lance Corporals and Corporals in the infantry ranged from a shilling and

threepence to a shilling and eight pence, and in the Royal Horse Artillery acting Bombardiers and Bombardiers could earn between a shilling and eight pence to two shillings and eight pence a day. In 1897 the basic soldiers pay was finally raised from a shilling to a shilling and threepence, meanwhile in 'Civvy Street' the average London unskilled labourer was earning 29 shillings a week!

To summarise, the soldiers pay was designed to be the bare minimum as a 'pocket money' payment to maintain the effectiveness of a soldier<sup>8</sup>, it was never designed to be a real wage by which he could support a family. With these financial restrictions, unless a soldier had the help of the government, it would be nigh-on impossible for him to contemplate the idea of marriage and a family whilst engaged in the Colours.

#### **Permission to Marry on the Strength.**

For a soldier to contemplate a married life 'on the strength', i.e. with the help of the Army, he had to first receive the permission of his commanding officer. Before 1867 no Army regulations existed to control the numbers who 'married on the strength', so the numbers allowed varied from regiment to regiment, as it depended upon the accommodation available and the discretion of the Commanding Officer. Typically rates varied between 6% and 10% for the married establishment.

Marriage off the strength was neither encouraged nor actively discouraged. It was thought that the Army life (a lot of moving around and low rate of pay) would be enough of a discouragement. Officially no married men could be recruited into the Army, unless a candidate was particularly desirable, but only then with special permission. Although this ruling was often flouted by recruitment sergeants, who were keen to meet recruitment quotas, they would sometimes persuade married recruits to sign the recruitment form indicating the

opposite. Not to mention some unscrupulous bounders who would use the Army as an escape channel from family responsibilities<sup>9</sup>

In 1867 regulations to help guide commanding officers, were introduced. These set the following standards:

- 7 years service.
- Possession of at least one Good Conduct Stripe.
- Allowances of: 100% for Regimental Staff Sergeants, 60% for other Sergeants and 7% for other ranks.

The regulations also stated that whilst the regiment was abroad; if a married soldier died, deserted, was sentenced to imprisonment for over 6 months or became a lunatic, he would be struck off the married roll and his family would be sent home<sup>10</sup>. The wife of a married soldier could also get her self struck off the married role for acts of misconduct. The introduction of the 1867 regulation was seen as the Armies endorsement of authorised marriage, and the discouragement of 'off the strength' marriage, although the regulations did not extend to punishing a man for marrying without permission.

With the introduction of Cardwell's Short Service it was anticipated that the married strength would be reduced, and to assist commanding officers the regulations were modified in 1876 to:

- 7 years service. (Short Service was for 6 years!)
- Possession of at least one Good Conduct Stripe.
- Allowances of: 100% for Regimental Staff Sergeants, 66% for other Sergeants and 4% for other ranks.
- These standards were to stay in place until the Great War in 1914.

#### **Bright and Airy Married Quarters.**

During the 1850s and 1860s Florence Nightingale and Sidney Herbert<sup>11</sup> led a campaign to improve the health and living conditions of the Army, central

to this campaign was the sanitary of soldiers barracks and provision of medical services. The provision of Married Quarters were also a result of this campaign. Prior to these reforms, the 'Corner System' of married accommodation was operated. Regulations of 1807 allowed accommodation of up to 4 married women per company of 60 soldiers in the same barrack room. The families lived in a curtained-off corner of the barrack room. No extra bedding was provided until 1838. Some regiments placed several married soldiers families into the same barrack room, but separated from the single soldiers. The wives who secured Army accommodation with their husbands were seen as fortunate compared with other wives who had to be accommodated in miserable lodgings which they could ill afford. As time wore on and the Victorian standards of a womens sensibilities and that of children were taken into account, separate married quarters from single soldiers were called for.

The Barrack Accommodation Committee of 1855 recommended that each authorised married man who was permitted to live in barracks with his wife should be provided with a room away from the unmarried quarters. The implementation of this recommendation was expensive, and hence its adoption was slow.

By the 1890s purpose built married quarters were being provided by the Army. The married quarters provided were categorised by the number of living rooms they had i.e.

'A' Type Married Quarters were provided with a living room, a bedroom and a scullery/kitchen.

'B' Type Married Quarters were provided with a living room, two bedrooms and a scullery/kitchen.

'C' Type Married Quarters were provided with a living room, three bedrooms and a scullery/kitchen.

etc.

The living rooms (including bedrooms) were built with the minimum volume

of 1,800 cubic feet. In addition to the quarters outlined above some quarters had their own toilet, whilst others had access to male and female communal toilets.

#### **The Government provides...**

The 1880 Revised Schedules of Barrack Furniture state that the items listed in Table A were issued free of charge to the Married Quarter of a NCO or private soldier. These items would be part of the fixtures and fittings of the Married Quarters, and would remain with the room when the soldier and his family moved on. Any breakages would, of course, be stopped out of the soldiers wages and the Inventory Board would be used by the inspecting officer to see that all was present. To summarise Table A for an ordinary soldier: the furniture provided was beds, bedding, a trestle table, a bench, cleaning equipment, lighting and fire utensils - hardly the rosey coloured picture presented by *Red Cross*, but wives could work miracles! Also mentioned in the article was the importance of the soldiers' garden, as well as supplementing the soldiers own rations the produce of the garden also supplemented that of his family. The Army actively encouraged soldiers to keep a garden, and as well as providing the ground they also provided the tools outlined in Table B.

As well as accommodation and furniture, the Army also provided medical care<sup>12</sup>, family allowance & widows benefits and education for the children (see below for more details). The result of these provisions was that the Army took on the responsibilities to maintain the soldiers family, rather than the responsibility resting with the soldier, this was vastly different to civilian life! Therefore the soldiers meagre wage was not depleted by having to support his family. The Army would only provide for the wife, legitimate children and step-children<sup>13</sup> of the soldier. The Army would not provide for other dependants such as older children, brother/sisters or elderly parents.

#### **Family Allowances.**

Separation allowances first appeared in army regulations in 1871. Separation allowances were paid to the 'on the strength' family that was left behind, whilst the husband and father was away with the army. If the soldier was sent away, the family would be sent 'home', and whilst the husband was away the wife would receive, daily, sixpence plus tuppence for each child. If rooms existed within the Garrison, the family could stay and, instead, receive the rates of threepence a day plus a penny ha'penny for each child. Although these rates sounded generous, the families in many case were left wanting help from the Poor House of the parish.

In 1882 the separation<sup>14</sup> allowances were increased. The wife would receive eight pence a day, plus tuppence a day for each child, from the Army. In addition to this payment the wife would also receive additional moneys stopped out of her husbands pay. An NCO would pay a daily allowance of eight pence for the wife and a penny ha'penny for each child. A private would pay a daily allowance of fourpence for the wife and a penny for each child.

It was always preferable for the family to travel with the husband and the regiment to the new posting. In the olden days the family would travel free-of-charge on the regiments baggage wagons. Whilst at home the Army did not provide any rations to the wife and family, but when posted abroad the wife received half rations and the children quarter rations each. The soldiers basic daily ration was a pound of bread and ¾ pound of meat<sup>15</sup>.

Should a married soldier be killed in action, or die as the result of wounds received in action, the wife became eligible to receive a gratuity of one years pay, which for a private soldier at a shilling a day amounted to £18-5-0. In 1883 a War Office



committee recommended the setting up of a proper pension scheme to allow an annual payment of £10 for the widow of a private and a £1 for each dependant child, but this proposal was never carried out.

#### **Children and Education.**

Because the children of soldiers were seen by the Army as a valuable source of recruits, the Army invested heavily in the education of the children. The Garrison schools were divided into 'infants' and 'grown children's' schools. Older boys and girls attended school in the morning with the Schoolmaster, in the afternoon the girls were separated to join the infants, who were taught by the Schoolmistress, whilst the boys remained with the Schoolmaster.

The infants were taught reading, spelling and singing. Whilst the grown children were taught reading, writing, dictation, grammar, arithmetic, algebra, English history, geography and singing. The afternoon lessons were 'industrial instruction'. For the infants and girls, this meant domestic duties, needlework etc., for the boys lessons could include tailoring, shoe making, carpentry, engineering etc.

School discipline was strictly enforced and was an extension of the Regiments discipline code. In some regiments mothers were forbidden to discuss any grievance with the Schoolmistress, any complaints having to be made by the father to their commanding officer. If children arrived late to school, the parents would be reported to the commanding officer.

Enlistment of the boys, after leaving school, was not compulsory, but the education system which they had been through was designed to indoctrinate them into following that course.

#### **Wives role of Supporting the Family and the Regiment.**

In order to increase the income to the family, it was expected that the soldiers wife would carry out paid work. As well as increasing the family income, it also provided the regiment with a valuable source of labour. The 'paid work' undertaken by the wives, included washing, cleaning, cooking, serving and sewing. Women of 'better character', the wives of NCOs<sup>16</sup>, were officers servants, nurses, midwives and schoolmistresses.

Wives were paid a ha'penny a day (a penny a day for mounted soldiers) per man for taking in the washing and carrying out repairs for single soldiers, each wife would look after as many as 6 to 10 single soldiers. Wives employed as the servants of officers could earn as much as a shilling a day for washing and mending clothes and cleaning of the officers quarters.

Out work from the Armies clothing factory in Pimlico, paid army wives and daughters the rate of eight pence ha'penny to sew an army shirt. In 1879 3,500 army wives and daughters were employed in this way, although 1,100 were those who were garrisoned within the London district. Some of the garrison towns employed wives in specialist sewing tasks, such as the repairing of tents and bedding for the Aldershot garrison (which paid a shilling a day), and the sewing of cartridge bags for the Woolwich garrison.

In 1880 Lady Strangford formed an association for the instruction of soldiers wives in general nursing, so that they could be employed in the Army hospitals. By 1881 classes were being held at Sandhurst, Taunton, Woolwich, Newport and Portsmouth. Wives were also trained as midwives and by 1881 500 wives had been trained as midwives, and many of them had been posted to India with their husbands were they attended the wives of both the men and the officers.

**Table A - Married NCOs' and Married Privates' Rooms**

Item	No.	Notes
Basins, iron, galvanised, or zinc, 14in wash-hand	1	
Bedsteads, iron, barrack	2	
Bellows	1	When turf or wood is issued as fuel.
Blankets	4†	
Boards, inventory	1	
Boxes, cast-iron, coal, 130lb.	1	
Brushes, hand, scrubbing	1	
Brushes, sweeping, long-handled, complete	1	
Candlesticks, iron, galvanised	1	When gas or oil is not supplied.
Cans, tin, soup, or water	1	
Cases, bolster	2§†	
Cases, paillasse	2§†	
Chairs, officers', or Windsor *	2	For schoolmasters and staff serjeants only, in lieu of forms.
Fenders, serjeants' *	1	
Forms, complete, 4ft. *	1	
Lamps, oil, complete *	1	By special W.O. authority.
Mop, with handle, complete	1	
Pails, wood, water	1	
Pokers, soldiers' *	1/2	According to rooms allotted for which fuel is allowed.
Rugs, barrack (or 3rd blankets when the store of rugs has become exhausted)	2†	
Sheets, hospital pattern †	2†	
Shovels, fire, soldiers' *	1/2	According to rooms allotted for which fuel is allowed.
Stools, serjeants' *	2	
Straps, leather, bed	1	If required.
Tables, soldiers', complete, 4ft *	1	
Tongs, fire, soldiers'	1/2	According to rooms allotted where turf is allowed as fuel.
Trays, wood, or tubs, iron, galvanized, coal	1	
Tubs, wood, washing, 8 gallons, 21½ in	1	Where there is no suitable washhouse provided.

\* When schoolmasters are married, a second set of the articles marked will be supplied if required.

† Schoolmasters and staff serjeants, when single, one set of bedding only.

‡ Sheets, barrack linen, will be issued for single men, and when extra bedding is down for children.

§ Hair beds, bolsters, and slip cases will be issued at authorised home and foreign stations.

NB. Extra bedsteads and bedding may be issued

**Table B - Soldiers' Gardens**

Item	No.	Notes
Axe, pick	1	For every 24 men having ground allotted.
Barrow, wheel, stable	1	Ditto
Board, inventory	1	To be kept in QM store
Dibble, garden	1	For every 12 men having ground allotted.
Fork, agricultural, 3-pronged, handled	1	Ditto
Hoes, handled, grubbing 3 lbs.	1	Ditto
Hoes, handled, large or garden	1	Ditto
Hoes, handled, small or Dutch, weeding	1	Ditto
Mattock, 6 lbs, helved	1	Ditto
Pots, tin, watering, large	1	Ditto
Pots tin, watering, small	1	Ditto
Rakes, iron, garden, 10-inch	1	Ditto
Rakes, iron, garden, 15-inch	1	Ditto
Reels, garden, with line	1	Ditto
Spades, helved, common	1	Ditto
Trowels, garden	1	Ditto

NCO's wives could also be trained as Schoolmistresses. Before a woman could be employed as a regimental or garrison schoolmistress she would first have to undertake six to twelve months training at an institution recognised by the Army. As well as the trained Schoolmistresses, untrained Army wives were also employed as assistants to the Schoolmistresses. In 1865, 443 female teachers were employed in the Army's schools, of which 209 were trained schoolmistresses.

#### **Officers' Ladies**

So far we have concerned ourselves with the married life for the rank and file, now to briefly mention the wives of officers and their relationship with the wives of the other ranks. There were no regulations controlling marriage within the officer class, but the informal rule followed was that 'subalterns must not marry, captains may marry, majors should marry and colonels must marry'.

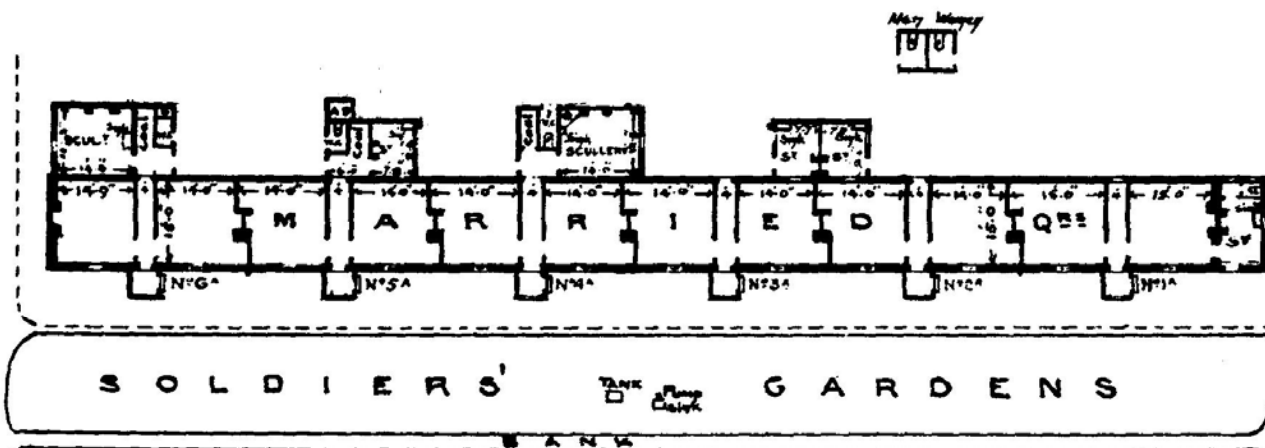
Life within the regiment tended to model that of the aristocratic family, with the colonel and the colonel's wife at the head of the family as Lord and benevolent Lady. The Colonel's Lady together with the other officers ladies took on benevolent acts such as the establishment of regimental libraries, they were expected to visit the other ranks married quarters and take an active interest in the welfare of the families. Army Officers and Ladies helped launch and run charitable organisations such as SSFA (The Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association formed in 1885), The National Association for the Employment of Reserve and Discharged Soldiers (1885) and the Army Temperance Association (1893). These charitable organisations had aims of improving the lot for the common soldier and his family.

#### **Married Soldiers and the Forts**

The four plans of the Fort Nelson married quarters give us a good idea of the layout of Army married quarters.

During the 1870s, just after the building of Fort Nelson, a block of six purpose built single storey married quarters were built on the opposite side of the Military Road from the Fort. These Quarters were known as 'Nelson Cottages', and were six 'A' Type married quarters, see plan I for details. With the upgrade to Fort Nelson, in the early years of the twentieth century, to enable it to accommodate a Heavy RGA Battery, an additional married quarter (7A) was provided by converting three rooms at the western end of the upper storey of the barrack block, see plan II for details. Some time in the 1920s the married quarters were again changed, with the disuse of the quarter within the Fort and the conversion of 'Nelson Cottages' to four 'B' Type married quarters, see plan III for details. The final addition to the Fort Nelson married quarters buildings took place in the last war with the building of a 'C' Type married quarter (outside the East Gate) now known as the 'Bungalow', see plan IV for details.

When looking at 'Nelson Cottages' they reflect very well the picture painted by the Navy & Army Illustrated article. Each Quarter had a living room and bedroom, each 14 feet by 15 feet, the height of the rooms was 9 feet 9 inches, which gave a volume of nearly 2,000 cubic feet. In addition to the two 'living' rooms each cottage had a Scullery (of varying sizes, with most built onto the back of the main block), an entrance porch, and a hallway between the front and back doors (except quarter No. 1A). Four of the cottages had their own WC (No. 1A had a toilet located inside) and the other two shared a communal block. Three of the cottages also had a coal store. The two living rooms and the scullery had a fireplace and all cottages had a water supply. The block of cottages was surrounded by a gravelled area, with a path leading up to the Military Road, on the south side of the cottages was a large soldiers' garden.

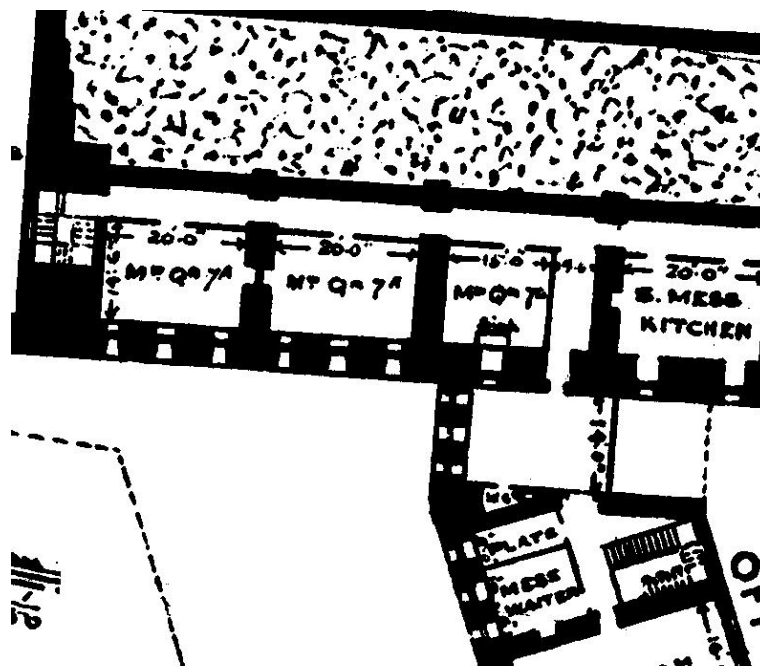


To summarise this article we will now look at the population census returns as these give a good idea to how the forts were inhabited. Table C gives population totals for some of the Portsmouth Forts. To summarise these figures. It can be seen that some of the forts (Wallington, Nelson, Southwick, Widley, Purbrook and Gilkicker) for most of the time had very few soldiers and high numbers of civilian males and females, this reflects the care & maintenance status in which the hill forts were held, together with their low status within the defences of Portsmouth. The Spithead sea forts had very few civilians (only Master Gunner Sutherland's wife Annie in 1881). Although they had no officers, they were manned by a greater number of NCOs and gunners; again on a care & maintenance basis. But the greater man-power indicates that the sea forts were of a higher status than the Hill forts in the defences of Portsmouth. Looking at the two Gosport forts (Forts Brockhurst and Gomer) it can be seen that they had both officers as well as a large number of soldiers, this reflected the more active role of these forts within the British Army.

families of the Armys civilian staff<sup>18</sup>. Unlike the idyllic picture painted by Red Cross, the Army did not provide accommodation to suite the size of your family, the families were put into what ever accommodation was available. As can be seen with the Fort Nelson returns for 1881, things must have been pretty cramped in the Martin and Hannant households, though two empty cottages and an empty fort existed nearby! It is surprising that a single man Barrack Colour Sergeant Collins was accommodated in the Married Quarters, the other surprising fact which can be deduced is that the Army was happy for lodgers to be taken as well as over age children to still be in residence.

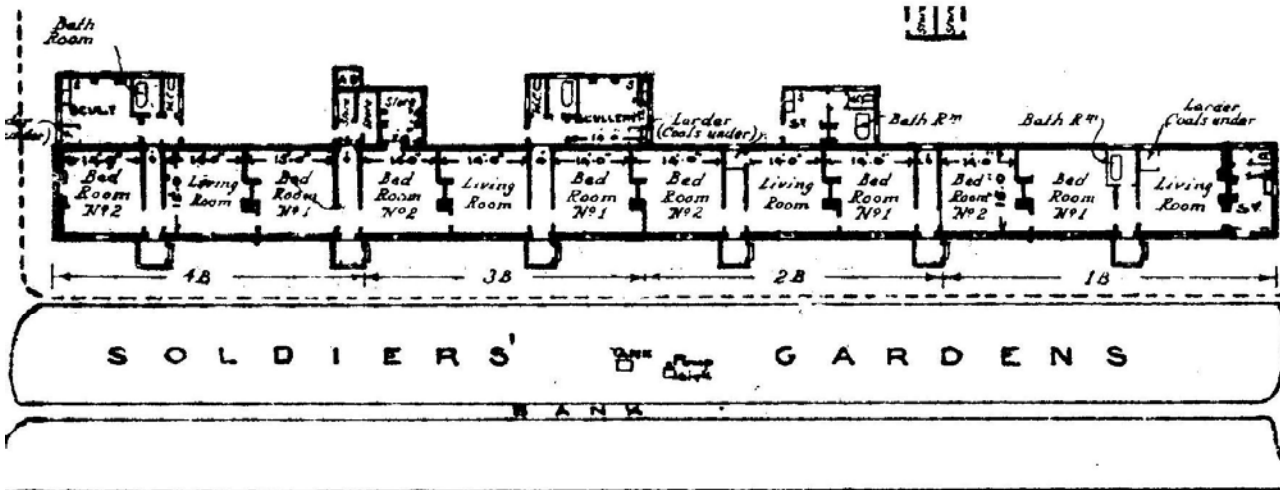
Plan I  
Fort Nelson  
Married  
Quarters  
(Nelson  
Cottages)

Plan II  
Fort Nelson  
Married  
Quarter 7A



To try and give an insight into life as a married soldier we will now look into a few of the detailed census returns<sup>17</sup> for the Forts:

Firstly, looking at the detailed returns for Fort Nelson (Tables D & E). It can be seen that as well as Soldiers the married quarters were also used for



Plan III  
Fort Nelson  
Married  
Quarters  
(Nelson  
Cottages)

When looking at the 1891 returns for Fort Southwick (Table F) it can be seen that married quarters were not allocated by the size of the family, but more likely on a first come first served basis. As a 'B' Type quarter has been allocated to Plumber/ Royal Artillery Pensioner Daniel Cleary and his wife, whereas the Fort Caretaker Thomas Graham, wife Fanny and daughter Annie had to make do with an 'A' Type quarter. It can be seen that Robert Hannant has now retired from the Royal Artillery and has left the Married Quarters at Fort Nelson and has taken up the post of a general labourer for Fort Southwick<sup>19</sup>. I am not sure why the Army had need of a 67 year old Shepherd Labourer - this may have been a mistake of the census recorder!

When looking at the details for the sea forts it appears that by 1891 the Army saw these establishments as far too hostile and remote environment for a soldiers family. In the case of Horseshands Fort, the 22 man garrison

included Master Gunner Edward Misen who was indicated as married but his family must have been receiving the separation allowance. The same must have been true for a married Sergeant and two married Corporals who were part of the 47 strong Nomans Land Fort garrison.

Finally, looking at Fort Gomer, it seems that the Fort Gomer garrison were more reflective of an Army regiment with very few families. When looking at the details (in Tables G and H) it can be seen that as well as the minimal civilian caretaker staff there were few married soldiers. Master Gunner James Francis and Soldier Henry Hall were the only married soldiers with families in residence in 1881. It can be deduced that the Master Gunner and the four gunners must have been part of Fort Gomer's caretaker staff, and that the officers and soldiers were part of a regiment billeted in the fort. As one of the other soldiers was married (but without his family) it gives us a 1.8% married role for the visiting regiment.

Plan IV  
Fort Nelson  
The  
Bungalow



C. TYPE M.S. QR.

Looking at the 1891 returns, they show only two married soldiers, John Cross and Thomas Coltman, and only civilian caretaker staff. Amongst the other 236 soldiers, 8 were listed as married (but without their families), this gives us a 4.2% married role for the visiting regiment. Both the 1881 and the 1891 percentages are well below the authorised limit. As for the reason for so few families inhabiting the fort, with other married men present, it must be assumed that the shortage of Married Quarters within the fort caused the separation of married soldiers from their families. It is also interesting to try to work out how the Army supported Charlotte Smith's family, as the only link seems to be through the daughter Martha who was the Officers Mess Caterer.

I will now leave it to the reader to decide whether *"the life of the soldier married with leave is a decidedly comfortable one"*?

**Notes**

1. Douglas Jerrold - This gentleman was an dramatist, journalist and raconteur in the early half of the nineteenth century. I have not managed to find the text from which this quote came, but another Douglas Jerrold quote was *"The best thing I know between France and England is - the sea"*.
2. No prettier sight - sounds ghastly to me!

3. The minimum standards for the infantry where 5 feet 4 inches in height, 33 inch chest measurement and weight of 8 stone 3 pounds (or 162.5cm, 84cm and 52Kg respectively in new Money). The Anthropometric committee of 1883 calculated that the average stature of an 18 year old boy was 5 feet 7 inches in height, 34 inch chest and 9 stone 11 pounds in weight. The minimum height standards for Garrison Artillery gunners in 1894 were 5 feet 7 inches.
4. A shilling for the youth of today was twelve pence, and twenty shillings made a pound. Therefore a shilling is 5 pence in today's money and a penny is 'bugger all' - so much for inflation!
5. In 1870 Good Conduct stripes were earned after 2, 6, 12, 18, 23 and 26 years, this changed in 1876 to 2, 5, 12, 16, 21 and 26 years service.
6. See Redan 46 page 9 for a complete list of Necessaries.
7. Lance Corporal in the infantry, was the equivalent of Bombardier in the Artillery.
8. Maintain the effectiveness of a soldier - to control the drunkenness of the soldier. It was always the case that excess pay went on liquor!
9. Up until 1873 a soldier received the protection of the Army from any claims on him from a women and family thrown upon the benevolence of the Parish Poor House, upon the disappearance

**Table C - Fort Populations**

	1871	1881	1891	1901*	1911*
Fort Wallington		2or, 4m, 4f	3or, 7m, 13f	6or, 1m, 7f	
Fort Nelson		2or, 16m, 10f	3or, 3m, 6f	1or, 4m, 10f	112s, 4m, 2f
Fort Southwick	1or, 2m, 3f	uninhabited	1or, 8m, 10f	3or, 1f	10s, 2m, 1f
Fort Widley	1or, 3m, 2f	2 or, 1m, 2f	8or, 4m, 5f	12or, 7m, 13f	91s, 9m, 22f
Fort Purbrook		2or, 4m, 6f	5or, 5m, 3f	6or, 5m, 7f	165s, 6m, 11f
Spithead Sea Forts		45or, 1f	92or	95or	54s
Fort Gilkicker †	2or, 5m, 4f	2o, 94 or, 4m, 6f	7or, 1m, 2f	11or, 1m, 1f	61s, 12m, 11f
Fort Brockhurst ‡	not reviewed	5o, 192 or, 57m, 55f	2o, 234 or, 18m, 29f	1o, 105 or, 39m, 98f	238s, 19m, 33f
Fort Gomer	not reviewed	4o, 115 or, 6m, 13f	4o, 238 or, 7m, 15f	6o, 224 or, 3m, 17f	259s, 7m, 14f

**Notes:** o=officers, or=other ranks, m=males, f=females, s=officers & men.

\* The details of the 1901 and 1911 surveys have not yet been released, the summaries released are not necessary complete.

† The figures for Fort Gilkicker in 1911 included those for Fort Monckton.

‡ The figures for Fort Brockhurst in 1901 and 1911 included those for Fort Elson.

**Table D - 1881 Nelson Cottages - Fort Nelson**

Living Rooms	Head	Wife	Children	Notes
2	Labourer John Martin - 40	Esther - 38	Alice - 15, John - 13, William - 11, Frederick - 8, Albert - 4, Stephen - 4, Arthur - 1	Labourer William Reeves a lodger also lived in the household
2	Gunner Robert Hannant - 46	Mary - 37	Robert - 15, William - 13, Charles - 12, George - 8, Rosey - 9, Brysman - 7, Frederick - 5, Alice - 4, Emma - 2, Henry - 11mo	The last three children were born in the parish of Boarhunt
2	Bk. Labourer John Demsey - 54	Johhanm - 42	Margaret - 17, Maria - 14	
2	Gunner William Springhall - 38	Victoria - 38		

**Table E - 1891 Nelson Cottages - Fort Nelson**

Living Rooms	Head	Wife	Children	Notes
2	Bk. Clr. Sgt John Collins - 4			
2	Gunner Thomas Cooper - 38	Alice - 28	Thomas - 3, Alice - 10mo	
2	Gunner Robert Vincent - 32	Bessie - 24	Ellen - 1	
2	Caretaker Robert Palmer - 54	Eliza - 49	Eliza - 16, Alfred - 9	

**Table F - 1881 Fort Southwick**

Living Rooms	Head	Wife	Children	Notes
3	Gen. Lab. Robert Hannant -56	Mary - 47	George - 18, Emma - 12, Henry -10, Alfred - 9, Maude - 7, Rose - 3	Rose was born in Southwick, Alfred and Maudein Boarhunt
2	Bk. Lab. John Osborne - 31	Annie - 27	Mary - 5	
3	Plumber Pen. Daniel Cleary - 49	Annie - 37		
1	Gunner David Pease? - 50	Eliza - 35	Thomas Bates (adopted) - 6	Couldn't read the name!
2	Caretaker Thomas Graham - 50	Fanny - 37	Annie - 8	
	Shepherd / Labourer George Philips - 67		Charlotte - 24, Kate - 12	

**Table G - 1881 Fort Gomer**

Head	Wife	Children	Notes
Mrs. Charlotte Smith - 74		Martha - 39, Harriet - 40, William - 57, Alice - 9, Edith - 6	Mrs. Smith was a widow, Alice and Edith were granddaughters, Martha was the Officers' Mess Caterer
Canteen Steward George Leader - 44		Emma - 16, James - 13, Mary - 12	Widower
Master Gunner James Francis - 44	Louisa - 38	Annie - 10, Florence - 8, James - 7, Elsie - 5, John - 2, Mabel - 1	
4 gunners			All single
Soldier Henry Hall - 35	Elizabeth - 35		
1 Major, 2 Lieutenants, 1 Surgeon and 110 soldiers			1 of the soldiers was married

**Table H - 1891 Fort Gomer**

Head	Wife	Children	Notes
Canteen Steward John James - 44	Sarah - 42	Amy - 17, John - 13, Thomas - 11, Constance - 9, Alfred - 7, Amilia - 2, Annie - 1	Agnes McAvoy - 74 was also listed in the household
7 Civilian Domestics (1 male and 6 females)			all single
Soldier John Cross - 40	Ann - 39	John - 11, Tom - 8, Eve - 3	
Soldier Thomas Coltman - 27	Amy - 24		
4 Officers, 236 soldiers			8 of the soldiers were married

- into the Army of the bread winner.
10. 'Home' meant either the place of marriage or the place where her husband enlisted.
  11. Sidney Herbert was Secretary of State for War in the 1860's.
  12. From the 1860's the Army started to provide Garrison Female Hospitals, although by 1883 only ten of the major British Garrison towns had separate hospitals for women and children.
  13. Children were defined as boys under the age of 14 years and girls under the age of 16 years.
  14. Separation allowances were paid for periods of separation greater than four days.
  15. The *Red Cross* article, stated a 5½ pound joint of meat every two days for a soldier and family with five children, for this arithmetic to work *Red Cross* must have used a meat ration of 1 pound per day per man.
  16. Long live the British Class system!
  17. The detailed census form has columns for recording: place, whether inhabited, number of rooms if less than 5, name & surname, relation to head of the family, sex, age, profession and place of birth. But many recorders did not bother to complete all of

these columns. Also the entry for occupation varied with the census recorders. E.g. 1891 Fort Purbrook shows that Gunner 19 Bty SDRA J. Rivett and wife Mary Ann were in residence, where as the 1891 recorder for Fort Gomer just listed the occupation of 238 men as 'soldiers'!

18. The civilian positions of Barrack Labourer, Labourer and Fort Caretaker were generally given to ex-soldiers when they had retired from Army life.
19. Looking at the places of birth for Robert Hannants' children, it can be reasoned that Mr. Hannant must have left Fort Nelson (and the Army?) sometime between 1884 and 1888.

#### Sources

The Navy and Army Illustrated, Volume II, 18th. September 1896.  
 Revised Schedules of Barrack Furniture, &c, - 1880.  
 Population Census Survey - 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.  
 Women of the Regiment, by Myra Trustram, Cambridge University Press.  
 The Late Victorian Army 1868 - 1902, by Edward M. Spiers, Manchester University Press.



A married soldier's Christmas