

“New Audit Finds Problems in Military Pay”
Testimony of
Mr. Kirk Zecchini, LTC US Army Reserve Control Group (Reinforcement)
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Chairman Platts, Chairman Carper, Ranking Members Towns and Brown, and members of the two Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning.

During the span of my military career covering 28 years mostly as a member the Ohio Army National Guard, I have personally experienced a wide variety of military pay problems. Serving as a traditional Guardsman, full-time active duty soldier, and as a Federal Technician has provided me with a broad range of opportunities and challenges.

In my experience in the military, pay problems are considered a normal part of Army life. Early in my career as a Second Lieutenant, I was mentored to keep a running travel log to track my pay, allowances, per diem and travel costs. This guidance proved to be valuable as I began to perform more frequent Temporary Duty and additional duties with the Ohio Army National Guard and travel vouchers were sometimes lost or misrouted during processing. For the most part, situations like this were easily fixed at the unit level as long as I could reproduce the original claim documents (i.e. orders, pay voucher, receipts, etc).

Later as a field grade officer, my pay problems became more complex during my first deployment to Afghanistan in 2003. My original mobilization order was not to exceed 180 days but I volunteered to extend for an additional 6 months. The extension order was published but my military pay stopped promptly at the end of my original order. It took approximately 1.5 months to have this issue resolved while I continued to perform in Afghanistan without pay.

Immediately following my combat tour in Afghanistan, I began a series of missions throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific Rim performing Humanitarian Assistance and Humanitarian Civic Assistance in various developing countries. Several of the countries in which I worked were designated for special allowances such as “Hostile Fire Pay” and “Hardship Duty Location Pay” which varied by amount per location. These pay types were not familiar to me. Upon my return to Ohio in August of 2004, I inquired with my unit pay clerk about being paid the additional allowances but this was new terrain to the unit as well so my inquiry was sent up the chain of command to the Ohio Army National Guard state headquarters for review by Military Pay and ultimately to the Comptroller.

After several months of emails and non-action, I created a spreadsheet which reflected duty locations, orders, dates, allowances, pay, and per diem. All entries were color coded to reflect status of payment. Several more months went by until I finally had to write a memo to the Ohio Inspector General requesting assistance. I eventually got paid for all requested allowances in late 2005 while deployed in Iraq approximately 1.5 years after performance of duty.

During my deployment to Iraq in 2005-2006, I was assigned to an Active Duty unit along with a team of ten other Ohio National Guardsmen. Our parent unit from Ohio was located in Baghdad while my team was deployed North in Tikrit. Three or four months into our deployment, we were notified that some particular tax was being withheld and that we all needed to complete additional paperwork in order to have the money refunded and the withholding to cease. This process was neither simple nor convenient while working in an austere environment.

Dealing with pay problems while in a combat zone is not something that anyone should have to worry about yet this was my second episode in as many tours.

Since resigning and receiving an Honorable Discharge from the Ohio Army National Guard in June of 2011, my pay problems have continued. Just last week I received a Leave and Earnings Statement for performance of duty on 5 January 2012, only to learn that the checking account number was entered incorrectly so my pay was not deposited into my bank account. I just heard yesterday, two and a half months later, from the US Army Reserve Finance Office that they think they resolved the situation. I have also recently received four separate notices from DFAS indicating a debt collection but there is no indication of the reason or how I should contest these erroneous claims. These debt collections seem to have been initiated by the Ohio Army National Guard even though I have not been a part of this organization since June 2011.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to testify this morning. Now that my eldest son is serving proudly in Afghanistan, I am especially interested to see that he and his fellow Soldiers are taken care of properly while performing their duties and without the distractions of pay problems. He loves being a Soldier as much as I always have and I want nothing more than to see him home again safely. It's all about taking care of Soldiers.