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“The Cheapest Pay”: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army



Paul E. Kopperman

DRUNKENNESS was epidemic in the British Army during the eighteenth century. Alcohol abuse was regularly blamed for poor performance by the soldiery, for undermining morals and discipline, and for shortening lives. In consequence, there were frequent campaigns against it. Almost invariably, however, such efforts failed to reduce drinking significantly. The ready availability of alcohol limited prospects for success, but equally problematic was the ambivalence that many officers in command positions displayed regarding liquor. The aim of this article is to account for the officers' unwillingness to confront what most of them considered to be a significant problem.

Eighteenth-century British soldiers had little difficulty in obtaining liquor. Sutlers were free to provide it, barring the issuance of specific orders to the contrary. Soldiers' wives often sold it, with or without permission, and troops regularly obtained it from locals, whether in taverns or shops or through dealings on the street. Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and even commissioned officers sold alcoholic beverages to the men, and occasionally they were even licensed to produce them.¹ In gar-

1. On soldiers' wives and the liquor trade, see Paul E. Kopperman, "The British High Command and Soldiers' Wives in America, 1755–1783," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 60 (1983): 23. A reference to soldiers who "Brew Drink" is included in an order of 5 December 1742; Additional MSS 41,144, f. 47, British Library, London (hereafter cited as "BL"). In a petition drawn 2 August 1757, sixty-seven men of the 40th Foot claimed that their commanding officer had for several years been limiting their provisions, while at the same time encouraging them to buy his rum; Loudoun Papers, LO 4028, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter cited as "HL").

rierson towns, soldiers sometimes hired on as part-time laborers, and in many cases their civilian employers paid them in liquor.²

The army itself was another major source of spirits. Liquor was often given to the troops before battle, to heighten their belligerency and steady their nerves, or after, to celebrate a victory. For example, British troops were provided a gill of “rum extraordinary” just before and just after the Battle of Quebec, and Cornwallis issued extra rum to his troops at James City Island on 4 July 1781, when a battle seemed imminent.³ Officers might issue liquor in order to ingratiate themselves with the troops. Any cause for celebration, such as notice of a royal birth or the anniversary of some special event, could be the occasion for a gift of liquor.⁴

Drunkenness in the ranks was common long before the eighteenth century, and it was sometimes facilitated by a ration, mainly of beer and ale, or occasionally wine. Including spirits in the ration appears to have been unusual, although brandy and whiskey were sometimes provided. Soldiers who wanted stronger drink usually had to obtain it through purchase, barter, or theft.⁵ It is probable that during the eighteenth century the amount of liquor distributed in the form of a ration increased markedly in the army at large. This was clearly the case in America. During the French and Indian War, rum rations seem to have been reserved for special situations, particularly those that prompted fatigue or were thought to be unhealthful. In June 1760, Major-General Thomas Gage ordered that the men at Montreal were to “have rum given to them as for the other services, that is when the weather is bad, the service may

2. Robert Hamilton, *Duties of a Regimental Surgeon Considered* (London, 1787), 1: 20.

3. Add. 42,449, f. 74, BL; John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the Years 1757, 1758, 1759 and 1760*, ed. Arthur G. Doughty, Champlain Society, *Publications* 9 (1915): 104, 107. (Note: This Knox volume will hereafter be cited as “Knox, 2”; “Knox, 1” refers to Champlain vol. 8.) After the battle of Camden, Cornwallis ordered a *feu de joie* and “A Double Allowance of Rum”; Orderly Book #4 (Cornwallis, 8 February–13 July 1781; MS orderly books will hereafter be cited “OB”), order of 14 May, Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited as “CL”). The Duke of Cumberland provided brandy for his troops after Culloden; order of 16 April 1746, Add. 36,257, f. 58, BL.

4. See MS #7606–7 (OB, 27 September–16 October 1761) re. Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick’s “Gratification to the Troops,” National Army Museum, London (hereafter cited “NAM”); and order of 10 June on Cumberland’s provision of brandy to the troops, Add. 36,257, f. 118, BL.

5. On drink and drunkenness in British armies prior to 1714, see Christopher Allmand, *Henry V* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 217–18; C. G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth’s Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 88, 90; John Childs, *The Army of Charles II* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 127–29, 216–17; R. E. Scouller, *The Armies of Queen Anne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 223, 230–31.

require it, and circumstances permit it. But they are not to expect rum as their right.”⁶ The previous year, a rum ration had been allowed to the troops at Quebec, and on 22 November Viscount George Townshend, wishing to counter complaining in the ranks, informed the men that their rations were being augmented and included “the Jill of Rum which is Given to the men gratis.”⁷

By the outbreak of the American War of Independence, however, the rum ration appears to have been more common and not to have been linked to special circumstances. In January 1776, Sir William Howe, the commander in chief, ordered, “When Working parties of any sort receive Rum from those that employ them, they are not to be drawn for by the Corps, nor to receive Rum in double Capacity.”⁸ The implication of the order would seem to be that the corps were regularly drawing rum for the troops. According to a report that Daniel Wier, the commissary general, prepared in August 1781, the “regular allowance of Rum to the soldiers” began only after Howe’s army sailed from Halifax toward New York, in June 1776.⁹ His comment should not be taken to mean that providing the men with rum was unusual during the first year of the war, though it may have been sporadic. In any case, by the summer of 1776 British soldiers in America were regularly being provisioned with rum. Generally, the ration appears to have been a gill of rum per day—about one gallon per month. On 1 April 1780, Gregory Townsend, the adjutant commissary general, reported that there were 12,630 gallons of rum available for

6. *Journals of the Hon. William Hervey, in North America and Europe, from 1755 to 1814; With Order Books at Montreal, 1760–1763* (Bury St. Edmunds, England: Paul & Mathew, 1906), 68. Also because of perceived health risks, men on transports normally received one gill of rum per day; account of provisions by Daniel Wier (commissary general), June? 1757, LO 6564, HL. Although rum rations may not have become standard until after 1760, the amounts purchased earlier by the army to distribute to the troops were considerable. On 4 January 1756, Major-General Sir William Shirley, who was serving as commander in chief of the British forces in North America, ordered purchasers to secure 51,328 gallons of rum, “3000 Gallons of which is to be good West India Rum.” LO 479, HL.

7. Townshend Papers, Townshend’s OB, Quebec, 21 September 1759–27 May 1760, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (hereafter cited as “NAC”). The ration had apparently been instituted on 14 September (the day after the decisive battle), at least in part because of the fatiguing duty faced by the troops. Northcliffe Collection, vol. 23, Monckton’s OB, 4 August–20 September 1759, NAC.

8. *General Sir William Howe’s Orderly Book, at Charlestown, Boston, and Halifax, June 17 1775 to 1776 26 May*, ed. B. F. Stevens (London, 1890), 189, order of 3 January 1776. As of 2 May 1775, Howe was allowing men in working parties two gills of rum per day: John Barker, *The British in Boston: Being the Diary of Lieutenant John Barker of the King’s Own Regiment from November 15, 1774 to May 31, 1776*, ed. Elizabeth E. Dana (1924; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 41.

9. *Proceedings of a Board of General Officers of the British Army at New York, 1781*, New York Historical Society, *Collections*, 1916, 81.

the 10,000 men present in the camp at Charles Town Neck and estimated that this would last for 30 days; on 20 April, he noted that 28,733 gallons were present, enough for 68 days.¹⁰ Both reports provide a monthly average of slightly more than one gallon, but since extra rum might have been provided for any of a host of reasons, such as fatigue duty or the observance of special occasions, Townsend's estimates suggest that in that region a gill-per-day ration was indeed the norm. At the same time in the Leewards, however, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Boycott of the 91st Foot was providing his men with a rum ration of a half-pint.¹¹ It may indeed be that in the West Indies and in Canada the troops received more rum from the army, whether in standard rations or in special allowances, for it was widely believed that liquor protected the body against heat and cold alike. The range and the rigors of weather across the span of territory in which the army served attracted the unfavorable attention of many Europeans, and some linked it to the heavy drinking that they associated with the New World. As an anonymous German officer wrote from New York in October 1780, "This is a bad country, this America, where you always have to drink, either to get warm, or to get cool."¹²

Rum was the main, perhaps the only, form of spirits to be issued in America, and soldiers seem to have preferred it for purchase as well. Whiskey appears to have been a popular spirit among troops in Britain and perhaps even more so in Ireland, and gin was regularly consumed by most soldiers, except in America. Whether the purchaser was the army or soldiers themselves, cost and availability were probably most influential in determining the choice of beverage. Cost may have helped to determine not only which spirit the men were likely to drink in a given region, but also how much they tended toward hard liquor, as opposed to malt beverages. Rum was cheap in America—notoriously so in the West Indies—while in India a soldier could, at the same price, purchase significantly more arrack than beer.¹³

10. Clinton Papers 91:5, 93:33, CL. These figures gibe with a Treasury account that 550,000 gallons would serve the army—36,000 men—for one year. See R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775–1783* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 31 n. 51.

11. Noted in order of 25 June 1780, Boycott OB, CL. Edward E. Curtis estimates the ration in America to have been $1\frac{1}{3}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ gills per day; *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (1926; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire: EP Publishing Ltd., 1972), 91–92. The norm was probably closer to one gill.

12. *Letters from America: Being Letters of Brunswick, Hessian, and Waldeck Officers with the British Armies During the Revolution*, trans. Ray W. Pettengill (1924; reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1964), 230.

13. As of 1845, three pints of arrack cost only slightly more than one bottle of beer; see Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army*

The army's liquor ration was generally exceeded by that of the navy, where a pint of wine or a half-pint of brandy or of rum (served as grog) was the standard daily allowance, with a gallon of beer serving instead on short voyages. As contemporaries recognized, however, naval officers had an easier time supervising the drinking habits of their men, for the sailors were confined aboard ship for long stretches.¹⁴ By contrast, soldiers usually had access to liquor. Not only were they ashore, but they tended to be in or near towns, often for months at a time, and so had ample opportunity to learn where to obtain liquor most cheaply.

The ready availability of liquor naturally promoted drunkenness. Indeed, it is possible that most soldiers were habitual drunkards. Early in the Flanders campaign of 1744, John Hawkins, a surgeon's mate in the army hospital, observed "the [British] Recruits reeling about continually drunk with Gin brandy &c that they got at Bruges."¹⁵ Another surgeon, William Dent, who was stationed at St. Vincent, commented in 1819, "Rum is as cheap as Ale in England the Soldiers consequently always drunk, which is the cause of all the Sickness in the West Indies."¹⁶ In a letter written in September 1798, Lord Castlereagh claimed that English troops were more prone to abusing whiskey than were the Irish. On the other hand, shortly thereafter John Bell, a former regimental surgeon,

1830–1854 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 66. In orders mentioning specific spirits, gin was the one most often referred to, except in America. MS #7712–48 (OB, 96th Foot, India, 1763–64), order #40, NAM; MSS #KO 880/6 (OB, Flanders), order of 6 August 1748, Lancaster Museum. Several lists of prices charged by sutlers for wine, beer, and liquor are extant, e.g., Knox, *Journal*, 2: 19. The inexpensiveness of spirits, as opposed to milder alcoholic beverages, was the subject of widespread concern. Thomas Jefferson commented: "No nation is drunken where wine is cheap; and none sober where the dearness of wine substitutes ardent spirits as the common beverage." Quoted in J. A. De Luca, "The Wine Industry and the Changing Attitudes of Americans: An Overview," *Fermented Food Beverages in Nutrition*, ed. Clifford F. Gastineau, William J. Darby, and Thomas B. Turner (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 188.

14. John Bell, *An Inquiry into the Causes which Produce, and the Means of Preventing Diseases among British Officers, Soldiers, and Others in the West Indies* (London, 1791), 90. Before leaving port, however, sailors were often able to conceal extra liquor on board. On liquor rations in the navy, see Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200–1860: A Social Survey* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1968), 254, 256–57; Christopher Lloyd and Jack L. S. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy, 1200–1900* (Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1961), 3: 88. Leading authorities on naval medicine condemned the grog ration; see Lloyd and Coulter, 3: 356–57.

15. WMS 2788, f. 10, Wellcome Historical Institute, London; cf. Sylvia R. Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 64.

16. Dent to his cousin, 12 August 1819, MS #7088–11, letter #43, NAM.

wrote that Irish recruits often suffered from ulcerated legs, as a result of their heavy drinking, while English troops seldom had ulcers.¹⁷

Since soldiers' pay—eight pence per diem—was almost entirely consumed by stoppages, the men were often unable to pay for liquor out of pocket. Indeed, officers frequently argued that troops should be allowed almost no pocket money, lest they waste it on liquor. But a shortage of cash seems not to have had the desired effect, for the men were prone to barter their provisions or their accoutrements for spirits. Sometimes they stole in order to obtain the necessary money or items for barter. According to Bell, among the regiments stationed in Ireland, "The crimes most commonly committed by the men, were, pledging their necessaries for whisky, and stealing those of their comrades for the same purpose."¹⁸ In the West Indies, where rum was plentiful, another medium of barter became popular: the liquor ration itself. The old rum, which the army usually distributed in preference to new rum—thinking it mellow and less harmful—was often traded in by the men, both because it was unpopular with them, being less potent, and because local merchants were willing to provide in exchange several times the quantity in new rum.¹⁹

Living conditions heightened availability. Typically, the soldier was not to be found in the field, but rather in the more stable environment of garrison or fort, and while there he seldom stayed in barracks. Garrisoned troops were frequently billeted, and in frontier forts and fixed encampments soldiers were sometimes allowed to build and occupy huts or cabins on the periphery. This was especially likely if the men were married, but unmarried soldiers might likewise be granted the privilege.

17. *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross (London, 1859), 2: 408; Bell, *Inquiry*, 138–46. National biases may have influenced these perspectives: Castlereagh was Anglo-Irish; Bell, English. It does appear that the consumption of alcoholic beverages increased in Ireland during the latter half of the century; see George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (1918; reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1977), 212–15, 282–86; note also chap. 4.

18. Bell, *Inquiry*, 66, 70, 133–34. On 15 August 1778, Lieutenant-Colonel Archibald Campbell of the 2/71st Foot admonished his troops that their pocket money would be limited because it was being squandered "on Liquor and Debauchery." Huntington Manuscript 617, HL. In his manual on regimental management, Captain Bennett Cuthbertson wrote, "the less money a Soldier has to spend on drink, the better will be his health, his attendance on duty more punctual, and his dress more becoming"; *A System for the Compleat Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry* (Dublin, 1768), 32. In 1758, Wolfe had recommended that the men pay for their rations, claiming that whatever spending money the men had was squandered on liquor; *ibid.*, 242. On the nature of stoppages, see Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 22–23; Paul E. Kopperman, "The Stoppages Mutiny of 1763," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 69 (1986): 241–43.

19. On the unpopularity of old rum, see Bell, *Inquiry*, 137–38.

Whether in Britain or abroad, barracks life was the exception. Indeed, few regiments possessed permanent structures sufficient to house all soldiers, and many either had no barracks whatever or their facilities were not habitable. Barns and other large structures often housed the troops, but whether the army was stationary or on the march, many men and officers were likely to be billeted in taverns or private homes. Furthermore, messing rules were lax, and soldiers were often left free to eat—and drink—unsupervised.²⁰

The pattern of existence that was typical of the army not only permitted, but encouraged, alcohol abuse. Life in billet, garrison, and fort was dull, often aimless. Bell, who had served in the West Indies, later wrote that soldiers there were bored: “Occasionally mounting guard, attending parade morning and evening, with the injurious and often unnecessary fatigue of a field-day, constitute the whole duty of a soldier in a West India island, even in time of war.” He claimed that this tedious existence greatly contributed to alcohol abuse in the islands, going so far as to advise that raw recruits not be sent there, because they lacked the discipline of veterans and were therefore more likely to become depressed by the tedium and turn to drink.²¹

Concerns over drunkenness in the ranks were common to chaplains, medical personnel, officers, and some soldiers. Clergymen, not surprisingly, cast their position in moral terms, and appeals for temperance were often accompanied by threats that damnation awaited the drinker.²² *The Soldier’s Monitor*, a tract written by Josiah Woodward in 1701 and published in many editions through to the 1830s, appealed not only to the soldiers’ fears, but also to their sense of pride.

Intemperance, wherever it prevails, destroys a Man’s Reason, Honour, and Conscience at once; and opens a wide Gap for any Sin or Folly, though never so monstrous and inhuman, to make its Entrance. It perfectly bereaves the brave Soldier of all that is great and noble in his Character. A very Child exceeds him in Strength, and an Idiot is his Equal in Discretion. . . . And when his Senses return to him, it will be a matter of sore Reflection, to consider that

20. On billeting and messing laxness, see Hamilton, *Duties*, 1: 15–19, 67–68, and Sir John Pringle, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army*, 3d ed. (London, 1761), 112–13. Tightening rules for messing was an objective for many officers, especially during the latter half of the century; Cuthbertson, *System for the Compleat Interior Management*, 31–38, and order of 31 July 1776, OB, 1st Bat. Marines, Halifax, 27 May–9 August 1776, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

21. Bell, *Inquiry*, 34, 91–92, 94–97.

22. A good example is a sermon delivered at Bruges by a regimental chaplain in July 1743. MS #7704–81–1 (Journal of Ensign Hugh McKay), 39–40, NAM.

he shamefully parted with his Manhood, his Honour, and his Innocence, for the inconsiderable Pleasure of a little Drink.²³

The Soldier's Monitor was probably more widely disseminated within the British Army than was any other piece of religious literature. From the time of its publication through the Napoleonic War, it was distributed to soldiers by the thousands, as the result of a combined effort by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the high command. For example, in 1775 the Society donated 3,000 copies for soldiers in America.²⁴

Some soldiers accepted the moralists' message, or in any case practiced temperance. Those who did could play a significant role in shaping the drinking habits of their comrades. According to Bell, "In Britain a soldier has an ample allowance of malt liquor, which, in general, being the drink of those with whom he associates, he consequently has fewer inducements to the use of spirits, and therefore seldom acquires an habit of drinking them to excess."²⁵

Medical opinion also stood against alcohol abuse. Often the complaints of physicians, no less than those of the clergy, were couched in moralistic terms. As Stephen Hales, a clergyman with an interest in medical subjects, claimed, historically the opposition to alcohol abuse had been led by "the physician and the moralist."²⁶ On the whole, however, physicians who wrote on drunkenness focused on the physical, rather than the moral, damage that could be caused by drink. Some noted that liquor itself could be fatal. Bell recalled, "The swallowing of even what may be considered a moderate quantity of new rum, has, (as I have

23. *The Soldier's Monitor. Being Serious Advice to Soldiers, to Behave Themselves with a Just Regard to Religion and True Manhood*, 13th ed. (London, 1823), 13–14. Some regiments, especially the elite ones, also attempted to appeal to the pride of the men. On 29 January 1799, the colonel of the 2d Life Guards told the troops, "Men of Irregular and undisciplined Corps may be guilty of such Crimes through ignorance, but in a regular regiment of Horse or Foot such conduct as drinking under arms would be felt as a disgrace to the regiment. Therefore in a Regiment of Life Guards, where every man is bound to support the character of a Soldier and a Gentleman, such a Crime must be held infamous, and punished in the most exemplary manner": from an orderly book quoted in (Sir) George Arthur, *The Story of the Household Cavalry* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1909), 1: 508.

24. CO 5/254/294, PRO. In another widely read tract, Jonas Hanway condemned drunkenness. See *The Soldier's Faithful Friend. Being Political Moral and Religious Monitions to Officers and Private Men in the Army and Militia* (London, 1766), 2: 25–26.

25. *Inquiry*, 64.

26. *A Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Gin, Brandy, and Other Distilled Liquors. With an Humble Representation of the Necessity of Restraining a Vice so Destructive to the Industry, Morals, Health, and Lives of the People*, 6th ed. (London, 1800), 6.

observed) been followed by almost sudden death.”²⁷ Slow death could likewise result from prolonged drinking, as alcohol damaged the brain, liver, heart, lungs, and stomach. Medical opinion further blamed alcoholic beverages, particularly spirits, for weakening the body’s defenses to disease and contended that moderate drinkers were likely to turn into habitual drunkards.²⁸ Magnifying the physical danger was the fact that much of the liquor that the soldiers obtained privately was improperly distilled or was adulterated. On 2 February 1775, headquarters in Boston ordered the closing of local dram shops, complaining that “two Soldiers have been kill’d (with the Poisonous Liquor they sell).”²⁹ Bell noted that the new rum that the men obtained in quantity in the West Indies was often “of the most execrable quality.” New rum, which was so much preferred by troops, was frequently contaminated with lead.³⁰

That rampant alcohol abuse represented a danger to the army was the conviction of many officers. Bell wrote that his own concerns about the bad effect of habitual drinking had “been confirmed by the testimony of every military man with whom [he had] conversed on the subject.” He noted that the death rates in the army were more than eight times as high in Jamaica during the Seven Years’ War as they were in Germany, and he asked, “To what cause is this . . . to be ascribed, except to the destructive effects of the immoderate use of spirits, in a country where they are so easily procured, and where indolence, inactivity, and consequent languor and dejection of mind, favour their operation in injuring the health?”³¹

Many line officers associated alcohol abuse with high rates of sickness and mortality. In May 1762, the earl of Albemarle reported to Sir Jeffery Amherst from Martinique that “upon my arrival here I found the troops very Sickly, many dead, & the Sick list increasing dayly, chiefly owing to the bad rum they got on shore.” Albemarle added that soldiers who were kept from rum (“that diabolical liquor,” as he called it) remained healthy, even if they had to labor in the heat of the West Indies.³²

Albemarle and others in command positions recognized that drunkenness represented a threat not only to the health of individual soldiers

27. *Inquiry*, 18.

28. *Ibid.*, 7, 15, 35, 58–59; Hales, *Friendly Admonition*, 4–7; Robert Jackson, *A Systematic View of the Formation, Discipline, and Economy of Armies* (London, 1804), 237.

29. MS #7609–3 (OB, 18th Foot, 1774–75); cf. Frederick Mackenzie, *The Diary of Frederick Mackenzie* (1930; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968), 6.

30. Bell, *Inquiry*, 16, 20.

31. *Ibid.*, 37–38, 55.

32. WO 34/54/132 (Amherst Papers), Public Record Office, Kew, London (hereafter cited as “PRO”). Albemarle wrote this before his army was decimated by yellow fever.

but to the efficiency of the army at large, and that it might even affect the course of war. A British expedition that was intended to attack the Spanish West Indies was aborted in 1780 because of illness among the troops, and some observers blamed the outbreak on excessive drinking.³³

Officers were even more concerned by the effect of drunkenness in undermining discipline. Major-General James Wolfe observed, in a May 1758 letter to Lord George Sackville: "Too much rum necessarily affects the discipline of an army. We have glaring evidence of its ill consequences every moment. Sergeants drunk upon duty, two sentries upon their posts and the rest grovelling in the dirt."³⁴ On 10 January 1768, Colonel William Taylor, the commandant at St. Augustine, wrote to Gage, "The Rage of Drinking is so strong that it has introduced a disposition to pilfering to supply them with Rum."³⁵ During the siege of Quebec by the French, in April 1760, Lieutenant John Knox observed, "Immense irregularities are hourly committed by the soldiery, in break-open [sic] store and dwelling houses to get at liquor: this is seemingly the result of panic and despair, heightened by drunkenness."³⁶ As Knox's observation implies, drunkenness not only threatened army discipline, but promoted behavior that could poison civilian-military relations. According to Bell, in Irish towns where malt beverages predominated, the relationship with the townsmen was good, but hostility was the rule where whiskey was readily available.³⁷

There was also the issue of cost. Rum alone cost the army in America seven to eleven shillings per month per man—depending on market prices, the quality of the liquor, and the size of the ration—and even the lower figure was more than the typical soldier received monthly, after stoppages.³⁸ Officers often expressed concern over the expense involved in obtaining alcoholic beverages for their men, and proposed cost-cutting measures.³⁹ The cost factor also limited the willingness to introduce new

33. Bell, *Inquiry*, 11–14.

34. Beckles Willson, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (London: W. Heinemann, 1909), 368.

35. Gage Papers, vol. 73, CL.

36. Knox, *Journal*, 2: 401.

37. Bell, *Inquiry*, 67–68.

38. As of March 1781, the British commissary general in America was paying 6s-6d sterling per gallon for Windward rum, 7s-6d for Jamaican rum; by 20 November, the prices were 11s and 10s, respectively. Note by Peter Paumier, December 1781, Clinton Papers 183:34, CL.

39. For example, Major-General James Grant suggested that port wine could be obtained more cheaply at Madeira than in the West Indies. Letter to Thomas de Grey, London, 3 September 1779, WO 1/683, 3, PRO. Bell proposed (*Inquiry*, 77–83) a scheme for reducing the cost of wine by making use of the shipments that were seized as war prizes. Hamilton commended officers who purchased wine for the troops at their own expense. *Duties*, 1:42.

or larger liquor rations. On 18 November 1765, Gage wrote to Governor George Johnstone of West Florida: "The Troops in those parts had never any Allowance of Rum, Since they were paid Six pence Sterling per Day for their Work, nor do I imagine such a Charge would stand without Questions about it, in the Engineer's Accounts. The Board of Ordnance discountenances all Innovations, and adheres strongly to Old Customs."⁴⁰

Commanding officers were in a position to initiate policies that combatted drunkenness, and many of them did so. Their campaign was run on several levels. A common aim was to prevent unsanctioned liquor from reaching the troops. The number of sutlers was sometimes reduced, or sutlers were barred from selling spirits. Soldiers' wives and noncommissioned officers who were selling liquor to the men might likewise be forbidden to continue. And soldiers might themselves be prohibited from leaving camp without official authorization. Sometimes the campaigns centered on efforts to prevent sentries from drinking while on duty.⁴¹ To encourage healing and also to maintain discipline, special efforts were aimed at preventing sick soldiers from obtaining liquor in hospital, and numerous orders were directed toward keeping alcohol out of the hands of prisoners in the provost.⁴²

Some of the officers were zealous in their efforts, and seem to have aimed to deprive troops of all liquor, or at least such as they themselves did not choose to distribute. Lieutenant-Colonel John Beckwith wrote to Gage on 2 April 1761, from La Prairie, near Montreal: "Some time ago I gave out orders forbidding any persons to sell any Spiritous Liquors to any of the Soldiers on pain of the Severest punishment; . . . I am Convinced Rum is the Bain of the English Army and Could wish there was none Allowed to Come into the Country whilst we remain in it."⁴³ At Quebec, Murray instituted a campaign that was yet more extreme, in that under its provisions the soldiers who obtained liquor, as well as their suppliers, were subject to punishment. Upset by a rash of theft, on

40. Gage Papers, vol. 45, CL.

41. OB, 13 April–19 May 1777, order of 26 April, New York Public Library, Manuscripts Division (hereafter cited as "NYPL"), required NCOs to surrender their licenses to sell liquor and sleep in the barracks. See also HM 617, f. 64 (order of 17 July 1778), ILL; Charles Hamilton, ed., *Braddock's Defeat* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 82 (order of 20 April 1755); Add. 36,255, ff. 5, 125 (orders of 28 April and 20 August 1745), BL.

42. Orders aimed at keeping liquor from the sick include: Add. 36,252, f. 31 (order of 18 October 1742), BL; Add. 41,144, f. 20 (order of 25 September 1742), BL; Boycott OB, order of 4 October 1776, CL; OB 13, order of 4 October 1776, CL. Keeping liquor from getting through to prisoners is the subject of: Add. 36,252, f. 31, order of 18 October 1742, BL; and MS Top. Oxon. d. 224 (record of service of the 52nd Foot), f. 108, order of 14 April 1803, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

43. Gage Papers, vol. 7, CL.

14 November 1759 he canceled all licenses to sell liquor to the troops and ordered, "any soldier that is found drunk will receive twenty lashes per day until he owns where he got the liquor, and his allowance of rum will be stopped for six weeks."⁴⁴

In some cases, the drive against drunkenness was coordinated by the high command. Even before he became commander in chief, in November 1763, Gage pressed a concerted effort to rein in the liquor trade, and he kept a careful watch over its progress. Some of his subordinates, like Beckwith, boasted of their vigilance and success, while others felt the need to defend themselves against a charge of laxity. Among the latter was Captain William Dunbar, who on 7 October 1761 wrote Gage, "You accuse me of permitting Liquors to be sold at Chambli; I must beg leave to inform you that . . . if I found any Soldier presuming to Sell Liquor, he was Severely punish'd, if a woman she was Drum'd out, & many Examples have been made of those men who were found Drunk."⁴⁵ Regardless of whether Dunbar was successful in his campaign, or even avid in its pursuit, other officers were willing and able to crack down on the liquor trade. In January 1760, Lieutenant-Colonel Eyre Massey wrote to Gage that "Capt. [John] Foxen has reported to me, that he has stop'd a great deal of Rum at Fort Herkermer."⁴⁶ Officers could sometimes enlist the aid of the state in their campaign. On 17 August 1767, Gage wrote Lieutenant James Douglass of the 15th Foot, who was commanding at Crown Point, that New York had a law "which inflicts large fines on any People who Sell Rum to Soldiers. You should Endeavour to have this fine levied on all Delinquents [sic]."⁴⁷ Gage appears to have persisted in his efforts and he may have enjoyed some success, for in May 1770 he was writing to the secretary at war, "it had been long customary to give Rum to the Soldiers, on fatiguing Duties . . . tho' I have after some Difficulty, and Time, put an end to that Custom."⁴⁸

Although there were efforts to reduce the amount of liquor getting through to the troops, a second element in the campaign to combat alcohol abuse, that of punishing drunken soldiers, was far more pervasive and persistent. Courts-martial, like common law courts, tended to hold that drunkenness, being a state entered into by free choice, did not mit-

44. Knox, *Journal*, 2:275. Note also (Sir) James Murray, *Governor Murray's Journal of the Siege of Quebec from 18th September, 1759, to 25th May, 1760*, ed. E. C. Kyte (Toronto: Rous & Mann Ltd., 1939), 11.

45. Gage Papers, vol. 8, CL.

46. *Ibid.*, vol. 5.

47. *Ibid.*, vol. 68.

48. Gage to Lord Barrington, New York, 10 May 1770, in *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, and with the War Office and the Treasury 1763–1775*, ed. Clarence E. Carter (1933; reprint, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), 2:540.

igate, but rather aggravated, an offense.⁴⁹ They therefore refused to accept drunkenness as an excuse for misbehavior, even though it was often offered as such. In May 1787, Cornwallis assured one of his subordinates that he approved of a proposed campaign against drunkenness among the troops in India and that he did not perceive “any appearance of a disposition in the court-martial to screen it.”⁵⁰ In campaigns like this one, common soldiers more than officers suffered, although subalterns were on occasion punished for misbehaving when drunk. Noncommissioned officers, on the other hand, were very much at risk, for part of their responsibility was to set an example of behavior for the troops. In an order of 3 March 1780, Boycott specified that the upcoming court-martial of a sergeant was to serve as a “warning and terror” to the other noncommissioned officers of the regiment, to avoid “that odious Vice drunkenness.”⁵¹

Drunkenness was itself regarded as an offense, even when it was not accompanied by misbehavior. Consequently, numerous orders set out punishments, often extra duty or drill, for soldiers who were found to be drunk, particularly at roll-call and church parade.⁵² Compounding the offense of drunkenness was the misbehavior and crime associated with it. Officers took pains to point out to their men the linkage between excessive drinking and the punishments that were regularly meted out to them. On 13 July 1776, soldiers of the 12th Foot, stationed in Gibraltar, were admonished, “few Men are brought to the Halberts, that Drunkenness has not been the Occasion. If the Men will but be Sober, few of them will be punished.” On 30 July they were told, “there are now 18 prisoners in the Regiment, and all of them but one for being Drunk.”⁵³ The disciplinary problem may have been greatest in America, for according to an anonymous observer, “of all the Regiments gone to America before they were Six Months in the country they have had more flogging among them for drunkenness alone, than they would have had in Europe

49. Regarding common law, note (Sir) William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (New York, 1843 ed.), 4:26. Beginning in 1794, American courts by stages came to see drunkenness as reducing culpability, but the change came later in England, and as late as 1820 some British legal authorities were pressing the traditional interpretation; see David McCord, “The English and American History of Voluntary Intoxication to Negate *Mens Rea*,” *Journal of Legal History* 11 (1990): 373–77.

50. *Correspondence of Cornwallis*, 2:266.

51. Boycott OB, CL.

52. E.g., LO 3576, order for 5 July 1757, HL; MS #6807–160 (abstract of standing orders, 19th Foot), order for 23 April 1766, NAM.

53. MS #C/8 (OB, Colling’s company), Suffolk Regimental Museum, Bury St. Edmunds, England. Wellington later observed that drunkenness was “the parent of every other military offence.” See Hew Strachan, *Wellington’s Legacy*, 65, quoting Wellington’s *Despatches*.

for three years all occasion'd by the immense quantity of cheap Rum."⁵⁴

In an order that was read to the 37th Foot in 1774, Lieutenant-Colonel John Pennington summed up the officers' concerns about alcohol abuse, and at the same time warned his troops of the consequences of drunkenness.

Drunkenness is a Vice of all others, the most brutal in its Nature, the most Ruinous in its Consequences, and unfits a man for every station and duty, it is the source of every irregularity, from it Proceeds idleness, slovenliness, neglect of orders, and a total loss of all Military appearance, and character. it breeds disobedience, creates Mutiny, ruins health, and is distructive to the constitutions of men. . . . it is the source of almost every crime the Soldier dose [sic] in generall Committ. Were there no Drunkenness there wd. be but few Courts Martial in the Regiment. The Lieutenant Colo. holds in such abhorrence and detestation this unsoldierlike unmanly Vice, That he solemnly assures the Regiment he will never give his Pardon to any Person who may hereafter be convicted of it.⁵⁵

It is apparent that many officers were deeply concerned by the extent of drunkenness in the army. Nevertheless, beyond attempting to limit the supply of liquor and punishing drunken behavior, few officers did much to ameliorate the problem of alcohol abuse. In an attempt to reduce the impact of the liquor ration, soldiers, like their counterparts in the navy, were often given their rum watered or were ordered to dilute it. However, the advantage gained was probably small. Bell argued that watering was actually detrimental, for grog was habit-forming.⁵⁶ And watering represented the officers' only concerted attempt to reduce the potency of the liquor that their men consumed.

As the preceding discussion suggests, elements within most key groups in the army did attempt to limit alcohol abuse. There is evidence that soldiers' drinking habits were influenced by those of their comrades, some of whom were abstemious, at least as regarded hard liquor. Regimental clergy and evangelizing groups, using both the spoken and the printed word, denounced drunkenness. So did leading medical figures. Perhaps most important, many commanding officers mounted cam-

54. Shelburne Correspondence, 10: 122–23, NAC (TS from BL, Lansdowne 48, 179–80). Also see Amherst to Pitt that "It was impossible to hinder the People giving the Soldiers Rum in much too great quantities." CO 5/53/198, PRO.

55. "Regulations for the 37th Regiment. Lieut. Col. Pennington," section headed "General Regulations," Royal Hampshire Regimental Museum, Winchester, England.

56. Bell, *Inquiry*, 24–27. On watering in the army, see Boycott OB, order of September 1777, CL. Frederick McKenzie Papers, #2 (OB, 2 November 1761–18 August 1762), 10, order dated 12 November 1761, NAC. Over time, the dilution ratio varied from 2:1 to 8:1, but by the 1830s the standard was 3:1. William Rowley, *Medical Advice, for the Use of the Army and Navy* (London, 1776), 23. Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, 66.

paigns aimed at discouraging intoxication among the troops. Each potential source of change, however, was seriously flawed, and this undermined attempts to combat the problem.

Any campaign to reduce drunkenness had to overcome two significant obstacles: one, the alcoholic culture that surrounded and shaped the military, and two, the widespread belief that liquor was in some respects useful to the army.

That alcohol abuse was rampant in eighteenth-century England is generally accepted. Indeed, the evidence appears to be overwhelming. There is the testimony of contemporary observers like Samuel Johnson, who once recalled that when he was a boy, "all the decent people in Lichfield got drunk every night, and were not the worse thought of"; or Henry Fielding, who in 1751 asserted that gin was "the principal Sustenance" of more than 100,000 Londoners. Available data suggests that toward mid-century the annual per capita consumption of spirits in London exceeded seven gallons.⁵⁷ Moreover, it was commonly the case that drinkers aimed not to drink so much as to get drunk. Johnson observed, "a man would be drowned by [claret] before it made him drunk, [but] brandy will do soonest for a man what drinking can do for him."⁵⁸

The late eighteenth century saw several writers, most notably Thomas Trotter, first propound the concept of "alcoholism."⁵⁹ Generally, however, habitual drunkenness was not viewed as a disease or an addic-

57. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1982), 235; Fielding, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, &c., with Some Proposals for Removing This Growing Evil* (London, 1751), 18; James Boswell, *Boswell's Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (New York: Literary Guild, 1936), 39. A good review of the "gin craze" and government efforts to restrain it is provided by M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), 27–42. There may have been a Europe-wide shift from beer to spirits; Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983), 239–42. According to excise revenue accounts (which are somewhat attenuated by liquor smuggling and unlicensed stills), spirits production peaked in 1743, at 8.2 million gallons, but after 1751 declined markedly, stabilizing at 1.5–3.0 million gallons between 1758 and 1785, before rising to the 3.0–5.0 million range between 1785 and 1800. See tables in T. S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The 18th Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), 243. Production of strong beers like porter likewise increased after 1777; Ashton, *Economic History*, 242.

58. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1945), 489.

59. Trotter's view was published in a dissertation for his M.D. in 1788 and later in his highly influential *Essay on Drunkenness* (1804). On the early history of this concept, see William F. Bynum, "Chronic Alcoholism in the First Half of the 19th Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 42 (1968): 160–85, esp. 160–70; Joseph Hirsh, "Enlightened Eighteenth Century Views of the Alcohol Problem," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 4 (1949): 230–36 passim.

tion, but as a condition over which individuals had control, if they chose to exert it. Writers argued that even a confirmed drunkard could quite easily curtail his drinking, or even quit entirely. Among them was Hales, who reported that "a very eminent Physician" had cured several individuals of habitual drunkenness by watering their liquor in progressively higher degrees, until after one week they were drinking water only.⁶⁰ Since drinking habits were held to be a matter of choice, drunkards were seen as depraved or weak, people who chose not to reform. The army's tendency to simply punish drunkenness, and the misbehavior that grew from it, accorded well with the conceptual norm of the period, one that placed the onus for reform on the drinker himself.

Likewise relevant to the army example was another common eighteenth-century attitude. While society might condemn the habitual drunkard, it often lionized the heavy drinker who seemed able to function well. Even drunkenness was deemed acceptable if it did not result in a form of behavior that was disgraceful or degenerate. The ability of a drinker to handle liquor was intimately linked to contemporary concepts of manliness. It was in this context that Johnson made his famous comment, "claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero . . . must drink brandy."⁶¹

From this alcoholic culture, the British Army drew its personnel, and indeed soldiers were often recruited in taverns. Wellington observed, "the English soldiers are fellows who have all enlisted for drink," and although his assertion may be somewhat overbroad, it is probable that a high proportion of those who joined the army came in already established as heavy drinkers.⁶² Thus, alcohol abuse was the rule, sobriety the exception, and generally non-drinkers were looked on with puzzlement, even contempt. Knox noted the case of two soldiers who "were both remarkably sober men, and had frequently been rallied by their comrades for their abstemiousness."⁶³ It was not merely that abstemious soldiers were a rarity, but that their habits seemed to be at odds with accepted criteria of manliness.

Denunciations of drinking from the pulpit and in religious tracts were often ineffective because many army chaplains failed to lead by example. On 2 March 1755, Charlotte Browne, matron of the General Hospital in North America, then in transit, noted in her journal, "Sunday but had no Prayers till After-Noon our Parson bring indispos'd by drink-

60. *Friendly Admonition*, 32–33.

61. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 489. Johnson's comment that "a man would be drowned" follows.

62. John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Viking Press, 1987), 126.

63. Knox, *Journal*, 2: 293.

ing too much Grog the Night before.”⁶⁴ Regimental chaplains had a reputation for worldliness, and coupled with this, at least as seen by critics and satirists, was a penchant for drinking.⁶⁵

Religion, moreover, did not play a large role in the army. Divine service was held sporadically, and the men tended to be indifferent to religiously inspired calls for temperance, so much so that they were often intoxicated when they appeared at church. Officers likewise showed little interest in the religious component of army life, and seldom if ever were regimental policies on drink influenced by the concerns of the chaplains.⁶⁶

Like chaplains, medical officers also failed to inspire temperance among the troops. Many were themselves heavy drinkers. Robert Hamilton, a former regimental surgeon, observed, “I have heard it urged in commendation of the abilities, as they expressed it, of certain persons of the profession, both [in] and [out] of the army, that they prescribed best when half drunk.”⁶⁷ More important, medical advice was by no means altogether hostile to alcohol. Some of the most influential army medical authorities of the eighteenth century, notably Sir John Pringle and Donald Monro, wrote in favor of a liquor ration, arguing that it was particularly appropriate in situations where troops might become fatigued or chilled.⁶⁸

In point of fact, army medical officers were responsible for the distribution of a large quantity of alcoholic beverages. They regularly used substantial quantities of wine in hospital treatment. In April 1779, patients and convalescents at St. Lucia were receiving a wine ration of three gills per day, the drink serving as a vehicle for Peruvian Bark. Wine was often prescribed as a medicine, and hard liquor might be, as well.

64. Isabel M. Calder, ed., *Colonial Captivities, Marches, and Journeys* (1935; reprint, Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1967), 173.

65. Paul E. Kopperman, “Religion and Religious Policy in the British Army, c.1700–1796,” *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1987): 395–96.

66. MS 6807–160 (standing orders, 19th Foot, Gibraltar, 1763–70), NAM, contains several orders relative to soldiers appearing drunk on church parade, e.g., 13 March 1763 and 3 April 1765. On absenteeism and on officers’ indifference, see Kopperman, “Religion,” 390–98.

67. Hamilton, *Duties*, 1: 160. The surgeons’ drinking habits tended to parallel those of the line officers, with whom they commonly associated.

68. Pringle, *Observations*, 95; Monro, *Observations on the Means of Preserving the Health of Soldiers; and of Conducting Military Hospitals*, 2d ed. (London, 1780), 1: 9–10. Medical authorities were usually careful to distinguish between the effects of moderate drinking, which they tended to see as positive, and of alcohol abuse. See Brookes, *The General Dispensatory* (London, 1753), 130–31. In an area of use important to the army, spirits were applied to wounds to encourage them to heal over and to prevent what was perceived to be corruption or putrefaction stemming from them.

For example, brandy was sometimes used to remedy colds.⁶⁹ And wine was routinely given to boost depressed or lethargic patients, or to those who were sinking because of fever. In the words of Michael Lewis, probably the most influential authority on drugs of the latter half of the eighteenth century, wine served “to stimulate the stomach, cheer the spirits, warm the habit, promote perspiration, render the vessels full and turgid, raise the pulse, and quicken the circulation.”⁷⁰ Spirits and wine were variously prescribed as diuretics, sedatives, and soporifics. Drink, even drunkenness, was often encouraged to manage the pain of a wound or to ease the agony of surgery. Liquor was allowed as an alternative to bad water or as a water purifier. Wine or spirits were regularly used as body-warmers for troops, particularly sentries, serving in inclement weather, and liquor was a standard remedy for frostbite. Throughout the period 1755–83, British troops in America also were allowed spruce beer as an antiscorbutic. Long popular in Canada, spruce beer seems to have been introduced into the army, at least on a regular basis, when a large contingent was stationed at Louisbourg in the late 1740s, and during both the French and Indian War and the Revolution troops were usually allowed a half-gallon or more per day, sometimes being permitted whatever quantity they desired.⁷¹

Medical authorities were divided on whether to condemn drinking in general or only drunkenness. Most took the latter route. Nor was there agreement on which, if any, alcoholic beverages were to be avoided. In general, eighteenth-century British authorities on military medicine divided chronologically on the issue of whether spirits were safe. Those who wrote around mid-century tended to see some benefit in them.

69. Grant to Lord George Germain, St. Lucia, 4 April 1779; WO 1/683, 223, PRO. See also John Buchanan, “Regimental Practice, or A Short History of Diseases common to His Majesties own Royale Regiment of Horse Guards when abroad. (Commonly called the Blews)” (Wellcome, MS RAMC 1037), 9.

70. *The Edinburgh New Dispensatory*, ed. John Rotheram, 3d American ed., based on 4th Edinburgh ed. (Boston and Worcester, 1796), 261; cf. Hamilton, *Duties*, 1: 41. Wine and spirits were given medicinal applications other than the ones enumerated in this article. Most of the applications common in the eighteenth century dated back to the Greeks, and some modern physicians would endorse many of the medicinal and prophylactic uses of alcohol mentioned in this article. See e.g., William Dock, “The Clinical Value of Alcohol,” *Alcohol and Civilization*, ed. Salvatore Pablo Lucia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 75–86.

71. Owen H. Wangensteen and Sarah D. Wangensteen, *The Rise of Surgery: From Empiric Craft to Scientific Discipline* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 292; Knox, *Journal*, 1: 293, 2: 365. Spruce beer was generally prepared by mixing a decoction of spruce needles with molasses, then fermenting with yeast. Note the recipe in (Sir) Jeffery Amherst, *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst, regarding the Military Career of General Amherst in America from 1758 to 1763*, ed. J. Clarence Webster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 152; cf. Knox, *Journal*, 1: 7, 466, and 2: 375, 497.

Pringle himself argued that spirits drunk in moderation would help to protect troops from camp diseases.⁷² He and most authorities within his age cohort believed that neither spirits nor other alcoholic beverages represented a significant health problem in the army—although, of course, none of them condoned drinking to excess—and some writers did not even deal with the issue of alcohol abuse in their works. Late in the century, however, writers dealt more severely with the dangers that alcohol posed to the army, and in particular they condemned the free use of spirits. One of them, Hector McLean, a veteran of service as a medical officer in the West Indies, went so far as to criticize the common practice of giving troops rum if they faced fatiguing duty. Calling the custom “preposterous,” he asserted that “instead of enabling men to bear fatigue, it wholly unfits them for it,” and he recommended that troops who were facing hard duty be allowed only water or lemonade to fill their canteens. But most authorities of their generation claimed that wine was therapeutic, and regarded malt beverages as nourishing.⁷³ At no point in the century did a significant writer on military medicine argue for total abstinence from alcohol, and indeed it was generally held that teetotalism represented a danger to health. Even McLean advised officers to drink wine, in moderate amounts, for the sake of their health, claiming

72. Pringle, *Observations*, 88. Monro supported Pringle; see Monro, *Observations*, 1: 9–10. Two of the giants of naval medicine differed regarding the rum ration, James Lind writing in favor of it in *An Essay on the Most Effectual Means of Preserving the Health of Seamen* (1757), Sir Gilbert Blane opposing it in *Observations on the Diseases of Seamen* (1785). *The Health of Seamen: Selections from the Works of Dr. James Lind, Sir Gilbert Blane and Dr. Thomas Trotter*, Navy Records Society, Publications, 1965, 42, 164.

73. *An Enquiry into the Nature, and Causes of the Great Mortality among the Troops at St. Domingo* (London, 1797), 261–62. Most of the earlier writers (Pringle, Buchanan, Monro) saw service on the Continent, while most of those who wrote later in the century—besides Bell and Hamilton, these would include Hunter, Rollo, Jackson, and McLean—had served as medical officers in the West Indies where mortality stemming from disease was far higher than in most army stations. Earlier in the century, spirits had likewise been considered nutritious: Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 25. See also T. G. Coffey, “Beer Street: Gin Lane: Some Views of 18th Century Drinking (with 5 Illustrations from William Hogarth),” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 27 (1966): 669–92, esp. 673, 675. Until the 1830s, beer was often regarded as a “temperance drink”; see Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 58. Some medical authorities complained that malt liquors were binding; see Marmaduke Berdoe, *An Essay on the Nature and Causes of the Gout* (London, 1772), 56. And there was a debate over whether sufferers from gout (who included many army officers) should drink wine; see William Falconer, *Observations on Dr. Cadogan’s Dissertation on the Gout and all Chronic Diseases*, 2d ed. (Bath, 1771), 112. It was also widely believed that beer and wine were most useful to the elderly, and most harmful to young men. W. J. Darby, “The Nutrient Contributions of Fermented Beverages,” *Fermented Food Beverages in Nutrition*, 62–66. See also Robert Jackson, *An Outline of the History and Cure of Fever, Endemic and Contagious* (Edinburgh, 1798), 368–69.

that "sobriety itself might be an error," although he added, "to this error few officers are likely to fall a sacrifice." And while medical writers late in the century tended to be more negative in their attitude toward liquor, they also challenged some assertions regarding its supposed dangers, notably, that it caused fever (a legend to which Albemarle, among other officers, subscribed).⁷⁴

The inconsistencies within the medical community at large were epitomized in Bell. On the whole, he was a hard-liner in his attitude toward the use of liquor in the military. He condemned the widespread medicinal use of wine, claiming, "there is no remedy in the materia medica prescribed so frequently as wine, with so little attention to the circumstances which ought to direct or forbid its use, or to regulate the quantity in which it is employed."⁷⁵ He also noted that remedies containing liquor might themselves encourage drunkenness: "The use of fruit preserved in brandy, or the use of various bitters infused in it, which has been prescribed as a remedy, has led many persons of both sexes, and of every rank of life, into an habit of drinking to excess. They, like many soldiers, feel a craving and uneasy sensation in the stomach, to alleviate which, they have recourse to the cause which originally produced it." Despite these complaints, Bell did not object to liquor per se, but only to habitual drunkenness. Nor did he criticize the army's role in distributing alcoholic beverages in general, just hard liquor, and even here he was flexible, for he recommended that spirits be given to troops who were cold or fatigued. Brewed or fermented beverages generally won his approval. He wanted wine to be given to troops regularly, to preserve health, and he described malt liquor as "an invigorating, antiseptic, salutary beverage . . . highly nutritive."⁷⁶

That medical opinion on alcohol was divided allowed army men of all ranks to believe what they preferred, and for most of them this was that alcoholic beverages, at least some of them, were safe, even beneficial. Predilection usually spoke against abstemiousness, and a legend that favored spirits could counterbalance much evidence that they were dangerous. Hales observed,

74. *An Enquiry . . . St. Domingo*, 255. See also John Rollo, *Observations on the Diseases which Appeared in the Army on St. Lucia, in December 1778; January, February, March, April, and May, 1779*, 2d ed. (London, 1781), 157; Pringle, *Observations*, 286; Monro, *Observations*, 2: 46-47, 50. John Hunter, a noted army physician, challenged the belief that rum caused the major illnesses of the West Indies; *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica* (London, 1788), 20-22. See also Buchanan, "Regimental Practice," 23.

75. Bell, *Inquiry*, 30. Late in the century, army medical policy, if not practice, began to shift from the liberal use of wine, as reflected in *Instructions from the Army Medical Board, to the Regimental Surgeons, and Assistant Surgeons, referred to in the Foregoing Warrant* (Dublin, 1797), 9-10.

76. Bell, *Inquiry*, 15, 32, 33, 59-60, 75-76.

Men plead on behalf of Rum, as a very wholesome Liquor: being ready to catch at any slight Argument in Favour of what they love, though at the manifest Hazard of what is most valuable and dear to them, (viz.) their Health and Lives. They flatter themselves that Rum is very wholesome, because they have heard that if raw flesh be put into it, it will preserve it in a plump, fresh, supple and soft State; whereas Brandy hardens it: And so does Rum too, when it has continued in it for some Time.⁷⁷

For their part, line officers were usually heavy drinkers, although their beverages, often wine and brandy, tended to differ from those of the troops. They, perhaps even more than the men, seemed to define the alcoholic culture of the army. As Hamilton noted, mainly as regarded officers' society, "In the army, where so much conviviality reigns . . . to avoid intoxication, and even frequent intoxication, is no easy task."⁷⁸ And when placed in circumstances where the routine was oppressive, officers, like their men, sought relief through drink. In August 1819, Dent described for a cousin the officers' life in St. Vincent: "The Day is generally passed in idleness; we have a good Mess and dine at five o'clock, generally take a pint of Madeira after it (which is absolutely necessary here) then retire to one of the Barrack Rooms, to take a flask of Grog."⁷⁹

Were the officers perhaps inhibited in attacking drunkenness by their own penchant for alcohol? On the contrary, as General Robert Wilson recalled of the Napoleonic Wars, "What shocked me most was to see courts-martial adjudging men to be punished for an offence of which the members themselves had often been guilty at the same time, and from which they had frequently not recovered when passing sentence."⁸⁰ The officers had several reasons for avoiding an all-out effort to reduce drinking in the ranks. An appearance of hypocrisy was probably not among them.

On the other hand, the officers' drinking habits suggest that as a group they found nothing wrong with alcohol. In weighing evidence about the impact of liquor on the army, therefore, a high proportion of them were predisposed to finding benefits. And certainly there were arguments made for liquor.

77. *Friendly Admonition*, 9. Hales also asserted (p. 7), "all distilled fermented Spirits are the same."

78. Hamilton, *Duties*, 1:153. Bell advised officers (*Inquiry*, 110–11) to be abstemious, but not teetotalers.

79. #7088–11, letter #43, NAM.

80. (Sir) Robert Thomas Wilson, *The Life of General Sir Robert Wilson. From Autobiographical Memoirs, Journals, Narratives, Correspondence, &c.*, ed. Herbert Randolph (London, 1862), 1:75; cf. *ibid.*, 98.

Many officers considered liquor to be healthful. Wolfe wrote to Amherst in June 1758, "The excess of rum is bad, but the liquor delivered out in small quantities—half a gill a man, and mixed with water—is a most salutary drink."⁸¹ And almost all officers believed liquor to be beneficial in certain climates. As has been noted, there was a widespread belief that spirits were of use in cold climates and inclement weather, but some officers who commanded in the tropics also increased the liquor ration, believing that it would help preserve the troops against illness. In July 1761 Colonel Andrew Rollo wrote to Amherst from Dominica that "The Excessive heat . . . hath putt me under the Necessitie of giving a Gill of Rum per day to each private Man." He added, "I was advised it was Necessary to the Mens healths. . . . The care of the Mens health is the grand object of my attention."⁸² Where had he gotten this advice? Very likely from a medical officer, or at least from someone whose opinions on medical matters he respected.

If the medical community, both inside and outside the army, had been consistent in condemning the policy of distributing liquor freely to the troops, those in command might well have taken steps to alter that policy, for on matters relating to health they tended to heed the advice of medical officers, especially hospital physicians and surgeons.⁸³ As the attitude of medical men was quite inconsistent, officers were left room to follow their own predilections. They were free to believe that liquor was, as various sources suggested, a good water purifier, an invaluable tonic, especially in cold or inclement weather, and a potent medicine, either preventive or curative.

Officers who failed to take strong action to curb drinking within the army may in some cases have been concerned that widespread trouble or even mutiny might result if the liquor ration were cut off. In 1791, Robert Jackson, the noted army surgeon, claimed,

Our soldiers have been so long accustomed to this gratuitous allowance of rum as their right, that no man could answer for the consequences of with-holding it. . . . The allowance of rum granted to soldiers, has done much harm by ruining discipline, and good behaviour. If it is with-held for one day, discontent immediately begins to shew itself among the men. If with-held for any length of

81. Willson, *Wolfe*, 377.

82. WO 34/54/12, PRO. Officers frequently cited health considerations to justify the introduction of a liquor ration. See James Mercer to Shirley, Oswego, 22 July 1756, LO 1325, HL; order of 14 October 1780, OB, Charleston, Wray Papers, vol. 1, CL; order of 7 January 1762, OB, 2 November 1761–16 January 1762, Gates Papers, NYPL. Townshend Papers, Townshend's OB, order of 24 March 1760, NAC.

83. Paul E. Kopperman, "Medical Services in the British Army, 1742–1783," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 34 (1979): 448–49.

time, complaints sometimes rise to a state of mutiny, and desertions become notorious.⁸⁴

At the very least, an officer who attempted to reduce the liquor ration was likely to hear complaints. In about 1780 Major Peter Traille, commander of the Royal Artillery, received a petition from the artificers who were attached to the Artillery in Charleston:

Your Petitioners cannot but reflect with the utmost Regret on the General Orders of the 10th Instant, whereby they are deprived of the usual Allowance of Rum, an Article we humbly conceive to be essentially necessary to the health of Labouring Men in this sultry Climate, . . . neither can it be thought that your humble Petitioners can Work hard from 6 o'Clock in the Morning to 6 in the Evening on simple Water, which is peculiarly bad in this Town.⁸⁵

The threat of violent consequences if the liquor ration were reduced or ended may have preyed on the minds of some officers, but it was probably not significant in determining policy overall, for the army often undertook or implemented policies that were likely to promote grumbling in the ranks. For example, in 1763 the Treasury, acting on the recommendation of Amherst, resolved to institute stoppages for rations in North America, replacing a practice that soldiers received their provisions gratis. As some officers on the scene predicted, the new policy met widespread opposition and in several garrisons mutiny, but it was nevertheless implemented with only minor concessions to the troops.⁸⁶

More important than fear of turmoil in shaping army policies on alcohol was a recognition of the fact that spirits served as a primary motivator of the troops. Many officers believed that without liquor their men would put in minimal effort or simply refuse to work. On 5 May 1760, Foxon wrote Gage from Fort Herkimer, "The Germans I pressed woud not move without Rum. . . . My Own Men have had no pay for some Time, and a little Rum is absolutely necessary on that Service. I hope you will order some Rum here, or I shall pay out of my own pocket the Quantity I have and shall issue."⁸⁷

Foxon appears to have seen the liquor ration as unfortunate, though a necessary evil. Some officers, however, may have viewed it more positively. Since liquor was craved by the troops, officers' control over the ration gave them leverage. Particularly as a stimulus to labor, liquor was probably unexcelled. Soldiers who served in working parties, as well as

84. *A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica. . . . And an Appendix on the Means of Preserving the Health of Soldiers in Hot Climates* (Philadelphia, 1795), 259.

85. Wray Papers, X, #99, CL.

86. Kopperman, "Stoppages Mutiny," passim.

87. Gage Papers, vol. 6, CL. Jackson claimed (*Treatise*, 259), "soldiers seldom perform extra-duty with alacrity, unless they are bribed with a double allowance of rum."

civilian laborers, often received much or all of the pay for their work in the form of a special liquor ration. The heavier the work and the more pressing the circumstances, the more generous the rations were likely to be. On 25 September 1759, as the British prepared to winter in Quebec, Murray ordered that soldiers who served as woodcutters be given a gill of rum per day, plus five shillings per cord.⁸⁸ There was also a widespread sense that liquor increased the capacity of the men to do hard work. In orders for a working party, issued on 8 November 1777, Clinton specified that he had “Order’d Fatigue Rum to be given Daily to the Men employ’d & trusts they will lose neither time nor Industry while on this necessary Duty.”⁸⁹ Not only had liquor the power to move men to labor, but to commanding officers who were interested in, even obsessed by, saving money, it had another virtue: Given its usefulness, it was inexpensive. Wolfe well summed up this perspective when he wrote to Amherst in June 1758 that grog was “the cheapest pay for work that can be given.”⁹⁰

The British Army faced a difficult problem in alcohol abuse. So long as billeting was widespread, supervision was difficult. And if the army had reduced the liquor ration, there would still have been many sources of alcohol available. Furthermore, even when officers in command positions tried to crack down on the illicit liquor trade, their orders were often ignored, notably by sentries and noncommissioned officers. For all these reasons, it would have been impossible to eradicate alcohol abuse, regardless of what policies were implemented. Even during the nineteenth century, when advocates of temperance in and outside the army actively discouraged drunkenness, success was far from complete and it came late. It is instructive, nevertheless, to compare the Victorian campaign to the efforts that we have reviewed in this article.

In the management of liquor, the Victorian army had several decisive advantages over its eighteenth-century counterpart. First, the ability of officers to keep watch over their men increased. The widespread use of barracks, instead of relying on billeting, made it possible to monitor the liquor consumption of the troops, at least so long as they remained in their compound. In this connection, the order, in 1848, to bar the sale of spirits in army canteens may well have had a significant impact. Still, in

88. Knox, *Journal*, 2: 145.

89. OB #9, f. 148, CL.

90. Willson, *Wolfe*, 377. Wolfe had an ambivalence regarding alcohol, for about the same time he wrote, of the garrison at Halifax: “The immoderate use of Rum, is the bane of Industry there; & the destruction of the Sea-Men & Soldiers—They are poison’d even in their very Hospitals, by that pernicious Spirit”; Northcliffe Coll., XIV, 110, NAC. But even here, there is the key qualifier: “immoderate.”

garrison towns there were the pubs that catered to servicemen.⁹¹ Success in efforts to significantly reduce drinking therefore depended also on reducing the desire of the men for drink, and here again Victorian officers who wished to promote abstemiousness had a great advantage, since the temperance movement, which peaked during the latter half of the nineteenth century, devoted significant attention to combatting drunkenness in the army. The Victorians injected a strongly religious flavor into their appeals for temperance, and undoubtedly many soldiers and officers were repelled by the tone, but others were attracted and took the pledge of abstinence, while temperance societies and clubs provided reinforcement for troops who were attempting to reform. Highly placed army medical personnel strongly promoted the drive to curb drinking, and many officers both demanded and practiced abstemiousness.⁹²

Eighteenth-century officers, not having at their disposal sufficient housing for their men, could not have monitored the drinking habits of the troops. Nor did they have the general support of society to mount a concerted effort to curb alcohol abuse. Nevertheless, they could have done more.

Of the campaigns that were launched, it may be said, first, that they were unimaginative. Little effort was made to promote alternatives to the liquor that the men consumed in such quantities. Some medical authorities proposed programs for reducing alcohol consumption by substituting less potent beverages for spirits. Bell claimed that by providing porter and ale officers could break soldiers of the habit of drinking spirits, and he believed that troops could be entirely weaned from alcohol if their commanders replaced the liquor ration with cocoa or fruit juice.⁹³ But it appears that few if any officers heeded his advice. It may be, therefore, that the failure of efforts to reduce drunkenness can in part be laid to a lack of creativity. But it is not the greater part.

Eighteenth-century campaigns were generally focused on the consumer, the soldier, rather than on a reduction of supply. Officers could

91. On the barrack-building campaign, see Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, 28, 60–63; Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 340. On the sale of spirits in army canteens, see Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, 67. On pubs in garrison towns, see Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 332–34.

92. The high command did not uniformly support the temperance movement; see Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, 66–67. Various churches continued to press the temperance issue in the army, and in 1893 they organized the Army Temperance Society: Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), 67; E. J. Hardy, *Mr. Thomas Atkins* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1900), 183. On the temperance movement in the navy, see Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 333; Lloyd and Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy*, 4: 96.

93. Bell, *Inquiry*, 51–52, 62. See also James Anderson, *A Few Facts and Observations on the Yellow Fever of the West Indies* (Edinburgh, 1798), 44; McLean, *Enquiry*, 250–51.

have been more consistent in attacking the source of supply. Sutlers, a major supplier of liquor, were vulnerable to such pressure, for if they were deprived of their licenses for selling spirits they of course lost their entire business. Certainly, the army could likewise have reduced its own role in supply, by reducing or eliminating the liquor ration.

Instead of pursuing policies that might have reduced alcohol abuse, commanding officers introduced half-hearted campaigns, directed mainly at the bad behavior associated with drunkenness. This half-heartedness reflected ambivalence and uncertainty. Although most officers believed that habitual drunkenness represented a threat to health, medical opinion was sufficiently divided as to allow them to follow their predilections when it came to deciding just how great the danger was, and it encouraged them to believe that at least some alcoholic beverages were actually beneficial. And while drunkenness clearly undermined discipline, here again there was no clear course to follow, for continuing the supply, with the army itself as a major supplier, provided officers with significant leverage over the troops. Undoubtedly, the officers would have preferred to be in a position to better manage the drinking habits of their men, but they could see disadvantages to dramatically reducing the soldiers' desire for alcohol. So it was that those in command concentrated on combatting the behavior that was the effect of alcohol abuse, rather than on initiating an all-out effort to end that abuse.