

# New Kingdom Soldiers



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**Without an army, Egypt would never have gained an empire. Dangerous enemies and imperial duties required a professional army and soldiering soon became a respectable career.**

## Career soldiers

Before the time of the New Kingdom, being a soldier brought little reward or prestige. But the need to remove foreigners from northern Egypt and then conquer other countries required a powerful, professional and well-trained standing army. Soldiering became a career with real prospects.

The military victories of the 'warrior' pharaohs like Ahmosé and Tuthmosis III brought prestige and wealth to Egypt. As a result, soldiers were much appreciated by average Egyptians and became respected members of their communities.

## Learning from the enemy

At the beginning of the New Kingdom period, soldiers had primitive weapons and no armor. After they defeated the Hyksos, Egyptians learned about more advanced weapons, such as metal daggers, swords and spears.

Egyptians also used light, fast, horse-drawn chariots. The chariot driver wore a leather or bronze helmet and armor, and was accompanied by another soldier armed with a bow, arrows and javelins.

## Archers and armor

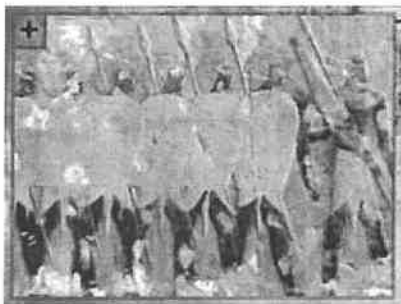
The most-feared soldiers were the archers. They used highly sophisticated bows, made from a variety of woods and animal horn to give them strength. These powerful weapons could fire arrows deep into the enemy ranks.

Although senior commanders were protected by bronze armor, most soldiers were protected by only light shields of animal hide, padded caps and triangular sporrans - heavy cloth patches in front of their genitals.

## A smart move

As the empire expanded and the need for soldiers increased, so did the rewards. Soldiers at camp enjoyed good food and wine, and professional soldiers were paid in gold and land.

For the upper classes, becoming an army commander was a smart career move. In times of emergency, when there was no heir to the throne, it was often senior commanders who took power and ruled as pharaoh.



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## Unlucky for some

Life was difficult in times of war. The pharaoh had the right to raise troops and would conscript one in 10 able-bodied men from each temple community to supplement the permanent army.

These conscripts were in the lower ranks and didn't want to be there. Many would go into battle wearing little more than a tunic and a pair of sandals, armed only with a spear. And although peacetime food was good, in wartime a soldier only ate what he could carry. He would often be marching for many days before he reached the enemy.

## Hands up

Battle would often begin with a charge. If they were victorious, the Egyptians would find out how many enemy soldiers they had killed by cutting off their hands or penises and counting them. There was a reward for each enemy hand or penis a soldier produced.

## Chain of command

Like the rest of Egyptian society, the army was ordered into a strict hierarchy. There were as many as 50 different ranks and the highest were passed down from father to son.

Foot soldiers were grouped into platoons of 10 men and companies of 200. These were commanded by captains, who carried a staff with the company insignia. Companies would then be grouped together into divisions of 5,000 men, led by a general under the banner of their local god.

## Military efficiency

The army was not just carefully ranked, it was highly organized. As the army expanded, a vast bureaucracy developed to make sure that it was fully supplied and as efficient as possible. Military scribes recorded recruitment and supplies, but also kept a record of events when the army was fighting abroad.

This organizational efficiency was central to the army's success at war, a success that made it one of the most feared and formidable armies in the ancient world.

## Soldiers



**Standing very still, Mdjai watches the sun rise, but the only thing on his mind is how his new sandals make his feet hurt and how much longer he can hold his spear steady. As a soldier and one of the pharaoh's elite bodyguards, he has already been up for hours.**

In another hour, he's relieved for breakfast. It's the same every day - a piece of bread. No peanut butter or jelly for Mdjai, just bread. If he's lucky it won't be too stale. The officers always get the best rations.

After breakfast, Mdjai does drill practice on a plain outside Thebes. After his unit has been yelled at by their superiors, they go on maneuvers, practicing charges and battle formations with the rest of his division - a total of 5,000 men.

The entire division is on the plain in battle formation of centers and wings. Everyone is involved - Mdjai and the other elite archers, the spearmen (always the first to die in battle) and the chariots. It's tiring but fun: the excitement of battle, but none of the danger. After a bad start to the day, finally Mdjai feels like a soldier again.

### **Afternoon**

After the maneuvers, the soldiers stop for lunch. Today, the rations are lentils and garlic, with some Syrian bread - popular in the army since they discovered it while on service there years ago.

As Egypt is currently at peace, there is little fighting to do. So after lunch, his company of 200 men is deployed to work on a government project.

Today, they are digging an irrigation canal on farmland belonging to one of the big temples. It's hot work and Mdjai can feel the sweat trickling down his back. Still, it could be worse - his friends in another company have been told to carry stones up a mountain for the pharaoh's tomb.

### **Evening**

After a short break in the late afternoon, the company marches back to its barracks to clean their kit and get some supper. The sun is now beginning to go down but the day is far from over for Mdjai. Instead, it's ending as it begun: on sentry duty at the palace, guarding the pharaoh.

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/soldier.html>