
Defense Report

AUSA



The Families of Junior Enlisted People—They are Close to First Class Status

When the decision was made to close down the Selective Service System and to staff the Armed Forces of the United States exclusively with volunteers the make-up of those forces began to change. No longer was there a rapid, two-year passage of young men through the ranks of the Army, returning them to civilian life to begin lifelong careers, marry and start families. Instead, young people now enter military service for three or more years with the idea of staying even longer. They are embarking on a career and, like their civilian counterparts, they get married and start families.

This is what the armed services expect their career personnel to do. But until very recently young Soldiers, Sailors Airmen and Marines with little rank and not much accumulated service were kept from participating in many service benefits by a gamut of regulations designed to minimize the cost of maintaining draftees and, quite obviously, to discourage the short term personnel from taking on the responsibilities of marriage. One of the many things they could not do was to bring their families along on overseas assignments at government expense. Of course many young couples and their children sought to make a family life for themselves despite the lack of government support. For the past several years there have been numerous reports of the hardships they have endured to pay for transportation and to keep house in foreign cities where the value of the U.S. dollar continues to shrink.

Now Congress has softened this hardship by appropriating money for most of the transportation expense for young service people assigned overseas in the future. They will even be allowed to ship up to 1500 pounds of household goods to their overseas station. Most of them will still have to find accommodations in the local civilian community but at least they will not be in debt for airline tickets and other costs before they arrive.

Congress needs to go further. For some reason the legislators declined to approve the same sort of support for young families moving from station to station in the United States. Certainly the cost of moving overseas is greater but what other employer picks up his employees, moves them across the country and then tells them he will not pay the moving bills for their families?

If we are to have a viable volunteer force, one that will attract and keep the kinds of men and women needed to master the increasingly complex tasks associated with defending our country, we must face up to some facts, once and for all. The volunteer force has special needs, like equitable treatment for the families of every member, and until those special needs are fulfilled we will continue to lose the youthful soldiers who know their families deserve first class status.