
Defense Report

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The Out-of-Pocket Costs of Moving — Another Disadvantage of Military Service

When the employees of a large corporation are transferred to new jobs, they are provided the allowances, services and assistance to make the move both physically and financially easier. The members of our armed forces work for the biggest corporation in the United States, but each leg of their peripatetic journey through a military career strains both their ability to cope and their ability to pay. A devoted service member, spouse and children will grit their teeth and put up with the inconvenience of the frequent moves, but there is little they can do about the hundreds and even thousands of dollars in excess of their moving allowances from "the corporation" that they must find a way to pay.

The Department of Defense estimates that each year the individual members of all the services spend a billion dollars out of their own pockets in order to comply with official transfer orders. If each of the two million military people moved every year this would mean a \$500 personal cost for every one of them. Obviously, though, only a fraction of the total force is on the move so the individual share of the cost is much higher. If a third of the force, 667,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, moved each year the individual *pro rata* share of that billion-dollar cost turns out to be almost \$1,500. In many cases, a move consumes savings. In more cases, it drives military families into debt.

One of the big expenses involved in a move is the cost of temporary lodging, both at the old post after the family must vacate its quarters and at the new post while awaiting new government quarters or seeking a civilian residence. The present system for compensating for this cost is simply inadequate because hotel/motel accommodations far exceed the housing allowance of a family. Similarly, the reimbursement for mileage traveled has not kept up with the true costs.

By its nature, military service is a nomadic life and it will certainly remain that way as long as we have a major portion of our forces permanently deployed overseas. Military families don't expect a movable feast, but they should not have to empty their own pockets to comply with travel orders.