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The paper discusses the military officers permanent change of duty station moves and the challenges that accompany this requirement. In addition to military officer readiness affected by the additional challenge of managing family moves, the military is also spending billions of dollars on PCS moves that technology has rendered less necessary, as evidenced by virtual technology utilization. The research of the effects on the family, including the children and the spouse, shows that increased family stability equals increased overall military readiness.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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The Military Officers Frequent Permanent Change of Station Moves: its effect on Readiness and the Military Family.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: The Military Officers Frequent Permanent Change of Station Moves: its effect on Readiness and the Military Family

Author: Major Moses Preston Carlock III, United States Army

Thesis: This research discusses the instability caused by the permanent change of station moves. A career Army officer's requirement to frequently change duty locations throughout their career increases stress on the military family. The research will show the lack of stability from PCS moves affecting dependents' mental health, education, career opportunities for the spouse, and overall military Readiness. The focus of the Army's perspective; however, as will be noted, this issue is military-wide. The active-duty military member will have mission and training requirements that require movement to different duty locations. However, due to effects on the military family, the services should try to provide more stability at the locations of assignment. Studies have shown that the frequent permanent change of station moves by the American service member puts stress on the entire family. A stable environment for the military family decreases the stress of the service member and increases overall Readiness. PCS frequency has increased mental health support requirements for adolescents. Although designed to assist with service family difficulties, a dependent on the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) limits the military member's assignment opportunities and career advancement. Additional issues faced during PCS moves are housing/daycare availability, which increased in difficulty due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The recommendations in this paper support stability options for the military family, which will increase officer leadership capabilities through decreased stress, allowing the focus to be on the mission, increasing overall military Readiness.

Discussion: The paper discusses the military officers permanent change of duty station moves and the challenges that accompany this requirement. In addition to military officer readiness affected by the additional challenge of managing family moves, the military is also spending billions of dollars on PCS moves that technology has rendered less necessary, as evidenced by virtual technology utilization. The research of the effects on the family, including the children and the spouse, shows that increased family stability equals increased overall military Readiness.

Conclusion: The military family life is complex. The added stress that comes with changing duty stations impacts leadership, as housing and daycare are basic needs met with a waiting list. The increased percentage of adolescents requiring mental health assistance indicates that frequent military moves affect the entire family. The 1.75 Billion annual PCS cost could be directed to other military needs increasing Readiness. This research is summed up in a 2019 quote by the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green in *The military's lingering readiness problem: Lack of daycare*, as he states, "Readiness is a three-legged stool, we have unit readiness ... I have family readiness, and I have personal Readiness. And every warrior tries to balance that same stool. If we can't get the quality-of-life part right because we're funding the war-fighting part, then we're suffering on the battlefield because I can't focus."

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Preface

My personal experience has involved a 2015 reassignment from Germany and a 2018 compassionate reassignment from Japan due to a lack of services after a dependent diagnosis that required enrollment in the Exceptional Family Member Program. The EFMP issues continued with a denial of my Army Intermediate Level Education slot at Command General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, after being selected for in resident. I received a one-line email from the EFMP office at Army Human Resource Command informing me that the assignment was denied due to lacked services at that location. No additional instructions were telling me what to do next. After conducting my investigation, I discovered a lack of providers accepting the military insurance, TRICARE, in the Kansas City area. My dependent would have approximately a six-month wait for an available appointment supporting her medical diagnosis. I contacted my Army Human Resource Command (HRC) assignment officer, who, along with the EFMP representative at my location (Fort Sill, OK), did not seem to have a plan for the situation. The result would be receiving orders to the Marine Corps Command and Staff College in Quantico, Virginia, EFMP approved for the area. Orders received at the beginning of March 2020 for Marine CSC. Unfortunately, due to issues related to Covid-19, including school closings in the state of Virginia and lack of housing availability (on and off-post) resulting from the Department of Defense mandated stop PCS order before my arrival to Quantico, my family was unable to be with me during the program. Since commissioning in 2010, my current position at Marine Corps Command Staff College is my eighth assignment. I have received a one-year tasking to Juba-South Sudan, deploying in October of 2021 to work with the U.N. This will be the second consecutive year without my family. This situation is not uncommon among career military officers. Could I have turned down resident ILE for family reasons without being looked at as a negative when assignments are listed? Was it necessary to push a complete in-house resident course following the onset of a pandemic resulting in limited housing availability? I leave those questions open, answered by your own opinions. The Army must do a better job of looking at the big picture regarding family readiness, not just its mission.

I want to acknowledge my family and all the military families who have served alongside their service member. The issues discussed in the paper are usually only highlighted on the social media military spouse's page—the emotional and mental effects of military moves on teens not being addressed in other venues as needed. The spouses and children are required to endure so much that comes with military life. As I have orders to my final duty station, my wife has finally completed her nursing certification and has just started her first job. My oldest daughter is completing her junior year in what is her 17th school in my military career. My middle school daughter is starting the most challenging age of all, beginning middle school in the middle of her sixth-grade year at her 8th overall school. My nine-year-old son is in the 3rd grade at what is already his 5th school. My soon-to-be three-year-old will not know the challenges of military life and frequent permanent change of station moves. How I wish I could have provided that stability for the rest. I will wrap up my final years of service after this program. I am very proud of my service, but I couldn't have done anything without the loyal family that sacrificed and supported me through these years. Thank you.

Introduction

Military Readiness usually refers to personnel, equipment, and training requirements to prepare the nation's defense. Although training and equipment readiness is essential, nothing compares to the preparedness of the Soldier. There are limitations to military success without the people serving in its ranks; connected to most of these Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines are their families. General Mark A Milley recognized the importance of family readiness during a 2017 forum focused on this topic. He noted that married Soldiers with an average family of four make up sixty percent of the force that ensures Readiness.¹ General Milley, the top-ranking military officer in the United States, said Readiness is the number one priority.² There is, however, a threat to Army and overall military Readiness that needs to be recognized. That threat is the frequency of the military officers' permanent change of station (PCS) moves and their effect on the military family.

In a 2019 article titled "*Frequent Moves Take Their Toll on Military Kid,*" Army Lieutenant General Eric Wesley referenced the PCS move issue. In the article, he states, "Because although cross-fertilization is good, I'm not sure the argument is more compelling than the fact that you're losing Readiness by PCSing."³ The Army Futures Command Deputy references military moves as an enemy, and PCS being the most significant harm to Readiness.⁴ A recent comment on military children comes from the new first lady. Jill Biden discussed with a group of educators how helping service member kids with life challenges caused by the military lifestyle is vital to national security⁵. Do not be confused by the word permanent, as permanent change of station (PCS) moves are not permanent at all. The movement timeframe targeted during the summer months, which has become known as the PCS period. The Movements caused the Department of Defense database to crash in the summer of 2019, delaying over 80,000 military members' movements.⁶

Purpose

This research discusses the instability caused by the permanent change of station moves. A career Army officer's requirement to frequently change duty locations throughout their career increases stress on the military family. The research will show the lack of stability from PCS moves affecting dependents' mental health, education, career opportunities for the spouse, and overall military Readiness. The focus is on the Army; however, as will be noted, this issue is military-wide. The active-duty military members will have mission and training requirements that will require movement to a different duty location. However, due to effects on the military family, the services should try to provide more stability at the locations of assignment. Studies have shown that the frequent permanent change of station moves by the American service member puts stress on the entire family. A stable environment for the military family decreases the stress of the service member and increases overall Readiness. PCS frequency has increased mental health support requirements for adolescents. Although designed to assist with service family difficulties, a member placed on the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) limits the military member's assignment opportunities and career advancement. Additional issues faced during PCS moves are housing/daycare availability, which increased in difficulty due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The recommendations in this paper support stability options for the military family, which will increase officer leadership capabilities through decreased stress, allowing the focus to be on the mission, increasing overall military Readiness.

The Exceptional Family Member Program

In an Army report titled "family adjustment to relocation," a 1985 DoD survey identified relocation adjustment as a problem in the Army. The impact was more significant on teenage children versus their younger siblings.⁷ A more recent study on PCS's impact on kids who move frequently has shown more mental health issues than stabilized youth environments.

The 12-17-year-old range is more likely to need mental health services for behavior, attention deficit, and even suicide prevention.⁸ The Department of Defense's response to these issues and others providing support to the military service member is the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), a Department of Defense program designed to assist military families with special educational and healthcare requirements.⁹ Children of active duty service members diagnosed with chronic medical conditions are referred to the program by their pediatrician and enrolled through an EFMP service coordinator.¹⁰ A 2019 Report in the American Academy of Pediatrics titled *Health and Needs of Children in U.S. Military Families* journal was conducted on military children's mental health and discovered almost seventy percent of the 128 thousand family members enrolled in the EFMP are children.¹¹ This research will discuss how the good intentions of the EFMP program cause career difficulties for the service members; the program's enrollment is a five-year commitment that limits the duty location opportunities due to EFMP services' availability being minimal.

As previously mentioned, the Exceptional Family Member Program is a challenge for a career Officer. This outlook on the adverse career outcomes due to having a dependent enrolled in EFMP is not exclusive to the Army. The US Marines conducted a study in 2007 titled *Analysis of the impact of Exceptional Family Member Program on Individual Marine Career Progression and Promotion* to determine if service members' careers had adverse effects. An indication that 70 percent of Marines believed negative assumptions connected with the program was the reason for the Analysis.¹² The findings showed no negative impact on EFMP enrollment, with 80 percent of the Marine Warrant officers achieving higher ranks than their peers with no EFMP dependents.¹³ The study did not negatively impact the Marines' career; however, the study showed the negative perception associated with the program.

The EFMP program, which comes with a five-year commitment before their primary care provider can release the patient, will require services for the condition at the Soldiers' follow-on duty station. The intention to ensure the availability of services for an Army Soldier/Officer's dependents is complimentary; however, this requirement comes with secondary conditions that negatively affect the Officers career.

Army officers must complete specific duty assignments that increase promotion opportunities to the next pay grade, guiding the Army officer's career. It is a directed path assisted by their career manager at Army Human Resource Command (HRC) to ensure upward career movement. Jobs, such as company command at the Captain rank, or Key Development (K.D.) positions as a new Major such as Battalion Executive Officer, must continue career advancement. The assignment location limitations set by having an EFMP dependent are detrimental to the officer's continued progress. He/she will be denied a duty location, not meeting the needs of the dependent. Some situations will require the officer to have a compassionate reassignment due to a lack of services after a dependent receives a diagnosis that requires enrollment in the EFMP. A compassionate reassignment is a medical request (generated by medical experts at your duty location) made to Human Resource Command that the Soldier should relocate due to lack of medical service to support their dependent.

An identified lack of resources for an EFMP family member can also lead to denial of attending important field grade officer schools, such as Army Intermediate Level Education at Command General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The officer will receive an email from the EFMP office at the Army Human Resource Command notifying him/her assignment denied due to a lack of services at that location. At some locations, this is due to a lack of civilian medical providers accepting the military insurance, TRICARE, in the duty location area. The limited availability of TRICARE medical care would delay available

appointments supporting the dependent's medical diagnosis. At this point, the Soldier will contact Human Resource Command to receive orders to an alternate location that can support the EFMP. The recent trend of military base hospitals reducing to a clinic has not assisted this effort. The DoD 2021 budget will bring additional military healthcare changes, reducing uniformed healthcare providers on military installations while sending dependents to civilian doctors off the post.¹⁴ It estimated this plan, called "rightsizing," will require 200,000 military dependents and retirees to seek civilian healthcare support from providers off the military installation.¹⁵ The DoD estimates the program, designed to increase Readiness by focusing on active members supported during wartime, will save 36 million dollars in the first year by connecting dependents and retirees with civilian healthcare providers in the TRICARE network.¹⁶ This plan's issue is that some military installations located in areas with small infrastructures cannot support the increased need for health care support. EFMP appointments for special needs become backed up, sometimes eliminating the installation as available for specific conditions for the incoming Soldier and his family.

The Military Child

The frequent relocation is a stressor for the Army Officers' young dependents, as continually changing schools is challenging. The military child moves three times more than the civilian friend. A demographic report conducted ten years ago by the Department of Defense identified "almost two million kids with at least one parent in the military, 1.2 million of those school-aged dependents between kindergarten and twelfth grade, with a military child growing up through all the grade levels moving an average of 6-9 times."¹⁷

2019 article "The Impact of PCS Moves on your Kids" showed the number of military kids changing school to be about 500 thousand every year.¹⁸ This large number puts a strain on the school systems associated with military duty locations. DoD schools are not available at most stateside duty installations, requiring families to rely on the local independent public-

school systems. In the book *Families under Fire, Systemic Therapy with Military Families*, relocation gives the military child a feeling of no control, even worse than the parents deploying due to the complete change to their social environment.¹⁹ *Families Under Fire* also states the stress is higher with the adolescent-aged dependents. The relocations disrupt several areas of life to include academics, friends, and even romantic bonds they had established, with the feeling of a completely new beginning resulting in psychological and emotional issues.²⁰ The military member is now not only navigating the PCS to a new location with new responsibilities; he/she is doing so with a stressed-out teenager. The Army Officer's focus has moved from the challenges associated with their new mission to managing the military household's chaos, all caused by the PCS move.

The Assignment Process

The issues continue referencing a Soldier's next duty assignment, which involves the Army's new assignment system, Assignment Interactive Module (AIM) 2.0. This system recently introduced active-duty Army officer talent management, requiring officers to identify as movers to preference jobs; one report shows the similarities to the online dating application Tinder as officers and units prefer each other in anticipation of a match.²¹ Before the assignment cycle closes, the Soldier sets up interviews in the hopes of gaining one-on-one matches with his unit and assignment of preference; the one-one assures the officer the position and will accept orders after the close of the assignment cycle. However, the EFMP process to identify available services at said location is not conducted at this point, as HRC conducts the EFMP availability process after the officer accepts the assignment. The unit assumes the preferred position filled at the desired duty location. If later identified the EFMP is not supported, the Soldier loses the assignment and must take what is leftover/ remaining in the assignment cycle. It is on the Soldier to reach out to possible duty locations to determine if their dependent will have care at the location. If the Soldier waits on the EFMP

clearance from HRC, they would be in a difficult situation with the assignment cycle closed and most of the jobs assigned to other Majors needing Key Development (K.D.) jobs. The career future not clear because of ensuring dependent youth received the medical services needed. In addition to this would be the delay in receiving orders confirming the family's following location. The AIM process itself is between three and five months. At the end of this process, the Soldier will wait another two months for temporary orders, with confirmed orders an additional two months from the temporary orders. There are circumstances that an Officer will go through the process only to have their one-on-one match broken due to the Army's needs. What is not recognized by Army Human Resource Command is that spouses and children are awaiting a confirmed location to plan for future employment and schools throughout the process. The stage of living in limbo, not knowing where the family's following location will be, is stressful. Preparation cannot begin until the process is complete and orders are confirmed.

The Military Spouse

So far, in the references to dependents, we have focused on the children. An important person in the Army family is the military spouse. The support required to move forward with the Military Officer's challenges in their career comes directly from this source; references both husbands and wives of the active-duty member. The frequent moves limit the spouse's ability to advance their professional skills, as today's spouse not traditionally in the stay-at-home and takes care of kids' role assumed in the military of old.²² Spouses today can increase their skills and education online, with the hopes of one day having a career outside the home themselves. The military even has financial programs available to assist a spouse in advancing their education. Unfortunately, a military family's spouse must put their professional goals and aspirations on hold to maintain the balance at home needed for the military member to succeed. This problematic situation is also the case for spouses with a

college education or who had a career previously before their husbands or wives came onto active duty. Without prior knowledge as to the requirements of this commitment, spouses quickly realize the difficulties of maintaining a career. The military family changes residence four times that of a civilian family.²³ The constant disruption affects the spouses' careers, families' finances, stress level, and affection for military life.²⁴ Temporary Duty Assignments, deployments, and field training events keep the military officer out of the home, not long before the military spouse realizes they will most likely be a one-income household for some time. Their role reduced to being a single parent regularly, requiring their service at home to care for the children alone. It takes time to adjust to a new assignment at a new duty location; when the military officer finally starts to get in a rhythm where the spouse feels that they can enter the work world, time for PCS orders. This complex process starts all over again.

Child Care Challenges

The first thing that may come to mind as a resource for the non-military spouse to have a career would be childcare. Childcare availability becomes an additional stressor that accompanies a move. Every military installation provides childcare through the Child Development Centers (CDC); however, it is the availability of that care when moving to a new duty location. In a 2019 *Military Times* article, leaders in defense addressed Congress on this issue, informing them that military daycare improvements were required to increase Readiness.²⁵ A spouse looking to transfer their employment skills while accompanying their military member to the new location will most likely not have an issue finding employment; however, daycare is the issue. The problem appears to be military-wide. The same article quotes the Navy Master Chief Petty Officer Russel Smith as saying childcare being affordable and available is a common complaint from Sailors at every paygrade.²⁶ The employment challenge of the non-military spouse has just increased. The demanding duties

of the military officer prevent them in most cases from assisting in childcare duties. A report concluded by the Congressional Research Service in 2019 covering military child development program problems referenced military spouse surveys indicating adequate childcare as the barrier to seeking employment.²⁷

Spouse arriving at the new location is met with a waiting list at the CDC before the job hunt can begin. A 2014 congressional report found 10,979 children on the CDC waiting list military-wide, with an estimated wait time between three and nine months.²⁸ The only option for the arriving family would be off post daycare in an area that the family does not know. Unlike the civilian family with support systems living in the local area to assist a dual working family, the military family is on their own. Defense secretary Mark Esper addresses this issue, signing a memorandum as part of the 2021 budget proposal that puts military childcare priority in categories, increasing the opportunity for the military working spouse, who has a 24 percent unemployment rate, to receive support.²⁹ The categories put a priority on active-duty service members and their spouses over Department of Defense workers. Spouses that are first responders receive a higher priority in this program. The program has shortened the waitlist; however, it remains. The non-employment of the spouse that wants to work directly affects the family readiness, which affects the officer and, eventually, the unit mission.

Pre and Post-Move Challenges

The active-duty officer will have to hit the ground running at their new assignment. The spouse becomes in charge of engaging with the household good (furniture) movers at both the departing and arriving locations while also maintaining school and health records for the family move. At this point, the spouse begins the challenge of identifying schools at the following duty location and the best match for the kids. In her thesis written on "Permanent Change of Station and Stress" U.S. Army War College 1991, Lieutenant Colonel Mary E.

Morgan identified fifty percent of mothers seeing a negative spike in the kids' behavior before a Permanent Change of Station, her move with high school-aged children being the most stressful.³⁰ Although written thirty years ago, LTC Morgan's thesis has a striking resemblance to the challenges the military family faces today with frequent moves.

Lieutenant Colonel Morgan expands on the military member's spouse's pressure by saying that the family feels this pressure. She states that the entire family puts their aspirations second to support the military and the Army's organizational demands.³¹ An incredible statement related to Readiness; this speaks to the active-duty officer maintaining his performance requirements established by the Army mission to take precedence over their family's goals. A strong statement from an O-5 level officer at the Army War College in the early nineties. LTC Morgan hits on several points, and solutions to such are discussed towards the end of this paper. However, recognize at this point related to an earlier statement about the expectation to hit the ground running. The military member takes PCS leave of absence, which allows them travel time to get their family from one location to the other. Depending on the distance, travel mode could be driving in personally owned vehicles or by air. The result for the military member upon arrival, however, is the same. The fact that they are on the ground means time to go to work. Permissive temporary duty, better known as permissive TDY, is a ten-day period to allow the member to find living arrangements for their family before processing or starting their assignment. If the military family is proactive and finds their residence off the post before arriving, they will lose the ten days of house hunting since they already have an established address. The fact in this situation is that it's almost impossible for a family with school-aged children to not be proactive in this situation. Parents must investigate the schools and determine the area they will live in before arriving, as ten days in an area you have never been before being not enough. The other challenge with this expectation is not having an address. The new school will require an address, along

with an emergency contact, which is another ridiculous expectation we will get into later. LTC Morgan recognized this conflict in her thesis. She referenced the Army's expectation of starting work upon arrival, placing additional stress on the family, and recommended a settling-in allowance of fourteen days for every family.³² The truth is that some military Officers are utilizing their leave days to provide the time buffer needed to settle their family into their new duty location before pulled away for their assignment demands. The military leave of absence is for quality family time. Officers using leave time for movement is not quality time with family. Providing the officer a few weeks to assist the spouse with school enrolment, childcare options, and even the spouse's employment opportunities will allow the member to focus upon their first day on the new job, thus increasing Readiness.

Housing

We have discussed that frequent moves challenge the spouse professionally and the family's physical and mental maintenance; health care for the children will not be consistent.³³ The spouse and member will start engaging with schools and health care facilities soon after the movement orders are received to ensure health care for the children is consistent and available. A prerequisite to the daycare, school, and healthcare requirement is housing. The essential requirement needed with establishing the new family foundation will be a place to stay. The initial thought for supporting this need would be on-base housing. Active-duty military locations have housing on base managed by civilian companies. The condition of these living quarters has received negative feedback from families. A recent survey conducted by a nonprofit organization identified families reporting unsafe conditions in private developers' base homes. The complaints about the conditions range from mold to structural issues.³⁴ These families were reporting these deficiencies in December of 2020 at a Senate Armed Service Committee hearing, which resulted in the President's new legislation that put disputes between military housing and military members in the hands of the regional

Commander.³⁵ Like the daycare, housing has a waiting list, as the larger homes' availability on the post for families of five or more is always limited. The families arrive at temporary live-in quarters until housing confirmed move-in. The civilian management can provide housing if available; however, there have been several cases where Officer housing is not available, and management will offer a house established for lower-ranking members. Civilian management will require the Officers' entire allotment for Basic Allowance for Quarters. The company is receiving a higher amount of income for a lower rate of housing. The option of reducing the BAQ withdrawn from the officers' pay is not available. The limitations on-base housing conditions and availability force families to look at renting a house off the post. The requirement for first and last month's rent plus a security deposit for a modest size family house could be in the range of three thousand dollars out of pocket immediately upon arrival at your new location. There is a third option, which is buying a house. It may seem that buying a house at a temporary location does not make sense; however, when looking at your options and the need to stabilize the family before starting work, this is the easiest way to get your family grounded. The back end of this option is selling the house before moving to another location in a few years; the less complicated option is renting the house. Military Officers become landlords without intention. The limited housing availability and increased housing cost due to Covid-19 have increased this at the beginning stages of the pandemic related to the Department of Defense mandated stop move order. In a June 2020 article by CNBC, the stop move order ran from March to 30 June of 2020, impacting approximately 24 thousand soldiers.³⁶ Families had put down earnest money on homes in anticipation of their PCS move, having to either lose the money or pay the mortgage along with their current rent; the polling conducted by Blue Star Families and Association showed this was the case for 17 percent.³⁷ The military Officer expectation to manage the situation and report for duty as required, with the additional pressure of hidden

increased cost of family housing management. The residual effects are present a year into the pandemic, as rising housing costs and limited availability have increased the difficulty of the housing situation for military families relocating in 2021.

Recommendations

So, what are some recommendations to overcome the previously discussed difficulties with Army PCS moves? First, the issues discussed are related to stability, a standard related to every PCS challenge for the Army Officer and his family. The military dependent loses the consistency of a steady dual-income, housing, education, and health care systems due to the requirement to adjust to new environments every few years.³⁸ The first recommendation would be to advocate for four-year assignments for Army Officers. Many of the before-mentioned issues could be eliminated by a military family knowing they will be at their assigned location for a reliable four-year timeframe. The stabilization would improve the education, medical, and spousal career opportunities and decrease temporary assignments' emotional stress. The designed EFMP assignment policy was to stabilize the service member in the location of identified services for four years.³⁹ Unfortunately, due to the Army and career progression needs, the officer with an EFMP dependent will receive orders well before the four-year mark, requiring them to decide between family separation or uninterrupted services for the dependent. Assignment officers at Human Resource Command should identify this during the assignment cycle, and the four-year EFMP policy enforced to override the change of station. For reasons that are not clear, the HRC assignment policies do not include investigating Officer advancement opportunities at his/her current location.⁴⁰ Army installations have multiple units with diverse missions that would allow the officer to progress through an inter post-move to another Command on the same installation. Inter post movements would be a monetary saving to the military in addition to improving Readiness through stabilization. Permanent change of station cost averaged 1.75 Billion dollars

annually between 2015 and 2020, with an expectation to rise.⁴¹ Officers and Soldiers assigned to a unit will become a cohesive team that understands each other and the unit's mission, increasing Readiness through familiarization and reduced retraining requirements.⁴² The frequent changes in Officer leadership install a constant state of change in unit environments throughout the Army. Extending the Army officer assignment to four years at a duty location will improve efficiency and Readiness.

Enlisted military members do not change duty locations at the officers' pace. Enlisted members are counted on to provide stability through the military, which is why the Army refers to its Non-Commission Officer corps as its backbone. Having a new officer at every level requires the NCO leadership to adjust to changes implanted through a new philosophy. The Army is continuously adjusting at every operational level due to the frequency of leadership changes. The change prevents unit stagnation. However, the Army should keep the leadership in place long enough to positively impact and change before the leadership movement, providing the leadership stability needed for improved unit readiness.

Professional Military Education is an essential tool increasing force readiness through knowledge, focusing on improving officer leadership. Seventy percent of military training cost movement, which makes up 3 percent of annual PCS moves, is dedicated to officer advanced courses such as the Captains course and staff college for Majors.⁴³ One thing we have learned through the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic is the capabilities of virtual learning. School systems around the country at all levels have adapted to online learning. The advancement in this capability could eliminate the stressful one-year relocation requirement that comes with advanced courses. Attending resident learning is a privilege earned through hard work and above-average officer evaluations. The Army uses this selection to differentiate between performance levels, as the top 33 percent of an officer class is selected for in resident staff college learning upon promotion to Major. If an officer were

to turn down resident learning to prioritize family stability, this would negatively affect future assignment and promotion opportunities. Not a written policy, however, well understood throughout the military officer world. As referenced to this organization several times, the Army Human Resource Command would need to establish policy and reduce residential selections to 20 percent to increase stability and reduce cost. Officers selected for residential but opt-out should be allowed to express their reason for the decision and not have this held against them for family reasons. An additional option would be to reduce advanced course learning to temporary duty assignment (TDY) to shorten the officer's time away from home. The TDY assignment is less than six months. The TDY could be a hybrid with virtual learning to meet the professional military education requirement. The one-year schools are a tradition; however, internet capabilities did not exist in years past, and consideration of this option is critical to family stability. An increased effort with virtual learning at all advanced course learning levels could streamline this effort and increase proficiency.

The job and school disruptions absorbed by the Active duty service member are only part of the military family's issues. As discussed earlier, the military family's youth struggle in several life areas due to frequent moves. The military child's stress level increases with disruptions related to continually changing schools and peer groups.⁴⁴ The greatest challenge for the military youth is the adolescent years of teenage life and the difficulties of moving for a high school student, as the adverse effects of PCS moves are increasing during these years.⁴⁵ In her 1991 thesis on this topic, LTC Mary Morgan captured the issues related to non-consistency of high school graduation requirements and how transferring credits from different schools due to PCS moves should not hinder the Officers child from graduating.⁴⁶ The military Department of Defense school system is active at overseas locations. However, stateside students are dependent on public school systems adjacent to military duty locations. The DoD education system needs a program in place for military high school students. An

education advocate could work with the local school district to prevent graduation delays related to high school credit transfers.

DoD representative could also be proactive in working with the family before the PCS move as a liaison between the family and the new school. The representative could also be an emergency contact, as this request from the new school is impossible for a family arriving at a new location. The United States also needs a standard education system to prevent military dependents from the educational adjustments that come with each duty location. A recent article titled "*Frequent Moves Takes Their Toll on Military Kids*" indicates 70 percent of high school students are not meeting the DoD academic requirements for enlistment could be a threat to Readiness.⁴⁷ Currently, the military mitigation plan is the high school stabilization program, limiting this disruption by stabilizing high school-dependent junior and senior years.⁴⁸ The program is, however, a small band-aid on a huge problem. The junior year of high school is the average age of 16 years old, and adolescents have established strong bonds with peers before this age. In conjunction with the Army Officer's recommended assignment extension, the high school stabilization program should start during the freshman year, allowing the military child to have a solid foundation during the most critical years of their education and emotional development. Allowing the active duty member to stabilize during the high school years would reduce overall stress to the family, lower emotional issues in military youth, and increase the military child's educational development. The Highschool stabilization program ensures family stability. However, HRC will instruct the active duty member that this program is for the family and does not stabilize the service member at their current duty location, which seems to undermine the program's point.

Another recommendation is for the before mentioned fourteen-day settle-in period upon arrival to new duty assignments; immediately reporting to work increases stress to the family adjusting to several aspects of change the new location.

⁴⁹ This recommendation, supported by the before-mentioned 1991 thesis by LTC Morgan, would prevent the officer from using valuable leave days to accomplish tasks associated with family stabilization. As mentioned earlier, the officer does not have the flexibility needed to provide a stable family foundation before taking on his assigned mission due to the expectation of working upon arrival. The settle-in period would be separate from leave or permissive TDY, allowing the active duty member to support the spouse during this critical period. Currently, the officer is juggling these responsibilities during the in-processing period and the new assignment's first few weeks. Readiness and work quality would increase due to these tasks being complete upon the Officers first day at work.

The Army has relocation and sponsorship programs that attempt to reduce the PCS stress, as advanced notice of the move would assist with stress reduction.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the advanced notice of Human Resource Command orders is not timely as the family would like. Confirmed orders for officers attending advanced courses received an average of four months or less before their graduation date, a limited window for the family to investigate all the before mentioned challenges with the PCS movement. The HRC orders process needs to provide the military family at least six months of advanced notice of their following duty location to reduce stress and increase Readiness. The Army attempts to support families through the Total Army Sponsorship Program (TASP), designed to assist families during PCS by providing a Soldier from the incoming unit of equivalent rank to assist the active member and his family with the move.⁵¹ The Army has required training for individuals selected to be sponsors, and the incoming Soldiers are required to enroll in the program upon receiving their orders to the new assignment. The program's concept meets the intent, though the commitment the sponsor provides to the family depends on the individual, as some are better at the responsibility than others. The sponsor is selected randomly by the administration section of the incoming unit (S-1), and the duty is in addition to regular tasks.

A common mistake is matching the sponsor to the family, as an officer that is single with no family should not sponsor an incoming officer with several dependents. A more effective program would be assigning this as a permanent tasking to a small team or even government service employees to provide consistent support to incoming families. The program has good intentions, but the different sponsors' inconsistency has taken away from the program's reliability. When responsibility is an additional duty, the expectation doesn't meet the program's intended level of effectiveness. Consistent sponsorship with an established program in place would reduce stress related to health care needs, school information, and housing assistance on or off the post. Having a reliable source through the permanent change of station process that can answer questions months ahead of your arrival and follow this up by assisting the family during the settling-in period would reduce stress and increase Readiness at the program's intended level. As this program improvement would help mitigate the limited housing and daycare availability, there is a need for increased availability in this area. Suppose an officer takes a military housing established for a lower rank due to limited availability; their housing allowance payment should be adjusted to that level and not pay their entire allotment for a lower level home.

Finally, we will discuss recommendations for what's personally considered the biggest challenge, the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). A RAND Corporation interview listed EFMP as the number one of the top four problems related to PCS moves, followed by spouse employment opportunities, kids entering new schools, and family stabilization.⁵² The first change to this program needs to be the mandatory five-year assignment after enrollment due to a particular medical need. The active duty member is subjected to the limited assignment availability for the duration, as EFMP service availability takes top consideration for assignments.⁵³ EFMP should be evaluated yearly on a case-by-case basis; for example, an infant with a severe milk allergy has a high chance of outgrowing

this problem before the age of five. The program currently does not provide that flexibility, requiring the officer to adjust career goals and objectives around the EFMP policy. The parents of the dependent need additional input with removing the dependent from the EFMP program. As it currently stands, this can only be accomplished by the medical professional after evaluation, and due to liability issues, the decision will be to remain on EFMP. EFMP eliminates overseas opportunities due to limited medical service, leaving the only options for the Soldier receiving overseas orders from HRC being unaccompanied or a different assignment with available EFMP services.⁵⁴ The officer with an EFMP dependent should be prioritized early in the assignment cycle; identifying the service ahead of receiving orders prevents the added work of canceling the orders and looking for locations late in the assignment cycle, which further reduces the PCS timeline that's already limited. The EFMP scan needs to take priority at the beginning of assignment cycles for the officer and his family to reduce the friction.

Conclusion

Being an officer in the greatest military in the world is a privilege and an honor, as serving one's country at the highest level of leadership has no comparison. Managing a family and this responsibility has several challenges, as we have discussed, with a lack of stability being the consistent theme. The increase in technology since LTC Morgan's 1991 War College Thesis referred to in this essay would eliminate some of the challenges the Army Officer continues to face today. The military family life is complex, and the added stress that comes with changing duty stations impacts leadership, as housing and daycare are basic needs met with a waiting list. The effect of waiting on housing and daycare is family readiness and the Readiness of the military overall. The increased percentage of adolescents requiring mental health assistance indicates that frequent move for the military child affects

the entire family. Traditional frequent moves for Officer career advancement need reevaluation, considering these same opportunities could be accomplished through post transfers while reducing the overall budget for PCS moves. The 1.75 Billion annual PCS cost could be directed to other military needs increasing Readiness. Military dependents serve alongside active-duty members and need issues resolved as that of the uniformed officer. The military spouse is looking to engage in their careers; however, they meet military family obstacles that limit these opportunities. Simultaneously, military child advances academically and emotionally from additional stability gained through longer Army Officer assignments. DoD education representatives are needed to assist with a foundational education program for a military child across the country. It is part of a transition team providing sponsorship to military and civilian contacts during a station change. The increased focus on stability would decrease PCS's stress and reduce mental health issues in military adolescents while providing consistency for EFMP dependents. The active-duty military should have the added family support in every area of concern discussed in this essay; the overall result of increasing the officer's family stability would be increasing the overall Readiness of our military. This research is summed up in a 2019 quote by the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green in *The military's lingering readiness problem: Lack of daycare*, as he states, "Readiness is a three-legged stool, we have unit readiness ... I have family readiness, and I have personal Readiness. And every warrior tries to balance that same stool. If we can't get the quality-of-life part right because we're funding the war-fighting part, then we're suffering on the battlefield because I can't focus."⁵⁵

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