

Frequent Fliers

Military families learn make the best of multiple moves.

By Tom Comi

When we think of the brave men and women who serve in the military to protect our country, we justifiably focus on the fact that they put their lives on the line for us every day. But there is also another sacrifice these people make, and that has to do with the constant moves, both here and abroad, that they endure with their families.

Most civilian families may make one or two moves in their entire lives, and even those are oftentimes within the same state. It is commonplace for military families to relocate every three to four years, and that can certainly take its toll—especially on those with young children.

Colonel James Robert Andrews is currently attending school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and he can relate to the hardships of moving as both a child and an adult. His father was also in the military, so he has spent his entire life on the go. As a member of the Army for the past 23 years, he has served stints in Germany (twice), Texas, North Carolina, Kansas, Kentucky and Virginia.

Andrews said he sees the good and bad of constantly relocating, and he admits his experience as a military brat has helped him and his wife, Christy, with the transition for their own kids (Meghan, 12, and Sean, 9).

“I think I’m better suited to sit down and talk to them about the next assignment and to encourage them to get excited about what they will gain rather than what they are losing,” he explained, adding that his wife and kids are currently living in Virginia while he attends school. “Children [in military families] are exposed to new environments and new challenges, which has added greatly to their life experience; however, they



Wayne Dedloff's family used storage facilities during his father's military career, and he now relies on them in his profession as a Realtor in Kansas.

hate having to make new friends all the time.”

Wayne Dedloff, 44, is a real estate agent in Lawrence, Kansas, and he also experienced the military life through his late father, Major James Dedloff. Like Andrews, his family moved often, living in Germany, Oklahoma, Texas, Hawaii, Indiana, Massachusetts and ultimately Kansas.

“I didn’t know any different lifestyle when I was younger, because all my friends experienced the same lifestyle as a military nomad,” he said. “You learn to make friends quickly, since you don’t know if your best friend’s family might get reassigned next month, or if it will be your own family that has to move in a month’s notice.”

Dedloff admitted, however, that the family’s last military assignment

to Kansas was a tougher transition, because he was starting high school.

“Most of my fellow students had gone to school together since the first grade, so I was suddenly the new kid,” he recalled. “It was at an awkward age, and I had to prove myself. It took a full year before I felt fully accepted and developed some strong friendships. Before then, growing up in the military, we were all the new kids at some point.”

What’s in Store?

Approximately 50 percent of storage rentals are directly related to relocations or moving, which explains why military personnel rely so heavily on places to store their belongings.

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One of those customers is Timothy P. Briskey, 50, who served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years before retiring as an E-6 and settling down with his wife in Ashburn, Virginia. He said storing his possessions was necessary for many reasons in his moves to Florida, Scotland, Maryland, London and twice in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

"I used storage paid by the government when I was in Diego Garcia, Scotland and London," he said. "For Diego, the only possessions allowed were clothes, a bicycle if you wanted one, a stereo and a TV. In Scotland and London, families had a limit of 7,000 pounds, and individuals were restricted to about 3,000. No appliances were shipped due to different voltage, and most U.S. TVs do not work due to European broadcast system."

Frank Chesney, 53, of Oceanside, California, said he also relied heavily on storage during his career in the Marines (he retired as a major in 2000). And that makes perfect sense when you consider he and his family moved nine times in 20 years and four times in a 34-month span.

"Almost all of our moves were door-to-door, so items were only in storage for a short time while waiting to be transferred to a new location," he said, mentioning that he lived in Arizona, Japan, Virginia, and California. "One move involved storing part of our belongings for a year in Arizona while we were in Japan. From Japan we moved to Virginia, and our belongings were then removed from storage and sent from Arizona to Virginia."

Chesney said storing his belongings—be it temporarily or long-term—made his life easier in several ways.

"One, I did not have to sell my possessions off and then purchase new items when we returned to the U.S.," he said. "Granted, we were only gone for a year, but it allowed us to keep our things stored and know where they were. Second, since our stored items had not left Arizona, I could go back and access them before shipment if I needed something right away at my next duty station."

Dedloff, 44, lives in Kansas with his wife Sherri and two sons, Hunter (14) and Logan (11). Even though he was young when his father was in the Army, he said he still remembers vividly how his family stowed their possessions.

"I know we left most of our belongings in storage in the U.S. during our 7-year tour in Germany," he said. "Living on Army bases, we not only didn't have room for many personal items, but we had no use for them since furniture and lawn care were provided on military bases. We also stored fragile items that we wouldn't want to risk getting damaged during shipping, such as family heirlooms, crystal and our china set."

The New Normal

Decisions on what to take or leave on a move are difficult enough, but relocating so frequently can also affect the buying habits of people in the military.

"It affected the quality of the items that we purchased in the sense that they had to withstand several moves during the

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time that we would likely own them,” Chesney admitted. “Durability was more of a premium in purchase selection than some other factors.”

Andrews said he and his wife purchased a lot of nice furniture in North Carolina when they first got married, but some of it ended up getting damaged in a move. As a result, he said they changed their mindset on future purchases.”



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Colonel James Robert Andrews

“We just decided it wasn’t worth our investment to purchase upscale furniture,” he admitted. “We’ll just wait until we are done moving. It’s definitely had an impact on what we purchase now or in the future. Our washer and dryer were in storage for three years, and we didn’t have any problems at all. We came back from Germany and still use it today.”

Because people in the military are so familiar with using storage facilities, it is not uncommon for that to carry over to their personal lives when they retire. Briskey said he and his wife wouldn’t be able to keep all of the things they collected over the years without a unit.

“We own a townhouse, and the only storage area we have is our garage,” he said, recalling that he used a facility for

more than six years while stationed in Alaska and London. “So we have a small storage rental, where we rotate our seasonal stuff in and out.”

As a real estate agent, Dedloff said he often relies on his family’s past experiences of using storage to help his current clients.

“I learned about the convenience and security of using storage facilities when my father was in the Army,” he said. “Oftentimes I experience sellers who have accumulated decades of items, and we have to encourage the rental of a storage unit to de-clutter a home and make it more presentable to potential buyers. When I think about it, it’s amazing how important of a role storage units have played in my life.” ❖

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