



The Soldier for Life — Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) is a centrally funded commanders program that provides transition assistance services to eligible Soldiers. For more information, visit <https://www.sfl-tap.army.mil/> (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. 1st Class LaTonya Kelly)

Transitions

By Sgt. Maj. Craig T. Lott

TRADOC Retention Branch

Published in From One Leader to Another Volume I by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2013

Transitions in the military are part of its culture and day-to-day life. Individuals will come and go from your organization and the service on nearly a daily basis. Like any change, it is important to remain flexible and adjust to that change when it occurs. In the simplest terms, transitions involve the process of passing from one point or stage to another. This paper will focus on two types of common transitions in the military, PCS (permanent change of station) and ETS (expiration term of service). Understanding the intricacies of each requires a great deal of research, plan-

ning, preparation, and time management which will be the central focus of this paper. The message here will be how individuals prepare for each phase in order to best posture them and possibly their family for success. Although a PCS and ETS transition are largely an individual action/responsibility, it takes leader involvement in order to ensure the greatest likelihood of a smooth transition. Today's leaders understand the significance of our Army's "All Volunteer Force" and how transitions into, within and out of the service can positively and negatively impact perceptions regarding the military.

At the end of the day each and every service member will experience a transition of one sort or another, therefore it is imperative that leaders at all levels educate and assist them in the process.

A PCS transition involves moving from one duty station or another based on assignment notification/instructions often directed at the need and discretion of the Army, while ETS involves departing the military service all together either voluntarily or involuntarily for any number of reasons. The keys to success in either situation start with understanding how to best research, plan, prepare, and manage one's time in the process. Individuals who embrace the concepts of transitioning find it easy to adjust when the time comes. Installations across the Army have established programs and agencies to assist in this process, some of which include the Army Community Service, the Army Career and Alumni Program, the Veteran's Administration and the Department of Labor. All of which can assist with conducting research in a number of areas including details on your gaining installation, employment opportunities in a particular area and services offered at your next location. One's research is only limited by their interest and motivation.

Planning and preparing for a transition includes a myriad of activities. A good starting point to capture those activities are the organizational and unit clearing



Former U.S. Army infantryman Spc. Kalob Johannsen, assigned to 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, works on a vehicle during his last week at Caliber Collision Academy in Falcon, Colo., March 23, 2019. Johannsen, who left the Army a year ago, found the academy through the Fort Carson Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program to help him get a job in Denver, Colo. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Neysa Canfield)

checklists. Although you may be several months away from your actual PCS or ETS it never hurts to ask for a copy of those checklists in advance in order to first, gain an appreciation for what will be expected of you and second, to add to those lists items not already identified. An example of those additional items for a married Soldier might be including the close out of your children's schools and pick-up of their school records, while for a single Soldier it might be when to schedule for your internet to be shut off. The point here is that there are countless small details that must be planned for in order to ensure success. Leaders must remain engaged throughout this process as they have the training, education and most importantly, the experience.

With regard to time management, the typical time for a transition depends on the circumstances and each individual; therefore the allocated time for a transition is largely on a case by case basis. For a PCS move, the normal timeframe is six-nine months from the time of notification. However, in some cases, report dates change and can be shorter based on current Army priorities, the needs of the gaining command and even the needs of the Soldier and their family. For an ETS, Soldiers typically plan to leave the



U.S. Army Forces Command's Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Grinston (now 16th sergeant major of the Army) speaks with the senior group of transitioning Soldiers at the Pfc. Milton A. Lee Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program Center at Fort Campbell, Ky., May 22, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Steven Lopez)

service well in advance and therefore have a greater lead time. Because there is generally a longer period of time available for their planning and preparation, Soldiers are now authorized to attend the mandatory Transition Assistance Program two years in advance of their ETS. The obvious exception is a Soldier being involuntarily separated which significantly reduces their planning time. Leaders are also required to conduct pre-separation counseling a year prior to a Soldier's ETS. The goal is to ensure that each individual Soldier is the utmost prepared before their ETS which may include a civilian/government resume, a letter of intent if attending college or an actual job offer.

In conclusion, transitions (PCS/ETS) are part of military life. It takes proper research, planning, preparation,

and time management. The focus of this paper was to highlight these concepts as individuals prepare for these life-changing events. Those who have lived through one or both of these experiences can attest to the importance of taking a deliberate approach. It is imperative to understand that transitioning is a life altering experience and when embraced properly can be a rewarding experience for everyone associated.

If you would like to learn more about this topic it is recommended that you take the time to read or visit the following: AR 601-680, *The Army Retention Program*, AR 600-8-8, *Total Army Sponsorship Program*, the ACAP (Army Career and Alumni Program), the TAP (Transition Assistance Program). You can also visit <https://soldierforlife.army.mil>. ■



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

