

Military OneSource Podcast — What You Need to Know About PCSing With Pets

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. In the military, we move a lot and often with pets. Today we'll talk with two people from the team that can help you move your pet to your new home. They're from the Air Force's Air Mobility Command. We are welcoming to the podcast Air Force Major Jose Hinojosa, and also with us today from Air Mobility Command is Angela Delauter.

Now, I'm retired Navy. I don't speak Air Force very clearly, so I'm going to allow you to both introduce yourselves and the organization where you work, and then we'll get into talking about pets. So Major Hinojosa, let's begin with you.

Major Jose Hinojosa:

Sure. My name is Major Jose Hinojosa. I'm a C-5 pilot by trade, but now I'm working on the AMC staff, so Air Mobility Command staff, as a special action officer in the commander's action group. Essentially what I do is I plan all the special events that our boss General Minahan hosts.

Bruce Moody:

Great. Great. Good to have you with us. Those C-5s, as big as they look from the air, they are huge.

Major Jose Hinojosa:

It's absolutely breathtaking. It almost seems like they're just floating through the air because of how big they are.

Bruce Moody:

They're bigger than you imagine when you're standing inside of them. Welcome, Angela Delauter. Welcome to the podcast.

Angela Delauter:

Thank you, Bruce. Good morning. I'm a logistics management specialist. I work in the Air Passenger Movement Policy Branch, and I am the lead for pet policy right now.

Bruce Moody:

Excellent. Angela, let's begin with you. You know, it may be obvious to anyone with a family pet, but talk to us about why a pet can be so important to a family and why we take such care in helping a family move their pet.

Angela Delauter:

Well, Bruce, pets really are family members. They're there for you to provide comfort, emotional support and in my case, humor. I have a boxer and I think they're the clowns of the dog world. They're just part of the family. And unfortunately, they can't always fly in cabin with you, and they need extra care for their travel arrangements. So that's what we try and do, provide the best care and comfort and safety for moving your family member, your furry family member.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Care, comfort and safety, two things that definitely you want to have. Major, I know you have a story that sort of, well, maybe illustrates the importance of taking care of your pet during a move.

Major Jose Hinojosa:

Sure, absolutely. So we'll rewind back to 2018. I was moving from Dover Air Force Base to Travis Air Force Base, and it was my first move with a family as a whole, so my wife Rachel and my Australian shepherd Luna. And as you can imagine, that's a really long cross-country drive. We planned it over seven days. And as you can imagine, once again, if anything's going to go wrong, it all did, all at the same time essentially. So within the first couple of hours of the drive, my dog Luna got sick.

She was pretty lethargic, just really not able to stay in the car for a very long time without having to use the bathroom. So it went from a seven-day drive out to a 14-15 day drive. And as you can imagine, that was pretty expensive out of our pocket for all the extra hotel stays that we had to take. And not only that, everything else that could go wrong did. We had a U-Haul pop a flat tire. We had people break into both vehicles at different points in time. Someone had actually broken into the U-Haul at one point.

Someone stole our spare tire. But of course, none of that really compares to the concern that we had because as you know, any move with an animal stresses the animal out, and really we just felt helpless with making Luna feel better.

Bruce Moody:

Ouch! What an experience. That really tees up the conversation that we're having today. And Angela, as we can empathize with Major Hinojosa, it's really important to talk about what the department is doing to help families who are moving with pets.

Angela Delauter:

So we're doing several things on the financial front. The DOD has authorized starting 1 January 2024 pet reimbursement. So whenever you incur fees in conjunction with your permanent change of station, moving with pets, if you're moving overseas, the reimbursement can be up to \$2,000. And if you're moving stateside, that reimbursement is \$550 that you could receive.

Bruce Moody:

Now, you're talking about pets, so I have to ask, what does the military consider a pet?

Angela Delauter:

So the military considers only dogs or cats pets. No goldfish or lizards.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. And again, break this down a little bit. Reimbursement is for one pet?

Angela Delauter:

That is correct. It is for one pet per family. Unless you are a dual military family, they do each get one pet reimbursed.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks, Angela. Got it. We're talking about a pet being a dog or a cat. Let's focus on the dogs with regard to specific breeds.

Angela Delauter:

Yes, Bruce, I definitely would like to talk about brachycephalic pets, which are the snub nose breeds, your English bulldogs, French bulldogs, pugs. They have a hard time breathing just on the ground, and so travel is especially tough for them. So I definitely ask that you speak with your veterinarian, make sure that your pet is in good health.

Make sure they're not sedated, which actually aggravates that condition of not being able to breathe. Again, speak with your veterinarian. I'm not a veterinarian. We do work very closely with the Defense Health Agency veterinarians, but there is an extra risk.

Bruce Moody:

Understand. You work very carefully with Defense Health Agency, and this is a policy that you spend a lot of time refining. Do you have any numbers? How many pets you've moved?

Angela Delauter:

So since 2017, we have moved almost 46,000 pets. And unfortunately, in that time, we have lost 17, 15 of those being snub nose breeds, and the other two being very elderly. And since we've started tracking medication, they've all been medicated. So there is a common denominator.

It really is the pet family's responsibility, as well as our responsibility. We're going to do everything we can to make the journey safe for your pet, but we need that family to make sure that they are taking all of those risks into consideration before they move their pet.

Bruce Moody:

Got it. I appreciate you getting into that, especially with those specific breeds of dogs. You're covering a lot of the policy and the intent of the policy. And Major Hinojosa, in light of the story that you shared earlier, as you're hearing all of this, how does this policy make it easier for families who are moving with a pet?

Major Jose Hinojosa:

So kind of how we talked about my experience there, one of the biggest impacts of extending that drive was expenses on hotel stays. So I don't know if you guys have ever moved or driven long distances with an animal, but good hotels usually charge anywhere between \$50 and \$150 for a pet fee, and that's per pet. So as we were moving and having to stay the night places, when we were looking for places to stay, we're paying on average about \$75 per night for Luna.

And that was in addition to what the hotel costs and also didn't include the extra fees we had to pay for cleanup when we were leaving. So hearing that, there are initiatives to provide reimbursement for those fees and costs, that would be a huge financial burden lifted off the shoulders of PCSing military members. I had a best friend just moved from Japan to Travis Air Force Base, and they have two dogs.

They were only able to fit one animal onto the Patriot Express. So my buddy Scott flew on the Patriot Express with one of those dogs, and his spouse Jessica had to get a commercial ticket to fly their other animal home. They ate that cost for that animal to fly commercially. So hearing that there is a commercial reimbursement for one animal up to \$2,000 would've been a huge benefit for them.

Bruce Moody:

Now, explain to us what is the Patriot Express?

Angela Delauter:

The Patriot Express is a commercial aircraft like you'd see in Delta American Airlines, except for the government contracts the aircraft out to fly to destinations specifically for DOD members, military members and civilians and their families.

Bruce Moody:

Got it. Okay, thanks for that. Now, when we're looking to move a pet, what are some of the considerations when we're comparing moving say across the states versus moving overseas?

Angela Delauter:

So moving overseas, you really need to be concerned with the country that you're moving to. What are their import requirements? Do your pets need to have a special microchip, vaccinations, quarantines, specific tests that they need to have accomplished within a certain amount of days before you move to that country? I mean, it's a lot of information, and every country is different.

Bruce Moody:

What advice do you have for families who are moving their pet for the first time?

Angela Delauter:

My advice is to start planning early, get organized, take your pet to the veterinarian, make sure that they are healthy enough to make the journey, get your pet acclimated to their kennel. It's very stressful for pets to travel. They don't know what's going on, and it is very helpful to have them already feel comfortable and safe in the kennel environment. It lowers their stress.

Bruce Moody:

Moving is an ordeal in itself. Moving with a pet is just next level. For people listening to this podcast, if you want a single takeaway from all of this, well, there's a lot of information in the program notes, links to articles that are going to help you prepare for your move. But even simpler than that, you can just get on the phone or text Military OneSource, our call center, 24/7 information for you.

You can just say, "Hey, I'm moving with a pet. What do I do now?" And they will absolutely help you out. I want to wrap up this conversation by giving the both of you an opportunity to talk about the organization where you work in terms of what it's like to be responsible to have a mission that includes moving families and their pets. Who are the people over at Air Mobility Command who are doing this job? Angela, let's start with you.

Angela Delauter:

Well, I can say that we are pet lovers and that we try to do anything that we can to make the pets have a safe journey, a comfortable journey. We try to ensure that the families feel comfortable with the transportation that they have available to them. We are constantly going back to the drawing board to make things safer and better for the pets. We work very closely with the Defense Health Agency veterinarians to find ways to improve the transportation process. And that's it, and we try to educate passengers moving their pets.

Bruce Moody:

Thank you. And Major?

Major Jose Hinojosa:

So as an air crew member, I can attest that Air Mobility Command is in the business of mobility, so getting things from point A to point B. And there isn't a better team to do it. This is my first experience working on a staff, and I've been absolutely impressed with everything that they've been able to accomplish and the initiatives that they're making for families and their pets whenever they're moving. I can say that that's a huge burden lifted off our shoulders for our next move, whenever that will be. So that's really all I've got.

Bruce Moody:

I really appreciate the both of you joining us today.

Major Jose Hinojosa:

Of course. Happy to be here and thanks for having us.

Angela Delauter:

Yeah, thank you, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

Air Force Major Jose Hinojosa and Angela Delauter. They're from the Air Force's Air Mobility Command. And want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. Click on the link in the program notes to send us a question, a comment, or maybe an idea for a future episode. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcast because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.