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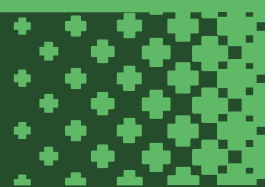


LIFE CHECKLISTS

The Military Life Handbook

Smart Hacks for Service Members & Families

By Mike Sanders



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018 Your First 30-Day Base Life Checklist

- ☐ Attend newcomer orientation or watch the online version
- ☐ Visit MWR and/or ITT office
- ☐ Enroll in or update the Tricare clinic
- ☐ Visit the commissary and exchange
- ☐ Check school or daycare enrollment options
- ☐ Find the gate access or visitor policy
- ☐ Attend one event (social, volunteer, recreational)
- ☐ Pick one perk to try (library, fitness class, gear rental)
- ☐ Know the hours of each gate. Some close at night.
- ☐ Know where restricted areas are.
- ☐ Find EV charging stations if needed.
- ☐ Buy a paper map. Look at the entire area.

036 Questions to Ask a Potential Roommate Before Moving In

Each adult in the household will grab their bag. This contains clothing in their size and style to keep going for 72 hours. These should be labeled with a name and color-coded.

- 1. What's your work schedule like?**
(Military? Civilian? Night shifts? Weekends? Helps avoid clashing routines.)
- 2. Do you smoke, drink, or have pets?**
(Know ahead of time if you're okay with their lifestyle and habits.)
- 3. How do you prefer to split rent and bills?**
(Equal split? Based on room size? Who pays utilities and when?)
- 4. How clean or organized are you?**
(Are you on the same page about dishes, trash, shared spaces?)
- 5. How do you feel about overnight guests?**
(Agree on rules for visitors, parties, or significant others staying over.)
- 6. Do you cook or eat out most of the time?**
(Shared fridge and kitchen use can get messy fast if not discussed.)
- 7. Are you willing to sign the lease?**
(Make sure both names are on the lease to protect yourself legally.)
- 8. What's your plan if one of us gets orders or needs to move out early?**
(Have a backup plan or agreement in writing for unexpected situations.)
- 9. Do you have reliable income and references?**
(Don't get stuck covering the full rent because they can't pay their share.)
- 10. Why are you looking for a roommate?**
(It's helpful to know their motivations and if they're reliable.)

038 Roommate Agreement

Basic Info

- Names of all roommates
- Address of the property
- Date the agreement begins and ends

Financial Responsibilities

- Monthly rent amount and each roommate's share
- Who pays for which utilities, and how costs are split
- **Security deposit:** How much each pays and how it will be returned
- Due dates for payments and how payments are made (check, transfer, etc.)

House Rules

- Cleaning schedule for shared spaces (kitchen, living room, bathroom)
- Responsibilities for taking out trash, yardwork, etc.
- Quiet hours and noise expectations
- Policy on overnight guests and parties

Lifestyle & Preferences

- Pets (allowed/not allowed, who is responsible)
- Smoking, drinking, and other personal habits
- Use of shared kitchenware, groceries, and household supplies

Lease & Legal

- Who is on the lease (both should be if possible)
- Agreement to notify the other if one plans to move out early
- Plan for finding a replacement roommate if someone leaves

Conflict Resolution

- How you'll handle disagreements (discussion, mediation, etc.)
- Point of contact for landlord or property manager

Signatures

- Both roommates sign and date the agreement

050 Quick Email Setup

- ☐ Create at least four email addresses:
 - ☐ *Official/Professional*: for work, government business, official school or certifications.
 - ☐ *Personal*: for family, friends, online shopping, and everyday use.
 - ☐ *Financial & Security*: reserved just for banking, Tricare, and sensitive logins.
 - ☐ *Junk mail*: for signing up to subscriptions.
- ☐ Use a free provider with strong security (like Gmail or Outlook).
- ☐ Turn on two-factor authentication for all accounts.
- ☐ Set up folders/labels for key categories, such as PCS, Orders, Medical, Finance, etc.
- ☐ Use a strong, unique password for each account (store it in your password manager).
- ☐ Check inboxes at least twice a week and delete unnecessary messages.
- ☐ Review and update account recovery info annually.
- ☐ Create an auto-reply message for extended TDY or deployment if needed.

050 Quick Password Mastery Checklist

- ☐ Install a trusted password manager app (like LastPass, Bitwarden, or 1Password).
- ☐ Use the password manager to generate strong, unique passwords for each account.
- ☐ Enable two-factor authentication (2FA) wherever possible.
- ☐ Update weak or reused passwords right away.
- ☐ Store the password manager's master password in a secure, offline place.
- ☐ Set a calendar reminder to review and update key passwords every 6–12 months.
- ☐ Don't share passwords with anyone unless necessary, and change them if you do.

058 Quick Digital File Organization

- ☐ Create a master folder called “Military Documents” with subfolders: PCS, Medical, Finance, Education, Awards, Housing, etc.
- ☐ Scan and save copies of all critical paper documents as PDFs.
- ☐ Name files clearly (e.g., PCS_Orders_June2025.pdf, LES_May2025.pdf).
- ☐ Use cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, OneDrive) for easy access anywhere.
- ☐ Back up your files to an external hard drive at least quarterly.
- ☐ Store sensitive files in a secure, password-protected folder.
- ☐ Share access to critical records with a trusted spouse or family member.
- ☐ Update your folders after every PCS, deployment, or significant life event.

059 Sample Digital File Folder Structure

```

Military_Documents/
├── PCS/
│   ├── Orders/
│   │   ├── PCS_Orders_June2025.pdf
│   │   └── Amendment_July2025.pdf
│   ├── Travel_Receipts/
│   ├── Housing_Inspection_Forms/
│   └── Move_Inventory_List.pdf
├── Medical/
│   ├── Immunization_Records.pdf
│   ├── EFMP_Enrollment.pdf
│   ├── Dental_Records/
│   │   └── Dental_Checkup_April2025.pdf
├── Finance/
│   ├── LES/
│   │   ├── LES_May2025.pdf
│   │   └── LES_June2025.pdf
│   ├── Tax_Returns/
│   │   └── Tax_2024.pdf
├── Education/
│   ├── College_Transcripts.pdf
│   ├── TA_Approval_Forms.pdf
│   ├── Certifications/
│   │   └── Security+_Certificate.pdf
├── Awards/
│   ├── COA_Feb2024.pdf
│   └── NAM_July2023.pdf
├── Housing/
│   ├── Lease_Agreement_Ft_Bragg.pdf
│   ├── Move_Out_Checklist.pdf
│   └── Deposit_Refund_Statement.pdf
├── Family/
│   ├── Marriage_Certificate.pdf
│   ├── Birth_Certificates/
│   │   ├── Child1_BirthCert.pdf
│   │   └── Child2_BirthCert.pdf
│   └── DEERS_Enrollment.pdf
├── Inventory/
│   ├── Inventory_list.txt
│   ├── Photos/
│   └── Manuals/
  
```

063 ONLINE SAFETY

This is the bag that the person in charge of the evacuation grabs. It contains key documents that may be needed during the emergency.

- ☐ Use unique, strong passwords for each account and store them in a password manager.
- ☐ Enable two-factor authentication (2FA) wherever possible.
- ☐ Keep your devices (phones, tablets, computers) updated with the latest security patches.
- ☐ Avoid posting sensitive details (locations, dates, unit info) on social media.
- ☐ Set your social media accounts to private and limit friend/follower lists.
- ☐ Don't click on suspicious links or open unexpected attachments in emails.
- ☐ Use a trusted VPN when using public Wi-Fi.
- ☐ Back up your important data regularly to a secure location.
- ☐ Watch for phishing scams, and report suspicious messages or calls.
- ☐ Talk to your family about safe online habits and OPSEC reminders.

067 Quick Stay Connected & Professional

- ☐ Schedule regular check-ins (calls, texts, video chats) with family and friends during TDYs, deployments, or PCS moves.
- ☐ Keep your LinkedIn profile updated with awards, certifications, PME, and volunteer work.
- ☐ Join relevant Facebook groups or forums for military support, PCS tips, and networking.
- ☐ Use a professional headshot and clear, positive language on your public profiles.
- ☐ Engage with mentors, supervisors, and peers — let them know your career goals and ask for advice.
- ☐ Clean up old social media posts that don't reflect your current image or goals.
- ☐ Use digital calendars to schedule personal and professional follow-ups and milestones.
- ☐ Show appreciation — thank people who help you along the way and pay it forward when you can.

160 HHG MOVE-OUT DAY

Before Movers Arrive

- ☐ Have orders, PCS binder, and inventory sheet ready.
- ☐ Set aside high-value items, passports, medications, and anything you'll hand-carry.
- ☐ Unplug, defrost, and clean the fridge/freezer at least 24 hours prior.
- ☐ Empty and clean trash cans, laundry, and dishwasher — movers will pack it as-is!
- ☐ Remove batteries from remotes, clocks, and toys if possible.
- ☐ Arrange for kids and pets to be elsewhere during the move-out.
- ☐ Walk through your home to double-check for hidden or fragile items.

While Movers Are Packing

- ☐ Be present and stay visible throughout the day.
- ☐ Point out fragile or high-value items and confirm they're marked properly.
- ☐ Watch that inventory tags match your items and note condition.
- ☐ Ensure prohibited items (cleaning supplies, liquids, perishables) are not packed.
- ☐ Take photos of electronics, furniture, and anything valuable before it's packed.
- ☐ Keep drinks and light snacks available for movers to keep things moving smoothly.

After Truck Is Loaded

- ☐ Do a final walkthrough with the moving crew to check all rooms, closets, and attic.
- ☐ Verify all boxes and furniture are accounted for on the inventory sheet.
- ☐ Take photos of the packed truck and license plate for reference.
- ☐ Keep your copy of the signed inventory sheet in your PCS binder.
- ☐ Lock up and turn off lights, water, and AC/heat when leaving the house.

169 Vehicle Readiness Checklist for a PCS Road Trip

Maintenance Must-Dos

- ☐ Get a full oil change and fluid top-off (coolant, brake, transmission, windshield washer)
- ☐ Check tire tread and pressure, including the spare
- ☐ Inspect brakes for wear or noise—replace if needed
- ☐ Test your battery, especially in extreme climates (hot/cold)
- ☐ Top off or replace wiper blades and make sure the washer system works
- ☐ Check headlights, brake lights, and turn signals

Emergency Kit Essentials

- ☐ Jumper cables or jump starter
- ☐ Tire repair kit or Fix-a-Flat (and a working **spare tire + jack**)
- ☐ Flashlight with fresh batteries
- ☐ First-aid kit
- ☐ Emergency blanket or poncho
- ☐ Multi-tool or small toolkit
- ☐ Duct tape and bungee cords (for quick fixes)

Packing & Prep Tips

- ☐ Balance the vehicle load for stability and fuel efficiency
- ☐ Secure large or heavy items so they don't shift or cause injury
- ☐ Keep documents easily accessible: registration, insurance, ID, PCS orders
- ☐ Print directions or use a GPS with offline capability
- ☐ Fill up with gas the night before departure
- ☐ Identify EV charging stations along the way.

Optional but Smart

- ☐ Consider a **roadside assistance membership** (USAA, AAA, OnStar)
- ☐ Download the **GasBuddy** or **Waze** app for fuel and traffic info
- ☐ Take your car for a **pre-trip inspection** at a trusted mechanic
- ☐ Note down **mechanics or dealerships** along your route just in case

184 What to Have Ready When You Call the CTO

- ☐ **Your Official Orders**
Have a clear, legible copy of your orders available (digital and/or printed) — they'll need details from it to book.
- ☐ **Full Names as They Appear on ID**
For yourself and any authorized dependents traveling with you.
- ☐ **Social Security Number or DoD ID Number**
Many systems require it to confirm your travel authorization.
- ☐ **Preferred Travel Dates**
Know your report date and preferred travel day(s), plus a backup in case flights are limited.
- ☐ **Preferred Airports**
Identify your departure and destination airports (some bases are served by multiple nearby airports).
- ☐ **Special Requests**
Note if you have specific needs:
Minimal connections
No overnight layovers
Early or late flights
Traveling with pets or medical equipment
- ☐ **Contact Information**
Provide your best phone number and email for confirmation and updates.
- ☐ **Government Travel Card (if applicable)**
Have it on hand for incidental charges if required.
- ☐ **Family Members (if applicable)**
Clarify if you're booking family on your orders or if they'll be traveling on personal expense.

184 What to Have Ready When You Call the CTO

Your Official Orders

- ☐ Have a clear, legible copy of your orders available (digital and/or printed) — they'll need details from it to book.

Full Names as They Appear on ID

- ☐ For yourself and any authorized dependents traveling with you.

Social Security Number or DoD ID Number

- ☐ Many systems require it to confirm your travel authorization.

Preferred Travel Dates

- ☐ Know your report date and preferred travel day(s), plus a backup in case flights are limited.

Preferred Airports

- ☐ Identify your departure and destination airports (some bases are served by multiple nearby airports).

Special Requests

Note if you have specific needs:

- ☐ Minimal connections
- No overnight layovers
- Early or late flights
- Traveling with pets or medical equipment

Contact Information

- ☐ Provide your best phone number and email for confirmation and updates.

Government Travel Card (if applicable)

- ☐ Have it on hand for incidental charges if required.

Family Members (if applicable)

- ☐ Clarify if you're booking family on your orders or if they'll be traveling on personal expense.

218 Government Housing Move-In Day

- ☐ Walk through with housing office staff and complete your move-in inspection form.
- ☐ Test light switches, outlets, appliances, faucets, toilets, and HVAC.
- ☐ Check for pests, leaks, mold, and odors.
- ☐ Confirm keys and locks work properly.
- ☐ Note and photograph all pre-existing damage — even minor scratches or chips.
- ☐ Ask about submitting maintenance requests and emergency contact numbers.
- ☐ Verify trash/recycling days and yard care responsibilities.
- ☐ Check smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.
- ☐ Find out parking rules and guest policies.
- ☐ Get your housing handbook and keep it handy for reference.

220 Rental Search

- ☐ Research neighborhoods near your duty station.
- ☐ Check multiple platforms (websites, social media, property managers).
- ☐ Make a list of must-haves and nice-to-haves (bedrooms, parking, fenced yard, etc.).
- ☐ Contact landlords/property managers to confirm availability and schedule showings.
- ☐ Walk through in person if possible — or request a live video tour if remote.
- ☐ Review lease terms carefully, including early termination and maintenance responsibilities.
- ☐ Verify utilities: what's included, what you set up.
- ☐ Inspect the property before signing — note any damage or repairs needed.
- ☐ Get receipts for deposits and keep copies of the signed lease.
- ☐ Register your new address with the base and update your records.

223 Civilian Housing Move-In Day

- ☐ Do a full walkthrough before signing and keep a copy of the inspection report.
- ☐ Test all appliances, outlets, plumbing fixtures, HVAC, and locks.
- ☐ Take photos of floors, walls, ceilings, windows, and any damage you see.
- ☐ Check smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers.
- ☐ Confirm mailbox access and address registration.
- ☐ Verify trash day, parking rules, and any HOA requirements.
- ☐ Get the landlord's contact info and emergency maintenance number.
- ☐ Set up or confirm your utility accounts and internet/cable service.
- ☐ Make copies of your lease, inspection form, and receipts — keep them in your PCS binder.

251 What Rituals Already Exist?

Think about your current habits. Which ones already feel like rituals (on purpose, meaningful, repeated)?

Situation

Ritual

Mealtimes

Bedtime

Weekends

Morning routine

After school/work

Deployments/TDYs

PCS moves

Holidays

251 What Feels Meaningful?

Now ask: What makes those rituals work? Why do we return to them?

They make us feel:

☐ Connected

☐ Calm

☐ Safe

☐ Seen

☐ Centered

☐ Like “us”

Other:

☐

252 Brainstorm New Rituals

Use this section to create or adapt rituals for different situations. Keep it simple.

Life Moment

New or Updated Ritual Idea

Bad day

Deployment
goodbye

First night at new
duty station

Sunday night

Post-reunion
reconnection

Weekly family time

Daily reset/quiet
moment

268 Your Pre-Deployment

Legal & Admin

- ☐ Update Power of Attorney
- ☐ Update Will or Living Will
- ☐ Check/update SGLI (life insurance)
- ☐ Confirm DEERS and Tricare info

Money

- ☐ Set auto-pay for recurring bills
- ☐ Discuss emergency spending limits
- ☐ Create or adjust a budget (solo grocery/lifestyle looks different)

Logistics

- ☐ Who will mow the lawn?
- ☐ Who's the emergency contact if something happens?
- ☐ Talk through the communication plan (how often, how, and when NOT to freak out)