OPNAV INSTRUCTION 7220.13A

From: Chief of Naval Operations

Subj: MILITARY PER DIEM RATES

Ref: (a) 37 U.S.C. §474
      (b) Joint Federal Travel Regulations, 1 September 2018

Encl: (1) Units Designated for Essential Unit Messing

1. **Purpose.** To provide policy and procedures under which essential unit messing or reduced per diem may be authorized. This instruction is a complete revision and should be reviewed in its entirety. Significant changes include:

   a. Procedures for requesting essential unit messing or reduced per diem.

   b. Units designated for essential unit messing, as listed in enclosure (1).

2. **Cancellation.** OPNAVINST 7220.13.

3. **Scope and Applicability.** The provisions of this instruction are applicable to all Navy members.

4. **Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee Review.** This instruction has been reviewed by the Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee staff in line with Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 5154.31, volume 5, of 16 October 2015, as Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee Case RR17005.

5. **Background.** References (a) and (b) authorize and prescribe certain circumstances under which per diem may be reduced. Enclosure (1) of this instruction provides a list of units designated for essential unit messing. The most common circumstances are listed in subparagraphs 5a through 5e. For purposes of this instruction, only essential unit messing and reduced per diem will be addressed.

   a. **Field Duty.** Reference (b), paragraph 020315-D1, prohibits payment of per diem to members on field duty, as defined in appendix A of reference (b).

   b. **Duty on a Government Vessel.** Reference (b), paragraph 020315-F, prohibits a Service member from receiving per diem for any period of temporary duty (TDY) aboard a Government vessel when quarters are provided without charge and meals are provided with or without charge.
c. Members Traveling Together. Reference (b), paragraph 020315-C applies when personnel are required to travel together away from the permanent duty station, and, due to mission requirements, remain together as a group while traveling. TDY travel allowances apply unless the travel order directs limited or no reimbursement, in which case transportation, food, lodging, and other items ordinarily reimbursed, must be provided without cost. Per diem is not authorized on travel days when the order directs limited or no reimbursement. Per diem prohibition applies to travel days between duty locations and does not include per diem for full days at the duty locations. Per diem prohibition begins when the traveler departs the permanent duty station and ends at 2400 the day the traveler arrives at the TDY location. Per diem prohibition begins again at 0001 on the departure day from the TDY location and continues until arrival at the permanent duty station. Directing personnel to travel together with limited or no reimbursement must never be done to save travel funds. If meals or lodging are not available, occasional meals and lodging are paid in line with reference (b), paragraph 020305. Limited reimbursement refers to reimbursement for occasional meals and lodging.

d. Essential Unit Messing. Reference (b), paragraph 020315-E prohibits payments of the meals portion of per diem to Service members when the Secretary concerned, combatant commander, or joint task force commander, determines that Government dining facility use is essential to accomplish training and readiness, in line with paragraph 7.

e. Reduced Per Diem. Reference (b), paragraph 020308 is the authority for a DoD Component head or the Secretary concerned to authorize (in advance) per diem rates in lesser amounts (to zero) when the travel and duty circumstances warrant and are unusual to the Service or DoD Component concerned.

6. Discussion. Per diem rates and actual expense reimbursement rates statistically represent average travel costs to the locality involved with the maximum limits set by law. Arbitrary reduction in those rates violates the provisions of references (a) and (b) and is patently unfair to Service members who would have to use personal funds to defray legitimate travel expenses above the amount reimbursable under the reduced rates.

a. Budget pressures routinely focus attention on reducing TDY costs. Reducing per diem simply as a means of preserving unit funds without any other basis for the per diem reduction is not authorized.

b. When command funds are insufficient to cover programmed travel, a reduction in travel, not reimbursements, is the proper course of action.

7. Guidelines for Essential Unit Messing Designation

a. Essential Unit Messing. Essential unit messing may be required in a command, organization, or unit when it:
(1) will enhance military readiness (e.g., the conduct of a military operation); or

(2) is necessary for the effective conduct of training.

b. Military Readiness. Unit messing is required to enhance operational readiness or the conduct of military operations. Designation for essential unit messing will be applied only to established organizational units and to operational elements and detachments, not to groups of individuals or to individual Service members.

   (1) Organizational Units. Any military unit whose structure is prescribed by competent authority, such as a table of organization and equipment, and is specifically part of an organization.

   (2) Operational Elements and Detachments. A part of a unit formed from its main organization on a temporary basis, and established for a specific operational purpose for duty apart from its main organization.

c. Training. Unit messing is essential when it must occur during training, rather than during administrative time, because of an unusually high tempo of training or operations, which precludes normal administrative breaks or, when unit messing itself is a significant part of the training. Justification must clearly demonstrate one of these rationales.

   (1) Unit Training Time. A period of time when unit members are not authorized the discretion of leaving the area of training, operations, or the dining area, because of training requirements or because the operation itself is a significant part of the unit's training. Movement to the messing facility may be in units or individually.

   (2) Unit Administrative Time. A period of time when unit members are authorized the discretion of leaving the area of training or operations, or the dining area during scheduled operating hours because of no operational or training requirement for their presence.

d. TDY as an Essential Unit Mess. Members assigned TDY to a unit listed in enclosure (1) as an essential unit mess are not entitled to the basic allowance for subsistence and are not entitled to the meal portion of per diem because they are provided subsistence at no cost by the Government.

8. Guidelines for Secretarial-Determined Reduced Rate Per Diem

   a. A specified reduced per diem rate may be authorized for a specific travel order when the locality per diem rate will over compensate for the normal and necessary expenses of that travel or duty. The reduced rate authorized in such instances must be set to reimburse fully for the normal and necessary expenses of such travel or duty. Reduced per diem will never be authorized for the sole purpose of reducing travel costs.
b. A reduced rate for per diem may be based only on the two criteria in subparagraphs 8b(1) and 8b(2) below:

   (1) Travel costs are below the per diem rate for the locale; or

   (2) Circumstances of the duty to be performed at the locality involved are below the prescribed per diem rate (e.g., tuition includes meals).

   c. Designation for a reduced per diem rate may be applied to individuals or to groups of individuals whose travel expenses are known to be the same. The reduced per diem must be specified in advance based on known travel expenses and applied only to a specific set of TDY orders. No blanket authority may be given. A minimum of 60 days for processing of a request for reduced per diem is recommended.

9. Procedures

   a. Requests for essential unit messing or reduced per diem should be sent to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Military Manpower and Personnel) via the appropriate chain of command and Director, Military Personnel, Plans and Policy, Military Compensation Policy Division (OPNAV N130).

   b. Requests must provide full justification based on the guidelines in paragraphs 7 and 8 of this instruction.

10. Conflicting Directives. When provisions of references (a) and (b), or other Navy directives appear to conflict with this instruction, submit a request for clarification to OPNAV N130.

11. Records Management

   a. Records created as a result of this instruction, regardless of format or media, must be maintained and dispositioned for the standard subject identification codes (SSIC) 1000 through 13000 series per the records disposition schedules located on the Department of the Navy/Assistant for Administration (DON/AA), Directives and Records Management Division (DRMD) portal page at https://portal.secnav.navy.mil/orgs/DUSNM/DONAA/DRM/Records-and-Information-Management/Approved%20Record%20Schedules/Forms/AllItems.aspx.

   b. For questions concerning the management of records related to this instruction or the records disposition schedules, please contact the local records manager or the DON/AA DRMD program office.

12. Review and Effective Date. Per OPNAVINST 5215.17A, OPNAV N130 will review this instruction annually around the anniversary of its issuance date to ensure applicability, currency, and consistency with Federal, DoD, Secretary of the Navy, and Navy policy and statutory authority using OPNAV 5215/40 Review of Instruction. This instruction will be in effect for 10
years, unless revised or cancelled in the interim, and will be reissued by the 10-year anniversary date if it is still required, unless it meets one of the exceptions in OPNAVINST 5215.17A, paragraph 9. Otherwise, if the instruction is no longer required, it will be processed for cancellation as soon as the need for cancellation is known following the guidance in OPNAV Manual 5215.1 of May 2016.

Releasability and distribution:
This instruction is cleared for public release and is available electronically only via Department of the Navy Issuances Web site, http://doni.documentservices.dla.mil
UNITED STATES NAVY COMMISSIONER FOR THE UNITED STATES OCEANS AND ATMOSPHERE

UNITS DESIGNATED FOR ESSENTIAL UNIT MESSING

1. Personnel assigned to student unit identification codes (UIC) and Navy class "A" Schools.

2. Students attending:
   a. Naval Technical Training Center Detachment, Lackland AFB, TX (UIC 35419)
   b. Field Medical Service School
      (1) Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, CA (UIC 65988)
      (2) Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, NC (UIC 65987)
   c. AEGIS training unit, AEGIS Combat Systems Training Center, Wallops Island, VA (UIC 41968)
   d. Naval School of Explosive Ordnance Disposal
      (1) Indian Head, MD (UIC 30446)
      (2) Eglin AFB, FL (UIC 47355)
      (3) Panama City, FL (UIC 30631)
   e. Naval Construction Training Center
      (1) Port Hueneme, CA (UIC 30633)
      (2) Gulfport, MS (UIC 31168)