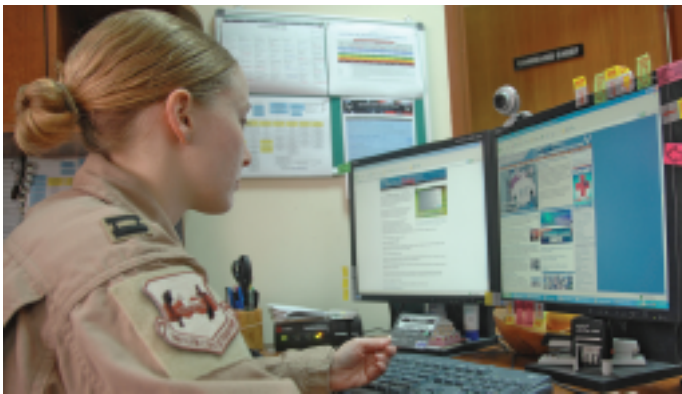


Finance Keeps Military Members in the MONEY

BY STAFF SGT. VINCENT BORDEN

386th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs | Photo by Tech Sgt. Raheem Moore/U.S. Air Force



Capt. Sarah Ford, 386th Air Expeditionary Wing executive officer, reads about the policies and rules concerning her new Citibank government credit card online Nov. 13 at an air base in Southwest Asia. Captain Ford is deployed from Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont.

AS a finance officer, Staff Sgt. Ronald Brewer doesn't just count cash all day. He's in the business of helping people; deployed Airmen and civil service members who are having problems with their entitlements and their pay. In an overseas location that demands increased work commitments from its Airmen to support U.S. Central Command's premier airlift wing, it pays for them to not have money on their mind.

That makes Sergeant Brewer's primary job more of a problem solver than a money manager. He said he considers his performance in that role as a valuable contribution to the mission.

"When you deal with people's money, it tugs the heart strings," said Sergeant Brewer, 386th Air Expeditionary Wing. "Being deployed you have enough stress.... Finance is a really important part of the morale of the troops."

The Tennessee native said the focus of the office is on preventing problems from ever occurring to Airmen traveling in and out of the area of responsibility. Their primary means of doing this is education, which they administer once deployed service members touch the ground.

Pay entitlements can be withheld during the entire time service members are deployed, and can be paid in one lump sum once members return to their home stations and file their travel vouchers. Sergeant Brewer said the voucher should be filed in five days upon a member's return, but his office encourages members to receive their tax-free pay at a

minimum, in order to avoid complications with taxing filing for the year.

The guardsman said his job is to make sure service members deploy, complete their assignments and return to their home stations with a minimum amount of problems, or confusion with their entitlements in the future.

"We have a really high success rate," said Sergeant Brewer, who is deployed from the Tennessee Air National Guard. He does not typically see the majority of people rotating in and out on deployments because service members don't usually drop by to say things are going well.

"If there are problems, a lot of times it's through no fault of the member," the sergeant said. "Once we send off the changes, we track it to make sure it gets done and updates on the member's pay record."

Sergeant Brewer said all pay change requests are sent to a central processing site in the AOR, in order to maximize efficiency between finance offices spread throughout CENTCOM. It normally takes two pay periods for members to see the adjustments in their pay.

Enrollments in special programs offered only in deployed locations, such as the Savings Deposit Program, are also handled by the office. The SDP allows military members to contribute up to \$10,000 to a savings account which draws a 10 percent annual interest rate. Military members qualify for enrollment in the program after 30 days in the AOR.

While individual pay issues are one of the main problems finance personnel deal with, the office does not strictly deal with the pay issues and entitlements of members. Finance offices have to worry about the logistics, time and money spent in the completion of their own operations, which is one of the reasons the Eagle Cash Card program was created for use throughout the AOR. The office handles the setup of the Eagle Cash Card, a program mandated in August for service members with extended deployments in CENTCOM. It works similarly to a debit card, requiring users to load funds onto it from linked personal bank accounts.

"It's a safe option," said Sergeant Brewer. "If members lose the card they lose money, but we can get it back...."

"Working with finance here has definitely opened my eyes to what they do here and how important they are," said Senior Airman Abbi-gayle Cochran, 386th Expeditionary Contracting Squadron contract officer.

"We deal with people that need us to help them," Sergeant Brewster said. "That's a privilege."

