



## Top Five Myths About the Commissary

By CSM Victor M. Garcia

**DO** you really know what your commissary benefit is all about? You'd be surprised how many service members don't understand or appreciate the importance of *their* benefit. For example, do you know the modern era of sales commissaries actually began in 1867, when Congress authorized enlisted men to receive the same at-cost purchasing privileges officers had already enjoyed for four decades?

Improving the awareness of the commissary benefit among our young enlisted members and their families is one of my top priorities as the Defense Commissary Agency's senior enlisted advisor. It's a mission I take to heart because I have grown up in the military with the Guard and Reserve component, and it's easy for me to understand your frustrations and needs. I know what it feels like to be located away from a military installation, travelling with the groceries in coolers and wondering if the food will spoil by the time you arrive home three or four hours later.

So let me debunk five common myths with the real deal about your commissary benefit:

### **The commissary is only for married soldiers.**

Your drill sergeant may not have marched you there in basic training, but the fact is that the commissary is for *all* authorized customers – single or married. Today we are partnering with each service's single soldier organization to spread that message and encouraging single troops to think about the commissary, especially to help single service members make healthier choices when selecting the food they cook in their barracks, dormitories or other single-dwelling locations.

### **The five percent surcharge is added to jack up the prices for more profits.**

First, the commissary is *not* a profit-making organization – it's a benefit. Second, the 5 percent surcharge provides new or renovated commissaries for service members while reducing overall taxpayer costs. The money it generates is used to make commissary shopping as quick, convenient, and pleasant as shopping at a civilian supermarket. That in turn encourages customers to continue using their commissary

privilege, helping generate more surcharge funds to build and maintain modern stores.

### **The commissary is part of the exchange system.**

Wrong. Both DeCA and the military exchange systems are part of DoD's military resale system. However, commissaries sell groceries at cost and are funded by appropriated funds; military exchanges (the PXs and BXs) sell department store items and are self-supporting through profits. Both entities – commissaries and exchanges – are vital to the quality of life of service members and their families.

### **The 30 percent savings isn't real.**

If you want to see how real the 30 percent savings is, do your own price comparison. Commissaries save authorized shoppers 30 percent or more over commercial grocery store prices. That means a family of four saves nearly \$3,400 annually by shopping consistently in the commissary. Couples can save more than \$2,100; single shoppers, nearly \$1,200. DeCA's average savings calculations are based on an annual price comparison study, which compares commissary prices on about 30,000 items with those of local supermarkets, major grocery store chains and supercenters.

### **Guard and Reserve members can only shop when they're training.**

There was a time when reservists were limited to 12 (later expanded to 24) visits a year. Since November 2003, members of the Guard and Reserve – including the Ready Reserve, Selected Reserve, Individual Ready Reserve, Inactive National Guard, Guard and Reserve retirees and their authorized family members – have had unlimited access to commissaries in the United States, Guam and Puerto Rico. This change is the result of the 2004 National Defense Authorization Act.

That's a wrap on the top five myths about your commissary benefit. Help us spread the word on what is real about the commissary. And, remember to check out the Website, <http://www.commissaries.com>, to discover more about your benefit.

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