



DeCA Senior Enlisted Advisors Expand Role

By Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia

There was a time when military commissaries were staffed by soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen working right alongside civilians. These uniformed members served as cashiers, stockers, store officers and more. Those days are long gone. But, in October we took a page from that past by adding regional senior enlisted advisors to the Defense Commissary Agency.

With the additions of Army Reserve Sgt. Maj. Linda K. Ricker in DeCA Europe, Air National Guard Chief Master Sgt. Larry Fullilove in DeCA East and Coast Guard Reserve Master Chief Petty Officer Joe L. Valdez in DeCA West, I now have a full cadre of “force multipliers” in place to extend DeCA’s ability to ensure that it provides a world class commissary benefit.

Since becoming the commissary’s senior enlisted advisor a year ago, the opportunities to talk to service members and their families have taken me from the Far East to Europe and all points in between. This is not a one-man job, and I owe it to all of our commissary authorized patrons in uniform to be able to hear about their benefit from someone who walks in their shoes and knows what it’s like to be deployed and away from their families.

We have 255 commissaries around the world and my regional senior enlisted advisors are geographically situated in three regions to accomplish the following:

- Advise the region director on how they can increase the education and awareness of the commissary benefit for all military members and their families.
- Be a liaison between the region director; myself, the headquarters senior enlisted advisor; and local commands and the families in the military community, especially those of deployed Guard and Reserve members.

- Serve as the primary contact with Guard and Reserve units for commissary on-site sales.
- Communicate with the region director on issues or concerns relative to the commissary benefit that may impact the morale of our customers.
- Maintain contacts with area senior enlisted leadership, applicable private organizations, and the military communities in their regions to promote the value of the benefit.

Collectively, our regional senior enlisted advisers have almost 90 years of military experience. Sgt. Maj. Ricker, for example, has served in the Army Reserve for 27 years, and was deployed to Iraq from March 2008 to March 2009 and mobilized in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Chief Master Sgt. Fullilove, a veteran of 36 years in service, was mobilized for Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as well as support of the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. Master Chief Petty Officer Valdez, a veteran of 24 years in the Coast Guard Reserve and another nine years in the active Army, Reserve and Guard, has been mobilized on active duty ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Ultimately, our goal is to make sure all qualified service members know about their commissary benefit. Our regional enlisted advisors will help us reach well beyond my position as the headquarters senior enlisted advisor in listening to our customers’ concerns about using the benefit and addressing those concerns to improve it.

Together, with the 18,000 employees of the Defense Commissary Agency, our regional senior enlisted advisors are one team, one DeCA and one benefit for the greatest customers in the world. **AF**