

DCMA Ground Systems and Munitions Division Blows Into the Windy City



By Dick Cole, Acting Director, DCMA Congressional and Public Affairs





“It’s a good news story,” he said with a broad smile. “From a personnel perspective, things are going extremely well. We were able to find places for a lot of people who didn’t want to leave Carson [Calif.]; we’ve had no [mandatory directed] relocations and no [reductions in force].”

What is it we’re talking about? Why, it’s the upcoming move to Chicago by the agency’s new Ground Systems and Munitions Division (DCMAG), and the gentleman who is speaking is the division’s first executive director, Mitch Howell.

The new division is to be collocated with DCMA Chicago in Arlington Heights, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, located approximately 25 miles northwest of the city. The new division will occupy space in a building residing on the base operated by the 85th Division, U.S. Army Reserve — the “Custer Division.”

Why move to Chicago?

“That’s a fair question, and people need to know that the decision was made after careful study and consideration,” Howell said. “There were 10 criteria that we examined when deciding where to locate the division,” he added, “and Steve [Bogusz, DCMA Naval Sea Systems Division executive director] used the same criteria when looking at where to base the Naval Sea Systems Division.” Howell then listed the five locations measured against the criteria — Chicago,

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(Left) Chicago skyline viewed from Navy Pier. (Photo courtesy of ©iStockphoto.com)

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St. Louis, Detroit, Philadelphia and Huntsville, Ala. “At the end of the day, Chicago was the best place.”

Howell explained that the division needed to be in close proximity to its customers. “Most of the folks I support are east of the Mississippi and are north of the Mason Dixon Line,” he said. “I have people in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan and numerous other states, and when we applied the criteria, Chicago became the best location to serve them as it is a major transportation hub. It also puts us closest to what I call my ‘C3’ — customers, [contract

management offices] and contractors.” Howell stated that making the Chicago area the headquarters for the division allowed for ease of travel by air to any member of his “C3” in no more than three and one-half hours

“There were also more daily direct flights from

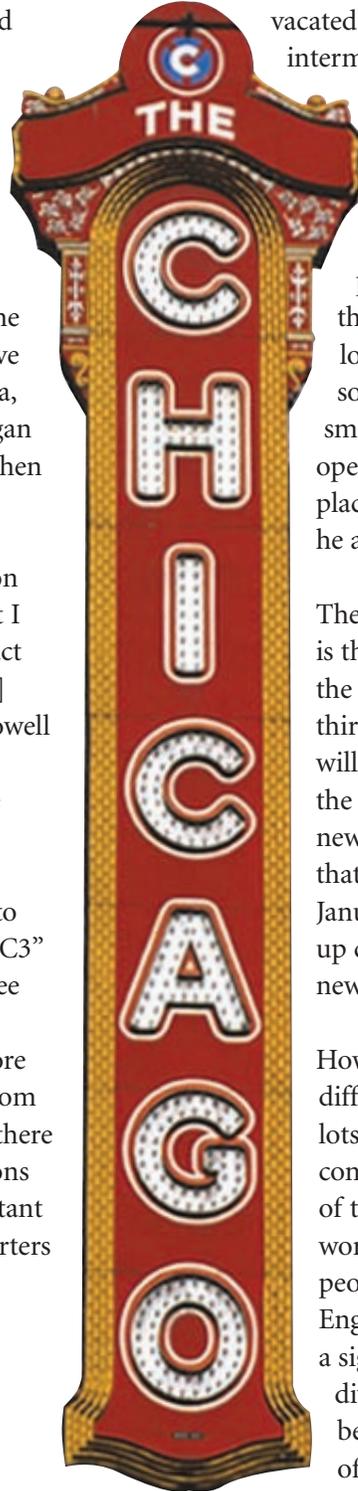
Chicago to Richmond [Va.] than there were from any of the other locations and, obviously, that will be important in 2010 when the agency headquarters relocates to Fort Lee [Va.]”

The plans are to relocate DCMA Chicago to another floor in the building they presently occupy and move DCMAG into the space

vacated by the CMO. “We won’t be intermingled with the CMO in the same work area, and both the CMO and the division will get newly renovated workspaces,” Howell explained. “We’ve completed phase one of the project. That is, we’ve identified the location where we want to locate the division, we’ve procured some temporary space for a small contingent of folks to begin operations there and we hope to place seven folks there before July 1,” he added.

The second phase of the operation is the relocation of the CMO and the build out of the new space. The third and final phase of the effort will be the movement and hiring of the personnel who will work at the new division headquarters. “We hope that sometime around the first of January [we’ll] have a formal stand-up ceremony for the division in our new home.”

Howell says the movement is more difficult than it sounds: “There are lots of moving parts and lots of complexities. We don’t do this kind of thing every day, and we’ve had to work very closely with our facilities people and with the [Army] Corps of Engineers.” In fact, if there has been a significant challenge in getting the division moved to Chicago it has been synchronizing the schedules of all of those involved. “Getting



(Above) The Chicago Theatre’s State Street marquee. (Photo courtesy of Google images)

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everyone on the same ‘sheet of music’ with me has been very challenging, but we’re pressing forward. Getting everyone moving together at the right pace has been my ‘Achilles’ heel,” Howell admitted.

Howell said that several people have been extremely helpful in the effort to date: “Melinda Vernon and Arlene Marks from Chicago, Angie Pavlat and Deb McCafferty from [Human Resources] and Virginia Hemingway and Mark Olson, my [operations] director, have been instrumental in getting us through phase one.”

Certainly traveling as often as he must to take care of day-to-day business and to manage the

build out and stand up of the Ground Systems and Munitions Division simultaneously must be a huge challenge. “I am a director without a complete staff,” said Howell, “and that has made this extremely challenging.” He explained that he is using his former secretary from DCMA Springfield to arrange and manage his travel schedule and getting lots of assistance from the folks with the DCMA Space and Missiles Division in Carson, Calif., which also provides support by handling some of the daily operational tasks. “Some synergies are certainly missing and it will be great to get everyone together in one location where we can provide the best support to our customers,” he concluded. **C**



(Above) Mitchell Howell, DCMA Ground Systems and Munitions Division executive director. (Photo by Sam Russo, DCMA Public Affairs)