

DCMA team learns from Guard & Reserve program

Patrick Tremblay | DCMA Public Affairs

Army Col. Kenneth Copeland, Defense Contract Management Agency Philadelphia commander; Michael Sywulak, DCMA Philadelphia supervisory quality assurance specialist; and Air Force Tech. Sgt. Edward Lowden pause before boarding an Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker Feb. 22 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J. Lowden is a N.J. Air National Guardsman who works as a civilian quality assurance specialist with DCMA Philadelphia. (Photo contributed by Michael Sywulak, DCMA Philadelphia)

Defense Contract Management Agency Philadelphia leaders

had a unique opportunity recently when a quality assurance specialist invited them to ride along on an Air National Guard aerial refueling mission.

In February, Army Col. Kenneth Copeland, DCMA Philadelphia commander; and Michael Sywulak, supervisory quality assurance specialist observed a three-hour training mission aboard a KC-135 Stratotanker. Edward Lowden, a QAS at the contract management office, was on the ground that day serving in his uniformed job as an Air Force technical sergeant, inspecting, launching and recovering the aircraft on which his supervisors flew.

Lowden has nearly 30 years of federal experience in inspections, the last eight with DCMA. He's also an aircraft



mechanic with the 108th Air Refueling Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard, stationed at the former McGuire Air Force Base, now part of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

Through a Department of Defense program known as Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve, airmen in the unit were able to invite their civilian employers to ride along on an aerial refueling mission over the Atlantic Ocean.

“I saw the orientation flight as the perfect opportunity for my DCMA supervision to see exactly what their QAS do on a part-time basis,” said Lowden, noting several DCMA Philadelphia employees serve with the National Guard. “We support the warfighter full time, and become the warfighter part time.”

He said his work in uniform makes him a better civilian employee, and vice versa. “The training and responsibilities I am assigned at the National Guard are all positive attributes which carry over to my

DCMA career.”

Lowden is no stranger to service overseas, but since joining DCMA, his deployments have all come through Contingency Contract Administration Services. He’s completed three six-month deployments with DCMA CCAS, including both Iraq and Afghanistan.

He’s finishing two degrees this year, and has been selected to be his air wing’s next first sergeant. He credits the understanding, support and positive reinforcement of his DCMA leadership with helping to make this possible.

Copeland and Sywulak were impressed with what they saw during the mission. Sywulak said, “As I observed the consummate skill and professionalism of the flight crew, I thought to myself, ‘these folks are representative of the warfighters we support on a daily basis in DCMA.’”

The Air Force’s Stratotanker has provided aerial refueling support for more than 50 years. It can carry up to 200,000

pounds of fuel, which can be pumped through a rear boom to other aircraft while in flight.

The mission provided refueling training for both the Stratotanker crew and other aircraft, beginning with several F-16 fighter jets with a Guard unit based in Atlantic City, N.J. Most of the action occurred at the rear of the KC-135, in or near the boom pod, where Sywulak and others watched.

“The smaller F-16s appeared alongside our KC-135, just off our wing tips, before settling in below and behind our aircraft for refueling,” said Sywulak. “Our crew included newer boom operators who were receiving in-flight training from an experienced boom operator, who had seven years of experience.”

After the F-16s departed, passengers lunched while awaiting the arrival of a KC-10 Extender refueling tanker. For 45 minutes the KC-135 and KC-10 trained together, highlighted by the



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Army Col. Kenneth Copeland, Defense Contract Management Agency Philadelphia commander, and Michael Sywulak, DCMA Philadelphia supervisory quality assurance specialist, sit in the passenger section of a N.J. Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotanker. They were invited by Air Force Tech. Sgt. Edward Lowden, a Guardsman and DCMA civilian quality assurance specialist, to ride along on a Feb. 22 aerial refueling mission through the Department of Defense's Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve program. (Photo contributed by Michael Sywulak, DCMA Philadelphia)

larger Extender conducting multiple "touch and go" contact attempts with the Stratotanker's flying boom.

During the flight home, Sywulak sat in the cockpit jump seat near the pilot

and co-pilot, watching the crew work and listening to their interaction with McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst air traffic controllers.

"It is our privilege and pleasure to

serve these folks," reflected Sywulak. "Our experience with the 108th on this refueling mission reminds us once again – we have a high calling in DCMA." 

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