

Gates Mandates Agency Oversee all Contingency Contract Operations

By Mark Woodbury, Associate Editor

"It was probably — not probably, it was — the most professionally rewarding year of my life. Any time you have an opportunity to manage a contract that's \$5.9 billion [and] takes care of 240,000 people including our warriors, coalition forces, contractors on the battlefield and in the State Department, what a fulfilling thing to do." — Army Col. Jake Hansen, former DCMA Iraq commander



Les Berry, Contingency Contract Administration Services quality assurance representative, checks each item on his checklist to make sure the inspected equipment item is functioning properly.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently requested that the Defense Contract Management Agency oversee all contingency contract operations within Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Eighty-nine agency employees currently oversee contingency contract administration services and logistics civil augmentation program missions in theater. The additional 250 DCMA civilian employees needed to implement the defense secretary's mandate will nearly triple the agency's presence in the combat zone.

In order to meet this requirement, Keith Ernst, DCMA's acting director, has amended the military deployment guidelines, made changes to the emergency essential civilian employment program to increase its attractiveness, sought authority from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to provide additional incentives and is reaching out to retired annuitants.

Ernst explained the changed military deployment guidelines in a recent agency-wide e-mail communication. The changes include:

- Shortening the time between deployments from one year to six months
- Declaring commanders with a contracting background, grade of O-5 or higher, deployable
- Making aircraft operations personnel, other than those in valid DCMA flying billets, deployable
- Reducing the amount of time before newly assigned personnel are eligible for deployment from 90 days to 60
- Allowing O-5 and O-6s selected for command assignments to fill positions other than command ones
- Reducing the time that servicemembers must return to their home stations prior to separation, retirement or a permanent change of station to 90 days

"It's not like being in a plant somewhere watching something being built day in and day out. When you're deployed, you're able to see your contributions on a daily basis and how [they] directly benefit the soldiers." — Steve Belnap, DCMA Iraq quality assurance representative

Ernst explained in a second agency-wide communication that he is also instituting civilian personnel changes to attract more civilian volunteers to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among these were:

- Upgrading deployment incentives to provide bonuses equal to 25 percent of base salary and other generous benefits like combinations of danger pay and post differential amounting up to 70 percent of an employee's base pay
- Allocating premium pay and overtime as appropriate

Ernst called the CCAS mission "the agency's number-one priority." He asked agency civilians with a contract management background to volunteer for a CCAS mission because he feels "... it is the singular opportunity to be embedded with the warfighters we support and is personally rewarding on many levels."

Administrative contracting officers, quality assurance representatives and property assurance employees at the contract management office-level who are interested in joining the emergency essential program should contact Sylvia Parker by e-mail at Sylvia.Parker@dcma.mil or by phone at (703) 328-3511. Employees with skills in engineering, pricing, manufacturing, transportation, management analysis and program management may also call Parker as they will be needed for future deployments.

Employees with questions about volunteering for a CCAS mission should contact Michael Bolduc by e-mail at Michael.Bolduc@dcma.mil or by phone at (617) 753-4048. CCAS deployment information can also be found at the Web site <http://home.dcma.mil/ctr-dcmac-t/deployment.htm>. 

"Overall, I wouldn't trade my deployments. I no longer see DCMA's mission as support to the military. We support Maj. Adams, Capt. Smith, Private 1st Class Roberts, Larry, Tom and Steve. What we do makes a real difference to the troops. I met people, saw things and did things that I would never have experienced sitting in an office in California or Virginia. I have lots of stories to tell my grandchildren." — Linda Wallace, former DCMA Middle East mission support officer



Steve Belnap, Contingency Contract Administration Services quality assurance representative, inspects jet fuel to see if it meets the required standards.

"The whole contracting process may not seem very fast or even very glamorous — especially when you are working hard to coordinate with a contracting officer's representative, reconciling a contract or tracking down an inspection and receiving report. But that all changes when a turbine is finally delivered, spare parts arrive on time, magazines for a children's hospital are made available or when a coalition or Iraqi security force member is protected by body armor you supplied. When that happens, you cannot help but feel you are at the top of your game. At that moment, you know you have made a real difference in people's lives." — Karen Parris, former DCMA Central Iraq administrative contracting officer

"For me, deploying was an opportunity to use skills I had developed over many years to achieve new things." — Robert Clark, former Logistics Civil Augmentation Program administrative contracting officer