

CONTINGENCY CONTRACTING CORNER

Voices From the Theater: Insiders' Perspectives of D

By *Carolina M. Woods, Staff Writer*

For most people, making the decision to go on a voluntary deployment to Iraq, Afghanistan or any other hot spot in the world is not easy. Sometimes family matters or concerns about the dangers associated with deploying can prevent one from making this type of commitment. Additionally, the extreme climate and long work days are not for the fainthearted. However, those who have embraced the opportunity to deploy with the Defense Contract Management Agency describe it as one of the most fulfilling experiences of their lives and a unique bonding

experience. I spoke with two DCMA employees who have gone through this experience to get their thoughts and perspectives on being deployed. These are their stories.

Linda Wallace, DCMA Headquarters mission support officer and former DCMA Middle East mission support officer

C: How many times have you been deployed?

Linda Wallace: Twice

C: Why did you choose to deploy?

LW: For the adventure of it. It was an opportunity to serve America in a real and tangible way and to experience the unknown in relative safety and without giving up my income.

C: In general, what is it like being deployed?

LW: Generally, it is a very positive experience. There are times of homesickness, and conditions can be austere — meals definitely aren't like at home. I found that as I allowed myself to adjust, those issues become less important fairly quickly. The opportunity to



Air Force Maj. Loreen Lisle, second from right, working as an administrative contracting officer for DCMA Iraq.



Lisle, sixth from left, with her DCMA Iraq colleagues.

Deployment

experience a different culture, meet new people and put a face on our customers more than makes up for the difficulties. It is great to see that what we do makes a real difference for the military members who are protecting our freedom. They are in harm's way so we can remain safe at home, and their appreciation for what we do is immense — and immensely rewarding.

C: What were your greatest challenges?

LW: Language is definitely tricky. When I was in Hungary, I had much more contact with Hungarian

employees in the office and on the base than in other locations. We communicated with hand signs and [often] passed a Hungarian-English dictionary back and forth. It is difficult because the conversation changes each time ... so each time is a new beginning. I found communicating to be hard work.

In Djibouti, I think the weather was the biggest challenge. It was hot. By the time I left in early July, 140 degrees was pretty routine. It feels a lot like being in a huge hair dryer when the wind is blowing. I didn't know it could get that hot.

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— Linda Wallace

C: What is your most memorable experience?

LW: There are several, but if I have to choose one, it would be volunteering at the girl's orphanage in Djibouti. A small group from the base went over every Friday

afternoon for a couple of hours. ... They liked for me to sing, and we sang almost every time I went. My friends very generously sent books, school supplies and personal items to give to them. It was a wonderful experience. I hope to visit Djibouti and the orphanage while I am in Kuwait.

C: How would you describe your overall experience?

LW: 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.

C: What advice do you have for civilians who are thinking about doing a voluntary deployment?

LW: I recommend they talk to someone who has deployed — especially someone who has been where they want to go. Ask everything you can think of and correspond with someone who currently is deployed if that is an option. Every deployment is different, but that discussion will give them a better idea of what to expect. Talk it over with family

members and be sure they are supportive. I used a calling card that had a very low rate and could be refilled over the phone. That allowed me to stay in touch with family and friends. It made a world of difference. Finally, clear the decks as much as possible so you have less to deal with while deployed. If you don't already bank online, set that up before you deploy.

Air Force Maj. Loreen Lisle, DCMA Headquarters contracting officer and former DCMA Iraq administrative contracting officer

Communicator: How many times have you been deployed?

Maj. Lisle: Three times — two with the Air Force and one with DCMA.

C: What was your greatest challenge?

ML: With all the deployments — and I am pulling all of them together — [it was] communication because we had to deal with a lot of the local nationals, and there are barriers on the cultural side. ... Also, each time I get there I don't have all the corporate knowledge because the person I'm replacing is gone ... and as soon as I am up to speed it's time for me to go. So [due to] that lack of corporate knowledge you

have to be very aggressive to get what you want and make the right decisions.

C: What would you describe as your most memorable experience from your deployments to Iraq?

ML: My memorable [experience] wasn't a positive one, but it is memorable all the same. I lost a friend, and when you're in that environment ... you become very close. You might have not known [that person] in the States, but when you go over there you're family. ... Losing someone during my last rotation really brought it home for me ... that, truly, freedom is not free.

C: Given your experiences during your last rotation, if you were given the opportunity to go back would you go?

ML: Yes I would, and I do say this even being a mom. [Even though] it is really hard on the family ... I would because taking care of the personnel is the number-one priority. In the States sometimes I get to do a job putting on a contract [which] takes several months — six to seven months. When you are over there that is the mission. ... You see the soldiers there; you see what you are contributing to the big picture. That part is truly rewarding. **C**