

New Graduate Begins Deployment Adventure



An interview with Ms. Lisa Anderson, *Communicator* Editor-in-Chief, DCMA Headquarters, by Ms. Katherine Crawford, Staff Writer

In April, the Communicator's editor-in-chief, Ms. Lisa Anderson, deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, as part of a Contingency Contract Administration Services (CCAS) mission. Prior to leaving, Ms. Anderson discussed both her upcoming deployment and graduation from Park University.

Q: Do you feel prepared for your impending deployment?

LA: Thanks to the great support from the folks at Headquarters CCAS and from fellow “deployees,” I am ready to go and serve my country. I’ve asked every question in the book: where to go for my medical requirements, what to pack in my duffle bag, what to expect when I land on the sand. Everyone has been wonderful.

Q: Why did you decide to deploy?

LA: I’ve worked for the government for more than 20 years now, and even though most of my career has been extremely rewarding, I’ve always wanted to find another way to serve my country. This is the way I feel works for me — to be right alongside the men and women who are there, seeing it through their eyes and using the skills needed to get the job done every day.

Q: What do you hope to gain from this experience?

LA: I’ve already gained so much, and I haven’t even deployed yet. For instance, every Friday

(Right) *Communicator's* Editor-in-Chief and DCMA Baghdad Contract Administrator Ms. Lisa Anderson. (DCMA staff photo)



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night I go to the American Legion for dinner, and, as word gets out that I’m going over as a civilian, it’s so humbling to have veterans come up to me, shake my hand and thank me for serving my country. I hope to gain insight into the inner workings of what it takes to make things work. I want to meet our warriors, coalition forces and the local nationals and see for myself the relationships between all of us to help me gain perspective on my view of the world.

Q: How do the people in your life and at DCMA [Defense Contract Management Agency] feel about your leaving for six months?

LA: It’s funny, but I’m the kind of person that once I make up my mind up to do something, I’m totally focused. My family and coworkers murmur, but I’m not really hearing what they’re

saying because of the anticipation of getting there and performing well for DCMA. I think my family is worried, but at the same time they’re supportive. Coworkers who have been there are incredibly supportive and helpful, and the CSOC [Combat Support Operations Center] has helped me every step of the way, patiently and thoroughly answering my questions and explaining the process to me.

Q: What advice would you give someone who was considering deploying?

LA: My advice is to find out who has been there and contact them. Ask questions about anything and everything you feel you need to know — it helps. As a civilian, I am not experienced in how a deployment works or what to expect. Fortunately, there are so many people in DCMA

(Above) Military personnel and civilians walk in the fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, Iraq. (DCMA staff photo)

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who have a wealth of information and will readily share it.

Q: What are some of the things you’ll miss most while you’re away?

LA: I’m sure I’ll miss the luxury of picking up my phone and calling my family anytime I want, though I’m planning on writing home once in a while. I’ll probably miss sleeping in on the weekends and having the freedom to get in my car and drive anywhere I want to go. However, I’m looking forward to the challenges and rewards of this deployment. I think it will make me a better DCMA employee and a better citizen.

Q: I know that you’ll be graduating soon, so you’ll also be missing your graduation ceremony, correct?

LA: Even though I won’t be attending my graduation, the end result is just as sweet. Park U. has promised to send me an honorary cap and gown.

Q: So you’re at Park University — what degree will you be earning in the spring?

LA: A Bachelor of Science in management and human resources. It took me a long time. I started in 1989 and

kept interrupting my schooling to care for ill family members. I don’t regret it, but I feel silly because it took me so long to earn my two-year degree.

Q: Do you plan to continue with your education for a master’s or doctorate degree?

LA: I recently enrolled in the master’s of public affairs program at Park University, and I’m already thinking about a thesis for my doctorate too. I am a life-long learner and very eager to get out there and experience as much as I can, while I can.

Q: What made you decide to go back to school as an adult?

LA: I grew up in a family of six kids. My father didn’t finish high school, even though his father was a teacher. My mom graduated from high school and went to work for the Army, but she never went to college. Both my parents were smart and resourceful but just didn’t have the money. I do have to say that if I could go back to high school and change anything, it would be how the counselors advise students on scholarships, educational opportunities, etc. I didn’t know anything about those options, but I had the grades for it — I just needed someone to take an interest in me. I begged my parents to help me go, but they sat me down and told me I’d have to find a way. I ended up taking the civil service test and working for the Army.

Q: Were people supportive of your return to school?

LA: Once I was in the federal system I had some mentors who gave me advice along the way. I worked for the Army Finance Center and then DFAS [Defense Financing and Accounting Service], so it was logical for me to start taking accounting classes, which I liked. One of the best-kept secrets of any agency I’ve worked at is the tuition assistance program. I owe my education to the federal government, which so generously supported me, and for that I’m eternally grateful. Thanks to that support, I kept



(Above) An OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter from 1st Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment patrols the skies over Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)



taking classes, and before I knew it I had earned my associate degree in accounting.

When I moved to the Washington, D.C. metro area, I decided that I wanted to keep going, so I started looking around for some night courses and found Park University. I decided to enroll in a program that would expand my knowledge base and make me more marketable, so I took management and human resource-related classes. I kept plodding along, enjoying every minute of it. Then I discovered online learning and decided to try it. If anyone tells you Internet learning is easier, they've never done it! It's much more challenging because there's no direct instruction — all interaction is done via e-mail and chat rooms.

In between the college courses I've had some other great educational experiences. I've graduated from courses at the Defense Information School and from the Sustaining Base Leadership and Management Program at the Army Management Staff College in 2002. Everyone has been extremely supportive, generous and helpful, and it has been a very positive experience for me.

Q: How has earning a degree transformed your character?

LA: I have gained so much by going to school, including self-esteem. I often compare myself

now to the girl who felt so hopeless in high school, the one who felt she didn't quite measure up. I think that if I'd had the chances then that I've had now, I would've been a much better student. When I talk to other people who don't have the desire to go to school, I think to myself, "How can you afford *not* to get some level of advanced education?" Besides gaining knowledge, experience and personal growth, it just makes you a better person. For someone with kids, it makes you a better parent because you have more to draw upon. It's a win-win situation.

Q: Do you have any advice for others returning to school after having been in the workforce for many years?

LA: For anyone contemplating going to school, I say, "Don't put it off. Start today. Take it a step at a time, and before you know it, you'll be finished and wanting to do more." At the beginning it looks like an impossible task, but keep at it and before you know it, you've achieved your goal. The best thing is that going to school late in life has its benefits — there is so much more practical experience to draw upon during the learning process. It's never a waste of your time to invest in an education, no matter how you approach it.

When I started going to school so many years ago, I never imagined I'd be where I am today, deploying to Iraq and totally prepared mentally, physically and emotionally for this life-changing experience. I'm ready to give it my all.

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(Above) A view from the fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo by Mr. Kevin Koch, NAVSEA Washington, D.C.)