

Assisting Homeland Defense With Donated Servers

by Mr. Richard Cole, Chief, Public Affairs, DCMA Headquarters



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The Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) assisted in the creation of two critical homeland defense organizations this year by providing them with surplus computer servers.

The beneficiaries of the computers were the Texas Emergency Fail-Over Data Center and the 273rd Information Operations Squadron of the Texas Air National Guard (ANG). As a result of DCMA's assistance, the organizations went operational earlier than anticipated and under budget.

In June, the Agency transferred 37 servers from its data center in Boston. The three-year-old servers formerly served in DCMA's telephone and computer networks. Previously, DCMA donated 92 servers from the San Diego network hub. The total value of the 129 servers is more than \$750,000.

The servers went to the two new homeland defense organizations through the 136th Base Communications Flight of the Texas ANG.

Based in Fort Worth, the unit's 35 part-time airmen and full-time technicians refurbished the servers for delivery to the end users. "A comparable active-duty unit has over five times the people we do," said Maj. Keil Hubert, the unit's commanding officer. "Many of our airmen come in on their own time and volunteer to do what's needed — [they're] middle-aged nerds," he said.

Members of the 136th flew from Fort Worth to Boston and San Diego and brought the servers to Fort Worth in rented trucks. Maj. Hubert said that the unit will "drive as far as is necessary" to get the type of equipment provided by DCMA.

The relationship between DCMA and the 136th is the result of the work of DCMA employees Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jeff Brady and Mr. Joe Holland. Tech. Sgt. Brady, who works for the Agency's data center in Dallas, is a Guardsman assigned to the 136th. He gave up his vacation time to serve in a military duty status to assist in both transfer events. Mr. Holland, the Boston data center manager, supervised the most recent server transfer.

(Above from left to right) The servers are carefully loaded onto planks before being packed up for shipment; Air Force Maj. Kyle Hubert and Air Force Staff Sgt. Patrick O'Connor place cargo straps around the servers to hold them in place during shipment; Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jeff Brady and Staff Sgt. O'Connor load new Compaq computer racks onto the truck. (Photos by Ms. Michelle Brignac, DCMA Aeronautical Systems and Naval Sea Systems Divisions)

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The arrangement is a win-win situation for the 136th and DCMA because key homeland defense organizations get the servers needed to support real-world missions, the 136th gets real-world experience performing its mission and DCMA doesn't have to expend resources demilitarizing the surplus equipment.



Saving the government money; enhancing readiness and mission accomplishment; multiplying the force: DCMA accomplishes its missions in more ways than you'd think!

Where Do the Servers Go?

by Ms. Ann Jensis-Dale, Congressional and Public Affairs Advisor, DCMA Aeronautical Systems and Naval Sea Systems Divisions

DCMA Information Technology Customer Service Organization (ITCSO) is responsible for keeping our computer networks up and running 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Operating, maintaining and periodically replacing servers (the technology components that handle databases, e-mail and multi-user applications), is a critical part of what ITCSO does.

"We replace one-third of our servers each year," said Mr. Mike Williams, DCMA chief information officer. Why? Mr. Williams said that statistics show that server components — particularly hard drives — start failing at an accelerated rate after three years as do other components. "Server manufacturers will warranty their products for three years, but that's it. You can't find any warranties longer than three years," said Mr. Williams. "And we definitely don't want to be in the server repair business. That would be really expensive for the Agency. Think about all the lost time and productivity that servers breaking down all the time would cause."

"Not too long ago we had over 600 servers," he continued. "Now we're down to about 300, and our goal is to get down to about 150 by March 2007." Why reduce the number of servers by so much? "Savings. Servers require electricity and air conditioning. Also, new server models put out more heat each year than their predecessors did. So, reduce the number of servers, and you reduce those costs — or at least, in the case of air conditioning, you keep that cost under control. And, if you reduce the number of servers, your replacement costs are lower, too," said Mr. Williams.

The advent of a new software technology called "virtualization" is allowing DCMA to reduce the number of servers it needs. "Virtualization" software enables each individual server to operate as if it were several servers, thus reducing the number needed. "This software technology has been around since 1995 but for years was applicable only to desktop computers. In the last few years, though, virtualization software has grown up, and it's now available for servers," said Mr. Williams.

Information technology equipment that is deemed excess goes through a screening process for potential use by other Department of Defense (DoD) agencies, federal agencies and non-profit organizations, to include schools. "This is not the first time we have donated servers," stated Mr. Williams. "We have donated servers to the Defense Contract Audit Agency and several other DoD organizations. But, this [129 servers] is the largest number of servers we've ever donated on a single occasion."

(Top) Back row, from left: Air Force Tech. Sgt. Adrian Christianson and Air Force Maj. Kyle Hubert. Front row, from left: Air Force Staff Sgt. Patrick O'Connor and Air Force Technical Sgt. Jeff Brady (Photo by Ms. Michelle Brignac, DCMA Aeronautical Systems and Naval Sea Systems Divisions)
(Right) Mr. Mike Williams, DCMA chief information officer, at DCMA Headquarters in Alexandria, Va. (Photo by Ms. Lindsay Gross, BRTRC)

