

Passport Agent Keeps DCMA Going Around the World

By Dianne Ryder, Editor in Chief

Mary Spindle, a six-year Defense Contract Management Agency veteran, now holds “the keys to the kingdom,” in a sense. That is, no DCMA employee travels outside the United States without checking in with her first.

Spindle, who took on the duties of DCMA passport agent in July 2006, supplies the means for intercontinental travel by providing passports — either diplomatic or official — and visas to those with a mission requirement to travel abroad.

Spindle’s supervisor, Kathy Butera, DCMA International Division’s organization and administration manager, has nothing but praise for Spindle’s dedication to duty: “I don’t think you’ll find a more customer-oriented individual than Mary. She goes over and above the realm of her regular function to do what she needs to do for the employee.”

Butera continued, “It doesn’t matter, literally, if you are Mr. Ernst or ‘John Smith, QAR out in the field,’ she provides you the utmost service.”

Spindle explained the difference between a diplomatic passport and an official passport: “A diplomatic passport is command-sponsored. That is, they are issued on the basis of entitlement to U.S. citizens assigned under the jurisdiction of the chief of mission — for example, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia or Israel.” They are black in color and can take up to 12 weeks to process. When these passports are no longer required, they are returned to the military passport agent for cancellation by the State Department.

Official passports are maroon and normally issued for five years to military members and dependents traveling to a country that requires a passport as well as Department of Defense civilians and employees of all federal agencies in connection with travel abroad on official business. When these passports are no longer required, the military passport agent can cancel and return the application and notify the State Department of the cancellation.

In both cases, lead time is key. “It’s taking 10 weeks right now to process [an official passport],” said Spindle, “and what people don’t understand is that it is not from the time they start the process, but the clock starts when the Special Issuance Agency of the State Department receives the application.”

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The application procedures vary depending upon whether the traveler already has a tourist passport, whether he or she has an official passport that has expired or whether he or she is applying for an official passport for the first time. In the latter instance, the traveler should be prepared to present identification (generally, a driver's license or military ID), two photos (2" x 2") and an original birth certificate, in addition to the forms required any time a passport is issued.

The Defense Department's DD Form 1056 ("Authorization to Apply for a 'No-Fee' Passport and/or Request for Visa") and Department of State Passport Office's DSP 11 ("Application for Passport (First Time and Minors)") are the first critical forms to be completed. If a traveler has an expired passport, he or she should complete a DS 82, or application for renewal. For more detailed information, travelers should refer to the DoD Foreign Clearance Guide found at the Web site <https://www.fcg.pentagon.mil>.

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An employee's reason for travel may also alter the process — for example, an employee relocating to a job overseas versus an employee going to another country for temporary duty purposes. If relocating, it will be necessary to obtain additional passports for a spouse and

dependent children (if accompanying the employee).

As to whether heightened security has resulted in any changes to her duties, Spindle said, "On January 23, 2007, the Western Hemisphere Initiative Act was implemented, and that requires all U.S. citizens traveling by air to have an official passport. We're looking at December or January of next year for it to be expanded to travel by land as well."

Spindle's philosophy of excellent customer service is simple: "just providing everyone the same level of service;" but she is quick to give credit to the team members who help her serve customers — Myonghui Brown, Air Force Capt. Rob Henofer and Matt Clough.

For more information, visit DCMA International's home page at http://home.dcma.mil/dcmai/FB/pssprt_vss.htm. 

(Right) Mary Spindle, DCMA passport agent, in her office at DCMA International headquarters in Alexandria, Va. (Photo by Dianne Ryder, DCMA Public Affairs)

