



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Regional senior enlisted advisors expand DeCA's military outreach

*By Kevin L. Robinson,
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FORT LEE, Va. – There was a time when military commissaries were staffed by soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen working right alongside civilians. These uniformed members served as cashiers, stockers, store officers and more. Those days are long gone. However, in October, the Defense Commissary Agency took a page from that past by adding senior enlisted advisors to its regional offices.

Joining Command Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia, DeCA's senior enlisted advisor to the director, are Army Reserve Sgt. Maj. Linda K. Ricker in DeCA Europe, Air National Guard Chief Master Sgt. Larry Fullilove in DeCA East, and Coast Guard Reserve Master Chief Petty Officer Joe L. Valdez in DeCA West.

“We thought it was only right, being that we had a command sergeant major at the headquarters, that we should also have some senior enlisted leadership in the regions,” said Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., DeCA director and CEO. “Fortunately we were able to do that with the cooperation of the military services. These are our senior enlisted advisors – professional leaders, experienced, multiservice and diverse.”

The added manpower will help Garcia in his mission of advising DeCA's civilian leadership about the needs of enlisted service members' commissary benefit and connecting with the senior enlisted leaders of the armed services. The agency's senior enlisted advisors are also military advocates for DeCA customers – the 12 million active duty, retired and forces in reserve and their families – and responsible for increasing the awareness of the commissary benefit and

its savings to these authorized patrons.

DeCA's decision to add senior enlisted advisors to its geographic areas mirrors the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which currently employs an Air Force chief master sergeant in the senior enlisted advisor position at its Dallas headquarters, and two Army sergeants major – one in the Pacific and the other in Europe.

“Since becoming the commissary's senior enlisted advisor almost a year and a half ago, the opportunities to talk with service members and their families have taken me around the world,” Garcia said. “However, this is not a one-man job. I want all of our uniformed commissary authorized patrons to have someone in their area who can listen to their needs and address their concerns about their benefit – someone who walks in their shoes and knows what it's like to be deployed and away from their families.”

Collectively, DeCA's regional senior enlisted advisors have almost 90 years of military experience.

Ricker, for example, has served in the Army Reserve for 27 years, and was deployed to Iraq from March 2008 to March 2009 and mobilized in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Fullilove, a veteran of 36 years in service, was mobilized for operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as well as support of the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.

Valdez is a veteran of 24 years in the Coast Guard Reserve and more than 12 years of other military service including active duty in the Air Force and the Army Active Guard Reserve program, and reserve service in the Army Reserve and the Texas Army National Guard. He was mobilized on active duty for seven years with the Coast Guard immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

“As senior enlisted advisors we are here to help connect our authorized customers with their commissary benefit. We understand what it's like to serve in this 21st century military because we also are wearing the uniform,” Garcia said. “With the addition of Ricker, Fullilove and Valdez in our regions, I have no doubt that they will be valuable assets to our ‘One DeCA’ team and join our civilian employees in delivering a world-class benefit.”

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent*

surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.