



NEWS RELEASE

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Commissary Awareness Month

‘Commissary Commando’ helps single service members learn about their benefit

*By Kevin L. Robinson,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Camouflage: check. GPS: check. Objective: tour your local military commissary.

This year, single service member programs will be on a tactical mission to seek out their commissary and introduce the most troops to their benefit. This annual competition of service groups, representing single soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen, has been retooled and renamed Commissary Commando.

Commando is part of several events the Defense Commissary Agency is conducting in May during Commissary Awareness Month. Other events include a worldwide case lot sale and the agency’s participation in the Presidents Challenge, a competition to motivate people to exercise and live healthier lifestyles.

Ultimately, the goal for Commissary Awareness Month is to spread the news about the benefit, starting with new service members who have yet to enter a commissary.

“We are really excited about the events we have for this year’s Commissary Awareness Month in May 2009,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. “We have reinvented the program, pumped it up a notch, and hopefully will generate more participation, and as a

result, more awareness of the commissary's benefits to our single enlisted service members.”

Already, the buzz has begun over Commissary Commando. Through April 14, nearly 60 service member programs had registered to visit their local commissaries for educational tours. These groups will be competing for industry prizes ranging from \$150 to a grand prize of \$1,500. Top prizes are awarded based on creativity and the percentage of single service members from that installation who participate in the competition. All prizes are donated by the American Logistics Association's Consumer Awareness Team, an industry outreach committee representing vendors that sell products in military commissaries.

This year's competition advances a new theme, “The Commissary – It's Worth the Trip!,” which encourages new customers to take advantage of all that their benefit has to offer: be it a visit to their local commissary or accessing the DeCA Web site, <http://www.commissaries.com>, for a wealth of customer services and programs, such as Ask the DeCA Dietitian, Kay's Kitchen and the electronic customer newsletter, *Commissary Connection*. The store tour drives the point home that commissary shoppers save more than 30 percent over retail, with the freshest meats and produce at even greater savings, said Sallie Cauthers, chief of DeCA's marketing division.

“We've responded to what our customers want with conveniences such as short-term parking, more express lanes, Grab 'n' Go meals, and expanded savings available during manager's specials and our worldwide case lot sales in May,” Cauthers added. “This is just a sample of what single service members learn when they participate in Commissary Awareness Month each May.”

Sponsored by the Consumer Awareness Team, typical single service tour events often range from scavenger hunts to shopping cart races to eating contests to physical fitness challenges. Participating service groups are the Army's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, the Single Marine program, the Air Force First Term Airmen program and the Navy Liberty program. First Term Airmen centers participate through the sponsorship of their respective family support centers.

Once the installation service groups tour their commissary and submit a roster of participants, they receive a \$100 incentive award, funded by the Consumer Awareness Team, which can be used for their next commissary tour or for the Commando competition.

It's through the blitz of store tours held during Commissary Awareness Month that many single, first-term service members often learn about their benefit for the first time, said Sakowitz.

“It's definitely worth it for our single troops, whether they are living in the barracks or

off post, to experience the 30 percent or more they can save on snacks, personal hygiene items, general groceries – even the food for that summer cookout,” Sakowitz added. “Times are too tough to pass up this deal!”

Single service members should check with their installation single service member program coordinator to see if that program is registered to participate in Commissary Awareness Month events. For more information on the program, contact Cauthers at sallie.cauthers@deca.mil.

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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 \$3,400 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.*