

DCMA Sees Warfighters Get What They Need, When They Need It

RUDI WILLIAMS

SPRINGFIELD, Va., Oct. 31, 2001 — “I can tell every soldier, sailor, airman and Marine that it's our job to make sure that what comes from a contractor — the food you eat, the clothing you wear, the weapon you shoot and the system you operate — is quality and it's there on time,” said Army Brig. Gen. Ed Harrington.

As director of the Defense Contract Management Agency in Springfield, Va., Harrington is DoD's senior contract manager. His mammoth responsibilities include ensuring that all DoD acquisition programs, supplies, and services are delivered on time, within cost, and meet performance standards.

That involves management of more than 325,000 prime contracts presently valued at \$852 billion. With a workforce of more than 12,000 civilian and military professionals from all Services, the agency is split into three districts — East, West, and International. Harrington said his people are involved with everything servicemembers eat, wear, shoot, or operate.

DCMA's network of 65 contract management offices is responsible for work performed at more than 900 far-flung operating locations worldwide. The agency's myriad tasks include ensuring that quality products as diverse as fighter aircraft and mortar sights are delivered on time at reasonable prices. It ensures the same for components, spare parts and assemblies for weapon systems readiness.

DCMA is a combat support agency under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. The agency was created to



Army Brig. Gen. Edward M. Harrington, director of the Defense Contract Management Agency, said his people are involved with everything servicemembers eat, wear, shoot, or operate.

Photo by Rudi Williams

streamline and modernize DoD's acquisition strategies and practices.

Harrington said the agency has the double-barreled mission of providing world-class customer service while leading the revolution in business affairs that is transforming DoD's acquisition process.

He calls DCMA “a leading edge organization,” and he should know. He served twice in the agency's predecessor, the Defense Contract Management Command, before becoming DCMA's second commander. He also commanded DCMC Syracuse, N.Y., from July 1994

to January 1997 and the Defense Contract Management District East in Boston from May 1998 to September 1999. The general has also served in numerous positions in the Army's acquisition and technology community.

Harrington recently chartered the agency's senior leadership to assess the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. He also asked employees, customers, and stakeholders if the agency is living up to their expectations.

Emphasizing that the agency is focused on its customers' needs, he said, "We've reoriented the agency's operations elements and can now connect more closely with our customers – the systems managers, system program directors, and the program executive officers of each Service. We want to know what else we can do to support them.

"We've initiated a 360-degree assessment to assess where we are as an organization and as a team," the general noted. "In doing this, we are going to focus on our people. DCMA isn't a bunch of computers, paperwork, and contract files. It is all of our team members and how they work together for our customers. They have to have resources to get the job done and to develop, both individually and technically. We have to ensure that we have equal opportunity and a culture of diversity here to help everybody grow.

"We're also working with our customers, because they may not be aware of what we're doing or we're not aware of what they need," Harrington said.

That includes everything from seeking feedback from Service Acquisition Executives [and] DoD acquisition, technology, and logistics staffs, to the program officers, project managers, and assistant program directors as to how well the agency supports operational readiness of weapon systems, he said.

"My biggest challenge is enabling our workforce to do better by providing them the tools

– software systems, automation, and communications capability ... to provide information more quickly to our customers," the general said.

He has gotten input from project managers, weapon systems managers, spare parts buyers, and others to help him make decisions.

One way DCMA helps its customers is by stationing a representative in manufacturing plants. "They oversee the production and delivery of spare parts, components and major weapon systems we provide for the warfighter," Harrington noted. "The better and faster they can gather and send information to our customers, the better we'll be able to use those precious taxpayers' dollars," he said. "So it's the timeliness and accuracy of information that really counts with the customer."

Asked what being a combat support agency means to DCMA, Harrington said, "It means being in Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Haiti, and actually managing contract actions for the warfighters on the ground."

Being in touch with the warfighters is essential, he said. He pointed out that figuring out what the future holds for warfighters is the job of warfighting commanders and the Joint Staff. Therefore, he said, being in close contact with those commanders and their staffs is essential to helping DCMA do its job.

"We need to be in touch with those commanders and deeply involved with the Joint Staff," Harrington emphasized. "The only way we can do that is to put some of our people on the ground with the warfighting CINCs' staffs. Being in touch will help us better understand what they are planning, how they are preparing for future conflicts, and what our role will be in supporting them."

When the nation goes to war, DCMA focuses on warfighting commanders' needs and how soon the agency can get systems and supply items to them. "Our job is to make sure that spares, components, and assemblies for major

weapon systems are presented to the government for acceptance," he said. "We're the official government activity that accepts items and authorizes payment of contracts. Our grand challenge is to ensure that stuff goes out the contractors' doors perfect every time."

DCMA ensures that what's written in a contract is correct and meets quality standards. For example, when an organization like the Defense Logistics Agency lets a contract, it has DCMA ensure that the contractor controls costs and delivers quality products on time.

Since Sept. 11, the agency's military people have been wearing their battle dress uniforms or service equivalents as a reminder of who they work for – the warfighters, the general said.

"It keeps them in touch with the ultimate customer and serves to remind our military people of where they came and how they got here," Harrington noted. "There are others just like them stationed all over the world who, at a moment's notice, can go into harm's way.

"So I figured we should wear those uniforms to strengthen our linkage with our ultimate customers and to give us a better feeling for why we're doing what we do," the general said. "Our many civilian employees get the same message when they see their military colleagues in BDUs or other utility uniforms."

However, there is a time when civilians wear BDUs. They wear them when they accept orders for deployment to a places like Bosnia, Macedonia, or Kosovo to serve on a contracting team.

"They're also put through what we call the Basic Contingency Operations Training course that

exposes them to a typical field environment in the Army," Harrington said.

Joined by their military counterparts, civilian personnel are sent to Fort McCoy, Wis., for 10 days of training to prepare them to live and work safely in an overseas contingency environment. The course replicates some of the conditions personnel can expect to encounter during tours of duty in hostile overseas areas.

They're taught survival skills including first aid, weapons familiarization, field hygiene, and use of protective equipment, such as decontamination kits, protective masks, and chemical protection suits.

"The training focuses on the safety of non-combatants who accompany the forces into hostile areas -- DoD civilians and DoD contractors," Harrington explained. "It's just like soldier training."

The training is voluntary for civilians and serves as a refresher course for active and Reserve military personnel who have not been assigned to an austere field environment in a while.

DCMA supports mainly military customers, but it also works on behalf of some federal agencies. For example, DCMA does quality assurance management for NASA. "We are there for NASA to assure the quality of the solid rocket boosters for space shuttles and to oversee the production and assembly of the international space station," Harrington said.

He calls DCMA's employees "unsung heroes" because they're the people who ensure that warfighters get what they need when they need it.

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