

DeCA West Region Director Keith C. Hagenbuch



Hagenbuch

## Mind on the MISSION

**O**n Jan. 11, Keith C. Hagenbuch was named director of the Defense Commissary Agency's West Region. Hagenbuch had been serving as acting director of DeCA West since April 4, 2009, following Scott Simpson's retirement.

Now also a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), this newest appointment represents another significant rung up the ladder for the commissary veteran. During his career, he has served in various store-level positions as well as numerous leadership roles, including Zone 16 manager, director of Performance and Policy, and DeCA West deputy director.

In this exclusive interview with E and C News, Hagenbuch provides insight into a repertoire of valuable commissary career experiences, and the challenges he and his region face in the coming years.

To recap your 31-year commissary career thus far, what would you say have been some of the projects or endeavors that you're most proud to have been a part of?



**Keith Hagenbuch:** Among my various assignments, I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had to strategically influence store design and equipment purchases, and provide our employees with the tools to do their jobs.

Designing the NB San Diego, Calif., commissary that opened in 2007 was a major milestone for DeCA, and I'm proud to have been a contributor when I was director of Performance and Policy. The commissary is the largest store in DeCA, and we incorporated technology features into its design to improve customer service and operating efficiency.

Electrical lines that pull down from the ceiling for food demonstrations, shelf label prices that change electronically, and an open and friendly customer service area are three of the store's features DeCA is using in new construction that have enhanced the facilities we

have built since 2007.

Another project I was a part of with my team at Performance and Policy was transforming the agency equipment procurement program into a push system. The automated replenishment system provides just-in-time, worldwide replacement of critical equipment, replacing old and outdated equipment with less effort from store management or headquarters personnel.

From starting out as a cashier at the Mather AFB, Calif., commissary, to your service as a store manager and zone manager, what do you expect your experiences will bring to your new role at DeCA West?



**Hagenbuch:** Including the position with Performance and Policy, my experiences have given me a balanced perspective with the ability to look both upward and downward when making a decision. I feel well equipped to consider how decisions we make at region headquarters affect all our stakeholders from customers to employees to our industry partners.

What will be some of your key areas of focus as director of DeCA West?



**Hagenbuch:** A high priority is having facilities and services in place to support military members and their families in Guam, South Korea, Texas, Kansas, Washington and Hawaii, as the services increase the number of uniformed personnel stationed in these areas.

PHOTOS: NANCY O'NEILL, DECA WEST



DeCA West Region Director Keith C. Hagenbuch (center) with Norm Brown (back to camera), then-executive assistant to the director and now chief, Workforce Development, took the opportunity to get an up-close perspective on merchandise, among other things, during a visit to the NAS North Island, Calif., Commissary, October 2009. "We will continue to broadcast our message in 2010: 'Eat healthy for less in the commissary,'" says Hagenbuch.

'I keep our mission forefront in my thoughts each day, and this drives my business decisions. I have a responsibility to deliver quality products our customers want and deserve, to help keep our servicemembers mentally, physically and emotionally prepared to serve.'

— DeCA West Region Director Keith Hagenbuch

My team and I are working with the military services to keep DeCA's construction and store operations plans aligned with the Department of Defense's (DoD) plans for when and where military populations will increase.

At Fort Bliss, Texas, we will open a \$20.3 million commissary in the summer of 2011 to support the 127,000 active-duty military, retirees and family members projected for the Fort Bliss area by 2012. An expanded commissary at Fort Riley, Kan., will be completed in the spring of 2011. At NB Guam, a project under way to renovate the Orote Point commissary will be completed in December, and a project to renovate the Andersen AFB commissary, also on Guam, is on track to be completed in March 2011.

With the status of U.S. forces in Korea changing from being forward-deployed to being forward-stationed with family members, the new commissaries

in Korea will be designed and stocked to serve command-sponsored families. In South Korea, the Yongsan commissary will eventually close, and a new 90,000-sq.-ft. commissary is planned at Camp Humphreys, along with a new 14,000-sq.-ft. commissary at FA Chinhae. A commissary is also planned for K-16 Army Base.

Keeping the pipeline flowing with product from manufacturers to commissary shelves is something else I focus on daily. DeCA West has an experienced and dedicated team that works with distributors, shippers and country officials to ensure product is available for our customers.

Moving perishable products from the U.S. to South Korea, Japan and Guam is particularly sensitive. Tropical storms, broken ships, and temporary restrictions on bringing product in from the U.S. are some of the obstacles they regularly overcome.

I'm proud of how well our overseas product support division functions. The division was recently recognized for winning the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command 2009 Shipper Performance Award in the super-large shipper category. Of 1,000 military shipping agencies, 15 were recognized, making our operations division among the top 1.5 percent.

In fiscal 2009, we held 63 on-site commissary sales for Guard and reserve members in communities where they live and work. This fiscal year, through February, we have already held 15 on-site sales and have 63 more planned by the end of September.

The reserve forces are playing a vital role in our nation's defense, particularly in Afghanistan. Holding a commissary sale at an armory or a military installation where Guard and reserve members drill introduces the commissary benefit to them and their families, and allows them to stock up on grocery products at a savings of more than 30 percent.

**Getting a handle on one of the people who bring you wet mops and more:**

Frankie Monegro does everything from sewing mops on a heavy-duty machine to packaging them for New York City Industries for the Blind in Brooklyn, New York. "I like working here. I get to meet people from all around the world, so I learn a lot," says Frankie, whose vision was impaired by a virus 16 years ago. Frankie loves to help others. "I took some walking canes to hand out to visually impaired people on a trip to Guatemala," he adds with pride. Conscientious. Hard working. That's Frankie Monegro, just one of the many people who bring you SKILCRAFT and other products produced through the AbilityOne Program.

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In general, how would you sum up your philosophy or your approach to delivering a benefit to the patron while also running a resale business? Who or what has most influenced your management philosophy?



**Hagenbuch:** DeCA's mission is to provide a commissary benefit to the armed forces community. DeCA delivers quality grocery and household goods at a savings of 30 percent or more, compared to commercial grocers.

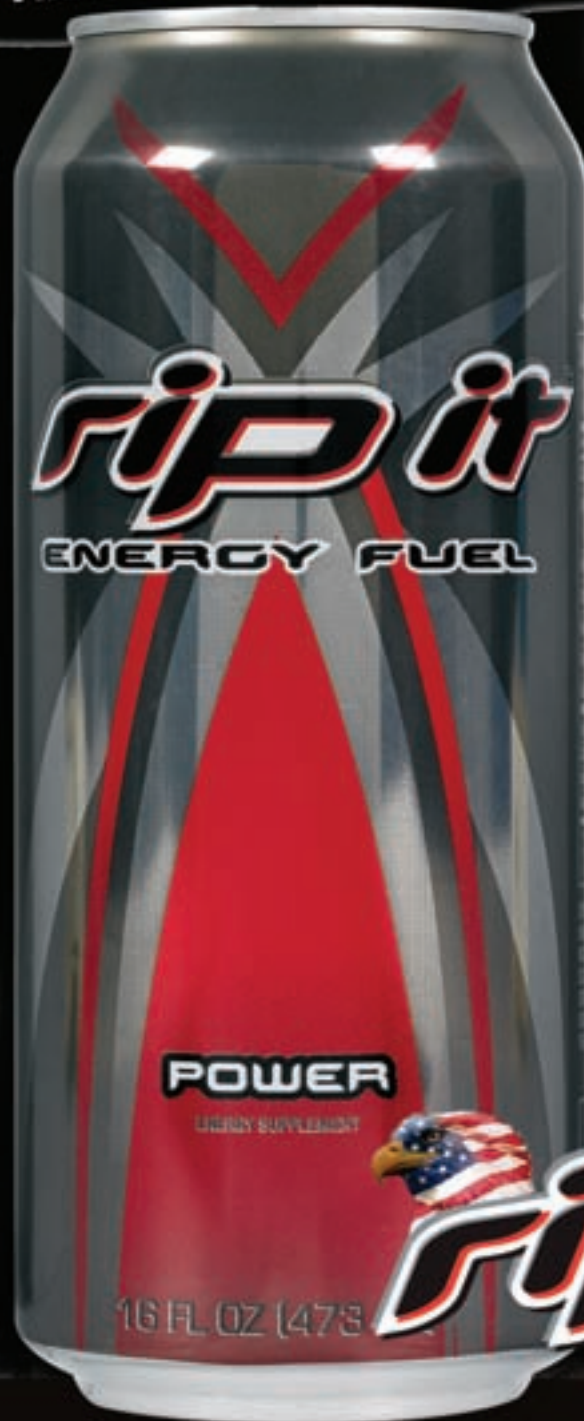
Operating commissaries as resale stores is how we deliver this benefit. Unlike a commercial grocery store, our goal is not profit driven. Our stakeholders are not corporate board members or financial investors; they are Airmen, Marines, Soldiers, Sailors and Coast Guard members and their families, who are making sacrifices every day to defend our nation.

I keep our mission forefront in my thoughts each day, and this drives my business decisions. I have a responsibility to deliver quality products our customers want and deserve, to help keep our servicemembers mentally, physically and emotionally prepared to serve.

I'm surrounded by people in DeCA who are every bit as passionate as I am about providing this benefit. We have a common understanding, which makes it easy for me to use a team goal-setting approach. I see my job as providing the tools necessary to achieve our jointly set goals.

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DeCA West spans an enormous geographical area. What kind of unique challenges does that pose, and how do you expect to handle them?

**Hagenbuch:** Size offers us both challenges and opportunities. From Kansas to South Korea, DeCA West spans 11 time zones and crosses the international dateline. The cultural differences of our workforce and customers are vast.

We stay sensitive to the unique challenges created by different cultures and languages. Many of our managers and most of our front-line employees in the Asia-Pacific area have a deep appreciation and understanding of the culture where they work, because they were born there, they have lived there for many years or they are married to a native of the country.

Weather can cripple our supply chain and knock out the power for an entire base. We plan and prepare for this by keeping back rooms sufficiently stocked during the danger months and working with installation officials to provide generators.

The inevitable happened this past January at Altus AFB, Okla., when a winter ice storm knocked the power out across the entire base for eight days. We suffered no loss of merchandise at Altus because of strong contingency planning and quick action by store management, who moved perishable product into back-room refrigeration and freezer units and opened the receiving dock doors to let in the frigid outside air to keep products chilled.

In the Asia-Pacific area, we try to turn host country restrictions on product into opportunities to expand our stock selection. Japan embargoes many fruits and vegetables popular with our U.S. military, including apples, potatoes, peaches, pears and some berries. In partnership with our produce contractor, we work to offer our shoppers in Japan the best selection and quality available from the U.S. and local marketplaces.

Apples and potatoes are the two most requested items we purchase locally in Japan. In Japan, we've added a potato grown in northern Japan, similar to the U.S. baking potato, and from a U.S. supplier, a frozen baking potato that can be heated in a microwave.

In Okinawa, we have tried offering produce



McClellan, Calif., Commissary employees greet Hagenbuch (foreground) at the store entrance during a visit on Jan 29, 2010. Behind him are Command Sgt. Maj. Victor Garcia, USA (obscured), DeCA senior enlisted advisor, and Master Chief Petty Officer Joe L. Valdez, USCG, DeCA West senior enlisted advisor (right).

grown in Korea. The test is going well, and we plan to offer Korean produce in commissaries on mainland Japan within a few months.

**With shoppers watching their pennies even more closely, are there any programs you will be devoting more attention to, for example, club packs? What else is DeCA West doing to encourage patrons to shop in its commissaries?**

**Hagenbuch:** We will continue to build and promote club packs and perimeter departments. Our club pack sales have increased 22 percent region-wide in the first two months of 2010. This is on top of a 12-percent increase in 2009, showing us that commissary shoppers recognize and appreciate the savings they receive when purchasing in large sizes.

DeCA West will also continue to hone the perimeter departments of meat, produce and dairy, and work with our industry partners to offer high-quality products at great values.

In February, we supported the kickoff of the DoD "Military Saves" campaign and its first-quarter theme, "Save and Invest," by partnering with financial resources on military installations to offer shoppers tips on how to increase their commissary savings by using coupons, and watching unit prices and sale promotions. The theme is one we will continue to promote to our shoppers throughout the year.

DeCA's "Mom's Day," "Lil' Heroes," and "Your

Pet, Your Family" promotions offer savings across categories for all family members. Store employees are building displays and keeping promotional products on shelves to help families increase savings.

We have a history in DeCA West of building eye-catching displays and winning industry display contests to give our customers another reason to come to the commissary: to find a treasure of new and exciting values.

DeCA West also has a strong record of conducting effective outreach events to educate shoppers about their commissary benefit. We will continue to broadcast our message in 2010: "Eat healthy for less in the commissary."

We are also using social media as a new channel to reach our shoppers. We post upcoming events, customer testimonials and links to coupons on DeCA's Facebook page.

**Is there anything you'd like to convey to the agency's network of store and zone managers and/or to its support system of suppliers, brokers and distributors?**

**Hagenbuch:** My focus has always been on teamwork and building relationships to foster an upward and downward flow of information within DeCA and with our industry partners.

Since DeCA's inception in 1991, the agency and its industry partners have done a tremendous job of working cooperatively to enhance the commissary benefit. As we enter 2010, a new decade, our opportunity broadens to reach outside our commissary network, to the large military service community dedicated to improving military quality of life.

The "Family Fun Fitness Festival" in May will bring together commissaries, exchanges and MWR to provide events dedicated to improving overall health and wellness of our servicemembers and their families through nutrition, exercise and family fun.

This isn't the first time we have teamed up with service agencies outside the commissary network, but it may be the biggest. It is certainly something we will do more of in the future.

—E and C NEWS



Hagenbuch (far left) and U.S. Coast Guard Master Chief Petty Officer Joe L. Valdez, USCG (far right), DeCA West senior enlisted advisor, visited Travis AFB, Calif., on Jan. 29, 2010. Greeting the two DeCA West executives were (from left after Hagenbuch) Meatcutting Workers Jermaine Brooks, Christian Marquez, and Rose Bradley; Store Associate Marques Jones; Meatcutter Beyer Bugayong; Store Associate Florida Angkratok; and Meatcutter Diana Jungers.

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