

# DCMA Deployee Gives Back to V

By *Dianne Ryder*  
Editor in Chief

**K**athryn Blackerby is an administrative contracting officer with DCMA Aircraft Integrated Maintenance Operations – Birmingham, Ala. She is also a wife, mother, grandmother and thrice-deployed emergency essential volunteer.

Blackerby worked with DCMA previously in the mid to late 1990s in the small business office and on a quality team. She was a contracting specialist with the Army Reserve Contracting Office in Birmingham, and in 2003, she continued working as a contract specialist with the Corps of Engineers in Huntsville, Ala., before returning to DCMA as an emergency essential employee in 2005.

“I have spent my career working with and for the military in some form or fashion and now had the opportunity to support ‘boots on the ground.’ Just the thought of that made me proud,” said Blackerby. “What I do for the soldiers who risk their lives every day ‘outside the wire’ is just a tidbit. But if I can be a part of ensuring they have three or four hot meals a day, a good bed to sleep in with heat and air conditioning and morale, welfare and recreation facilities, then I will sacrifice what little I do to be in this environment with them.”

In February 2007, Blackerby switched gears by beginning a permanent ACO position in her home office. “But I couldn’t stand not coming back, so when my EE position was re-announced, I applied, and here I am,” she said. “It’s just one of those things that you either feel compelled to do or you don’t.”

Blackerby returned in December 2007, reporting to Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. She worked there for a few weeks until she was asked to take over the northern camps and move to Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

“I was very clear from the beginning that I wanted to come to Iraq. I had experienced Afghanistan, now I wanted to work in Iraq,” Blackerby said. While at Buehring, her Iraq opportunity arose and she immediately accepted. In February 2008, Blackerby moved up to Camp Slayer, Baghdad.

In October 2008, Blackerby returned to Southern Iraq as an

ACO at Camp Taji, Iraq, where she currently serves. She plans to have at least one more deployment before retiring.

As many deployees have discovered, working conditions in Iraq can be difficult. But in her own words, Blackerby’s main challenge was “hopping helicopters and C-130s. I’m only five feet tall and a few pounds over what I need to be,” she said. “Therefore, carrying the extra weight of the ‘battle rattle’ and duffels is getting difficult, to say the least.” At 55 years old, Blackerby is just grateful to help. “I guess I’m just showing my age, and I don’t like to feel I’m a burden to the pilots or soldiers.”

Another lament Blackerby had in common with other deployees was missing home life — especially spending time with family at holidays and other special occasions. “I missed Thanksgiving this year, and this was my second Christmas [deployed] in a row. I’ve spent my last two birthdays here in Iraq and missed children

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# Warfighters Through Sacrifice



Kathryn Blackerby, an administrative contracting officer with DCMA Aircraft Integrated Maintenance Operations – Birmingham, has found emergency essential deployments to be immensely rewarding.

and grandchildren’s birthdays,” she confessed. Blackerby is married with two daughters and five grandchildren. Her husband, Danny, is an engineer with DCMA Huntsville.

When asked about her most valuable lessons learned from each of her deployments, Blackerby responded, “To appreciate what the soldiers endure each and every time they go outside the wire. To be a bit more patient, forgiving and in tune with the difference in culture and to appreciate the freedom that we, as Americans, enjoy each and every day.”

As for Blackerby’s most memorable experience, she detailed one evening’s events in Afghanistan. “It was about 11:30, and I had just lain down. My phone rang. It was a soldier asking to borrow a [Logistics Civil Augmentation Program] forklift to get a Humvee out of a dump truck,” she said. “I got dressed and went down only to find a Humvee jammed into the back of an Afghan dump truck!” The Humvee had broken down, and the soldiers collected money to pay an Afghan dump truck driver to haul it back to camp. “[The soldiers] finally got it unloaded onto the recovery vehicle about 1:30 the next morning,” Blackerby concluded.

The DCMA employee describes her deployment experiences as “different, because each and every camp and personality is different.” But she sums up her time as an EE employee with a profound affirmation: “Outside the birth of my children and grandchildren, my deployments have been the most rewarding experiences of my life, and I would definitely do it all over again.”

In addition to her own experience, Blackerby encourages DCMA civilians contemplating volunteerism in the future. “Go for it. If it’s for you, you’ll enjoy and return. If not, you’ll do your six months and go home. I know of several people who have come here for a six-month tour and have either extended or applied for an EE position.”

Blackerby expressed deep gratitude for all of the service members who put their lives in jeopardy on a daily basis, as well as families of service members for their daily sacrifices. “I’d also like to thank my husband for all the love, patience and support he has given me through all of my deployments. I look forward to returning home in April and hopefully spending the holidays at home this year.”