



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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**Release Number:** 53-20  
**Date:** June 24, 2020  
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## 153 years and counting

On July 1, military commissaries observe anniversary as the oldest U.S. military resale program. For commissary patrons, the benefit helps them improve their quality of life by helping them save on groceries

*By Tamara Eastman,  
DeCA historian*

**Note:** To read this release online, go to the [DeCA website](http://DeCA website).

**FORT LEE, Va.** – As far as Army Command Sgt. Maj. Tomeka N. O’Neal is concerned, the commissary benefit has been as much a part of her military experience as her uniform.

“I’ve always been an advocate for the commissary,”

said O’Neal, the Defense Commissary Agency’s senior enlisted advisor to the agency director.

“Throughout my career I’ve told anyone who would listen that the savings in the commissary are real, and they are losing out if they don’t take advantage of this benefit.”



**Soldiers and family members enter the Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Commissary. July 1 marks the 153<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of military commissaries. (DeCA photo: Kevin Robinson)**

On July 1, O’Neal and the rest of DeCA will celebrate the 153<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the commissary benefit, making it the oldest U.S. military resale program.

Over the past 153 years the commissary benefit has evolved considerably. The modern day commissary benefit dates back to July 1, 1867, when enlisted men began receiving the same shopping privileges at the subsistence stores that had been available to officers since 1825. In 1867 most commissary sales stores were set up in abandoned warehouses. Over time these subsistence stores became sales commissaries and sold goods at cost in order to provide soldiers with food at reasonable prices.

In 1899 the first overseas commissary opened in Cuba. Another store opened in China in 1900 and in Panama in 1904. By World War I, the U.S. was operating commissary stores in France. By the time World War II ended, the U.S. was operating commissaries worldwide and have existed on every continent except Antarctica in more than a thousand locations. Today, DeCA continues to serve the military and its families at nearly 240 stores in 13 countries.

Each military branch originally ran their own commissaries until 1990, when Congress and the Department of Defense decided to consolidate the individual service commissary systems under one agency – the Defense Commissary Agency, which officially formed on Oct. 1, 1991.

Today, commissaries offer high-quality commissary store brands that provide low-cost alternative products for customers and the “Your Everyday Savings! (YES!)” program, which helps stateside customers get extra savings on the hundreds of popular items they tend to buy most. Customers can also go online and register their Commissary Rewards Cards for access to digital coupons to help them save even more on their grocery bill.

“Your local commissary is still the No. 1 choice for all sorts of quality meat, fresh corn on the cob, watermelon, and ice cream and more,” O’Neal said. “Your commissary helps you improve your quality of life by helping you save thousands of dollars annually on your grocery bill.

“We also want all our customers to know that during these unprecedented times the commissary wants them to stay safe and to please follow all preventive safety measures for any holiday activities.”

**-DeCA-**

**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. Commissaries provide a military benefit, saving authorized patrons thousands of dollars annually on their purchases compared to similar products at commercial retailers. The discounted prices include a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. 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.*

## **Stay Connected to Your Commissary Benefit**

COMMISSARIES.COM: Visit [www.commissaries.com](http://www.commissaries.com) to learn more about the Defense Commissary Agency: check out the latest news, find a store near you, see what's on sale, create a shopping list, learn of food and product recalls, scan employment opportunities, read frequently asked questions, submit a customer comment form online through DeCA's Your Action Line and more.

COMMISSARY CONNECTION E-NEWSLETTER: Stay connected with the latest news about your most valued benefit, Hot Links to additional savings, shopping sprees, contests, commissary promotions, events and more, go to [www.commissaries.com/subscribe.cfm](http://www.commissaries.com/subscribe.cfm) and subscribe to the Commissary Connection newsletter.

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