



# ***News Release***

**U.S. ARMY SUSTAINMENT COMMAND**

***Oct. 2, 2009***

## **CACIO workshop features best practices**

**By Sgt. 1st Class Sean Riley  
ASC Public Affairs Office**

*ROCK ISLAND, Ill.* – Seeking better performance, the U.S. Army Sustainment Command hosted a Continuous Improvement and Quality Workshop Aug. 18 – 20 at Jumer’s Event Center in Rock Island, Ill.

The workshop is an annual event that facilitates sharing and learning on continuous improvement and quality by providing an effective forum for professional collaboration across the ASC. The workshop provides opportunities for professionals to share and help each other with best practices and lessons learned, officials said.

According to the Command Assessment and Continuous Improvement Office (CACIO) of the ASC, headquartered on Rock Island Arsenal, Ill., key topics discussed during the workshop focused on improvement and quality in joint military programs, the Army Left-Behind Equipment Program, and service contracts. Also discussed during the three-day workshop were quality assurance and control programs, improvement and quality in contingency operations, best practices and lessons learned.

Key speakers included senior leaders and lead subject matter experts from Defense agencies, the Army, Marines, and industry.

Key issues such as retrograde process improvements and Army Prepositioned Stocks were the most relevant, given the U.S. Army’s current position in Iraq. For the thousands of pieces of equipment in theater, it is the U.S. Army Sustainment Command’s mission to move, or

retrograde, the equipment, prepare it for use in new theaters, and position it strategically around the globe.

“In 2007, when General Radin took over, he gave the Mobility Team a mission. He was like ‘Hey, I want to know if we can track all the class VII retrograde that’s leaving the theater,’” said Sgt. 1st Class Cedric Stokes, assigned to the ASC’s Mobility Team. The team has responsibility for managing and tracking all retrograde equipment from theater to its destination. “Of course, at the time, there wasn’t an established method or process for tracking. So, we had to come up with a solution to provide him with all the information.”

That solution is now the standard across the Army Materiel Command and has been adopted Army-wide.

“The main problems are property accountability by the people who have (the equipment) and visibility of the transports, so we can tell the command this is where that equipment’s located,” Stokes said.

The CACIO team addressed those issues by employing Lean Six Sigma improvement strategies. Lean Six Sigma is an improvement method that utilizes collected data to identify and eliminate problems in a process. It is an improvement engine that establishes a new set of procedures and clarifies or redefines organizational roles while working to continuously generate results.

“The trick is, can we hold those improvements and (ensure) that the controls are working, so that when we do this retrograde of the equipment from Iraq, that it will be responsive and effective to the big surge,” said Jerry De La Cruz, the former director of ASC’s CACIO, now heading the G8, Resource Management. “The responsible redeployment task force will be able to make this happen because we are checking and monitoring the retrograde process against the standards, to include the controls that measure the process. That is what the Distribution Management Center and Sergeant Stokes are responsible for: to ensure that our process is behaving the right way.”

A potential challenge facing Stokes and the Mobility Team is communication among the many agencies involved. The keys to success, Stokes said, are cross-talk and establishing retrograde priorities.

“For example, the Multi-National Corps-Iraq may cut the fragmentary order to have the equipment turned in, but they may not assist with the

movement of the equipment,” he said. “So, the units may be slowed down when it comes to actually being relieved of that equipment because it’s not their priority.”

Stokes and his colleagues in the DMC believe the processes in effect will make for a smooth retrograde.

Sharing the responsibility for retrograde and issuing new or refurbished equipment are the mechanics and service providers who are tasked with ensuring the equipment is efficiently processed while maintaining precise quality standards. Kuwait, with service carried out under the Global Maintenance and Supply Service program, is the first of many stops equipment will make on its way in and out of the battlespace.

To ensure a smooth and timely transition of the equipment, quality assurance and control practices in Kuwait were streamlined the same way as CACIO streamlined the retrograde process. What once took several weeks, now takes only a few days.

“They have to keep talking to each other, keep measuring the data, and put a standard operating procedure in place,” said Tom Ferguson, a Lean Six Sigma Division master black belt in the CACIO. “Our first-time yield (meaning, a piece of equipment that makes it from start to finish without being kicked back for maintenance or safety issues) went from 62 percent to 80 percent to 90 and to 96 percent. Over the last year, it’s been at 99 percent.”

Seeing such a marked improvement in the Kuwait maintenance activities process has, and will, help the retrograde process considerably, said Ferguson.

Craig Verbeke, a quality assurance specialist in CACIO, said he believed the workshop was a success.

“We had 32 speakers from industry and government who talked about International Organization for Standardization compliance, corrective actions, continuous improvements, QA and QC responsibilities, e-board information, quality in the (Directorates of Maintenance), best practices, replication and much more. There was great audience participation, leading to better understanding of the challenges and opportunities we face in the future,” he said.

CACIO officials said planning has begun for the next Continuous Improvement and Quality Workshop scheduled for sometime in August of 2010.

**-30-**

**ASC PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**  
**PHONE: (309) 782-5421; FAX: (309) 782-5011**  
**E-MAIL: [rock-amsas-pa@conus.army.mil](mailto:rock-amsas-pa@conus.army.mil)**