
Military Provides Rep A Change In Plans

Larry Muncie waits for this year's elections and other world events to unfold to tell him what his future will be. But for the present, this former rep finds himself in the position of Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army as he prepares troops for their deployment to anywhere in the world where American troops are needed.



Lieutenant Colonel Larry Muncie (center) confers with Colonel Randy Smith (left) and MSG Dave Portish (right) in preparation for the deployment of the 76th brigade to Afghanistan.

Up until just a couple of years ago, Muncie, a CPMR, headed Muncie & Assocs., Greencastle, Indiana. His single-man agency represented kitchen/bath cabinetry, commercial case-work, sinks, faucets and appliances. That all changed quickly following the events of September 11, 2001.

Muncie, who joined the National Guard in 1969, recalls hearing the news bulletin on TV that day and watching as a second terrorist's plane struck the World Trade Center. He thought, "We're under attack." He immediately got in touch with Camp Atterbury in Edinburg, Indiana, where he serves as deputy commander. Life has hardly been the same since. Among the changes he's encountered since then are that he is no longer a rep — he's full-time in the military. In addition, instead of heading a one-man agency, he now has more than 600 people he works with as well as a camp troop population that swells to 8,000 plus calling him "Sir."

According to Muncie, "I joined the National Guard 35 years ago. At that time I was a college student who wanted to continue his education. Membership in the National Guard provided me with the opportunity to do that while

fulfilling the obligation to my country. My initial obligation was completed in six years. I decided to stay in for 20 years in order to get vested in the military retirement plan." By staying in even longer, additional retirement points have accumulated.

As he views the career-altering events that he's faced even as he neared a planned retirement from his rep business, Muncie explains, "When I originally enlisted, I vowed that I would support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Since 1969, I had never been called up for any lengthy period of time, but during that same time period I have been receiving a paycheck from the U.S. government. Maybe it's my background as a rep that lets me see it this way, but I look at it as if I've been receiving a retainer for more than 35 years. This is a mission that I trained for over the course of my military career. Now it's time to 'pay the piper,' and I have no regrets."

Agency Closed

Part and parcel with "paying the piper," according to Muncie, is the fact that he had to close his agency. "I was getting close to my



Lt. Col. Larry Muncie

planned retirement and had been putting money away for that event. Being called up certainly changed things. I can no longer fund retirement like I was, but at the same time I no longer have the expenses (e.g., medical coverage) I had before."

At the beginning of his call-up, Muncie tried to juggle his rep business with the demands of military life. "The reaction I got from my principals was mixed. There was a four-month period at the beginning when I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I was wearing the uniform and doing the job while working the phones on my off hours to continue the rep business. Some principals immediately cancelled their contracts because they felt they needed permanent representation in the territory. Believe me, I have no hard feelings. They were simply trying to run their business. Some others hung with me for a

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Muncie stands in front of the veteran's memorial Camp Atterbury, where he is currently stationed.



Muncie conducts a mobilization and orientation briefing for units deploying for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

year or more before they ran up the white flag. I really appreciate their support. Eventually, though, I had to close the agency. When my military duty is over, I'd like to re-establish my agency."

Now fully immersed in the military, Muncie notes that over the course of his military career he has filled a number of positions. In 2000, he was assigned as the deputy commander for Camp Atterbury Maneuver Training Center. In that capacity he exercises executive leadership and provides policy and programmatic oversight to the directorates and special staff.

For some time, Muncie's mission had been to prepare troops for deployment. Until 2002, he led training exercises to ensure the mission was possible, but thinking he would probably never have to lead a deployment. After all, he was less than three years from his planned military retirement. But in February 2003, Camp Atterbury was "stood up" and called to active duty as the only National Guard Mobilization Station to be responsible for deploying troops. Since that time, as chairman of the Validation Committee, he has signed off on almost 12,000 troops being deployed in the war on terrorism, and he predicts that number will exceed 20,000 by year's end.

He explains, "Most people think all our troops are going to Iraq, but Camp Atterbury has also deployed troops to Bosnia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sinai, Cuba, Europe, Africa and several other spots around the world." He adds that most people think the National Guard is restricted by state boundaries, but Camp Atterbury has deployed soldiers, both National Guard and Army Reserve, from more than 20 states.

Feeling the Weight of the Job

Muncie especially feels the weight of his responsibility when he briefs troops prior to the flights that will take them to a place of danger. He knows there is a good chance some will return injured or not return at all. He says it seems the soldiers are so young. "Sometimes it feels like sending my own son or daughter off to war." But knowing that they are well-trained and equipped provides him comfort.

"Our mission at Atterbury is to make sure things are in order for them before they go," Muncie says. "That includes everything from legal paperwork; making sure their family care plans are in place; providing medical maintenance like dental work, updated eyeglass prescriptions; to proper equipment like chemical protective gear, updated weapon systems, desert uniforms and myriad other items the soldiers will need while deployed. We are also responsible for arranging for airplanes to fly the soldiers to their combat theatre and ships to get their equipment to them. That is no small task."

As hard as his job might be some days, he says you can't beat the feeling of pride when he greets returning troops at the airport. He is the first one on the airplane to thank these men and women for their service and welcome them home. "That's a great feeling," Muncie says.

In addition to that "great feeling," Muncie adds that a side benefit of his full-time status in the military is that they've been able to show that the systems and processes they've worked on for years actually work. "Personally, at the beginning of my deployment, I

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endured a number of sleepless nights where I asked myself, 'Have I done all that I can for that soldier to make sure everything is in place?' I no longer have those concerns. We're proud of the product we put out there when it comes to training soldiers and ensuring that their personal affairs are in order. We do our jobs to the Army standard or better; I'm very confident of that."

In doing that job, Muncie is able to look back at his previous career as a rep and CPMR, and he's convinced that many of the tasks and talents — including flexibility, planning and strategizing — he exhibited in sales now come into play in the military.

Lessons Learned as a Rep

"As I consider the variety of accounts I served while covering the tri-state area in which I worked as a rep, I had to be flexible in anticipating and meeting their needs, just as in meeting the needs of a diverse group of soldiers from so many different states. We've got to always be ready to offer the best in terms of customer service to those soldiers. That's how we view them — as customers — since they are the recipients of what we have to offer. I've trained my entire staff to be 'customer friendly' and to be

able to meet the needs of those customers."

Added to that ability of being flexible are the talents of planning and strategizing. "That's where the CPMR training has been so valuable. One of the more important things we learned during the three years of CPMR is to include variables into your planning process. At the same time, it becomes second nature for you to include those plans in your strategies. Bottom line, that's just what we do in the military. The two — CPMR and the military — complement each other very well. The three-year MRERF program was ideal training for me in both my careers."

Muncie doesn't know how much longer his commitment to the military will be ("That's a decision made by people a few pay grades above me."), but he does know that he's been extended to at least February 2005. "I'll serve for as long as my country needs me, and I'm proud to do so." In the meantime, he has no regrets concerning where he is today. In fact, judging by his words, he's exactly where he ought to be. As he says, "I take a great deal of pride in what I've done to prepare my soldiers to go overseas and even more pride when they return home safely. Given a choice to do things over, I wouldn't change a thing." □

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