

A

AFES TACTICAL

# Assortment, Education DEFINE SUCCESS



Atherton



Paul Atherton, senior buyer of tactical and survival gear in the AAFES's Sales Directorate (SD), reported that the exchange service's fiscal 2008 tactical sales were \$98.1 million, a 10.7-percent increase over fiscal 2007's sales of \$88.6 million. Fort Lee, Va.

Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) outlets offer a wealth of tactical equipment to properly outfit any soldier, including everything from goggles and flashlights to hydration packs and other military-specification and approved gear, found in its worldwide network of Military Clothing Sales Stores (MCSS).

Although momentum decelerated slightly in 2008, this area continues to be a significant growth area for the exchange service during the past several years.

In addition, MCSS locations on base and in theater will continue to be in the retail spotlight as downrange efforts shift focus from Iraq to Afghanistan.

## SALES

Paul Atherton, senior buyer of tactical and survival gear in the exchange service's Sales Directorate (SD), said AAFES's 193-facility worldwide MCSS network consists of 132 stand-alone sites; 54 MCSS facilities that are collocated in another store, such as a main store, a troop store, a furniture store, or some other venue; and seven MCSS sites that are located downrange in the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) theaters.

He reported that fiscal 2008 tactical sales were \$98.1 million, representing a 10.7-percent increase over fiscal 2007's sales of \$88.6 million. Downrange sales contributed 38 percent of the overall

sales for last year, or \$37.2 million.

Fiscal 2009 sales through May, Atherton reported, were about 3-percent behind the previous year's record pace. Downrange sales have thus far contributed 37 percent of fiscal 2009's overall sales.

"We have seen a slight decrease in the trend of sales downrange, while CONUS sales have seen a slight increase in their trend from 47 percent of the total sales in 2008 to 49.5 percent of the total sales in 2009," Atherton said. "OCONUS sales have seen a corresponding decline in their sales trend from 53 percent of the total sales in fiscal 2008 to 51.5 percent of the total sales in fiscal 2009."



## TOP MCSS STORES

The Fort Hood, Texas, Army MCSS was AAFES's top sales-producing CONUS store during fiscal 2008 with \$12.15 million in activity, followed by Fort Bragg, N.C., Army MCSS (\$10.8 million); Fort Lewis, Wash., Army MCSS (\$7.8 million); Fort Lee, Va., Army MCSS (\$6.45 million); and Fort Bliss, Texas, Army MCSS (\$6.42 million).

The top five OCONUS MCSS locations based on fiscal 2008 sales activity were Camp Liberty, Iraq (\$5.96 million);

Schofield Barracks, Hawaii (\$4.85 million); Camp Buehring, Kuwait (\$4.47 million); Bagram AB, Afghanistan, Air Force MCSS (\$4.17 million); and Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Air Force MCSS (\$3.78 million).

## TOP SELLERS

Among the top-selling items in AAFES's tactical assortment in their respective categories during fiscal 2008 included ICE-2X eyewear (\$1.29 million, 32,326 units sold); CamelBak ThermoBak 3L Hydration Pack (\$3.7

—Continued



Planograms help maintain consistency within the tactical assortment, and are updated regularly to reflect the needs of servicemembers. Fort Lee, Va.

A

## AFES TACTICAL

"Uniforms, insignia and tactical categories are destination categories for our MCSS venues," Atherton explained. Fort Lee, Va.



teries in a clamshell case (\$1.11 million, 55,775 units sold); large APL glove, combat green (\$203,979, 3,254 units sold); and Wiley X Goggle (SG-1) (\$1.14 million, 16,257 units sold).

Other top sellers included ICE-2X NAR eyewear (\$926,262, 23,256 units); CamelBak Mule AUC (\$1.12 million, 12,723 units) and CamelBak BFM AUC (\$1.07 million, 6,069 units); G2 Black Case (\$697,415, 22,720 units); medium APL glove, combat green (\$185,768, 2,961 units); and the Wiley X Goggle (XL-1) (\$481,962, 8,736 units).

#### MCSS ATTRIBUTES

AAFES MCSS stores are the authorized source for issue uniforms and Atherton said "one of a couple" Military Service Certified sources for optional uniforms and accessories. "Uniforms, insignia and tactical categories are destination categories for our MCSS venues," Atherton explained. "AAFES ensures that we work with the services and comply with their uniform requirements so that we provide uniforms that meet or exceed the services' requirements for optional uniforms.

"This also translates to our tactical category, where we purchase pouches, hydration packs, combat gloves, Authorized Protective Eyewear List (APEL) eyewear, and lights that have been tested to ensure that they meet the Army requirements in color, shade, pattern, fire resistance, protective qualities, duration and illumination."

In addition, AAFES has cross-service agreements at many of its locations worldwide so that the exchange service can support the host/tenants at each location with the items they need in order to perform their duties.

"Many of these items are Defense Supply Center Philadelphia (DSCP) issue items, the same ones that are issued to them when servicemembers enter the service or are deployed," Atherton said. "If there are special certifications, we ensure that those items meet the specific requirements set out by those services."

#### EDUCATION

Although requirements are constantly changing, the role of the local MCSS in educating servicemembers about the items

most important facets of these venues' services to their patrons. Nowhere is this more evident than in the eyewear area, where the difference between APEL and ballistic items — and the adherence to eyewear requirements set forth by the services — gives MCSS stores an edge versus outside-the-gate entities.

"There is a distinct difference between APEL and ballistic," Atherton said. "APEL eyewear is ballistic, but ballistic eyewear is not necessarily APEL. APEL also covers the requirements for lenses to completely cover the eyes from front and side impacts along with the nose piece coverage to keep shrapnel from entering the eyes from that part of the eyewear. An APEL lens must also be either clear or smoke grey, while ballistic lenses are sometimes green and yellow along with the approved APEL colors. Only APEL eyewear will provide the proper protection needed by Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines on patrol outside the wire."

Atherton said Air Force Protective Eyewear List (AFPEL) is designed to meet the impact requirements created by the Air Force and are designed to fit under the new flight helmets without scratching the helmet eye shields when lowered into place. "The lens also are colored so that they do not conflict with the instrument panel displays and allow the pilots to clearly see their displays," he added.

#### PLANOGRAMS

Atherton said that AAFES MCSS managers are responsible for choosing the planograms and assortments of the categories they carry, and managers are also responsible for controlling inventory levels.

"We have very few similarly designed stores," Atherton said. "Most of our stores require our local managers to determine what planograms they can carry. We have created smaller planograms to allow the stores to tailor their assortments to meet their space allowances. This is an increasing requirement as stores are being co-located into our main stores or co-positioned in our main store mall areas."

However, this part of the local managers' duties is about to change. "Once

Retek becomes the replenishment program for the MCSS sites, this responsibility will shift from the stores to the 'Headquarters Impact Teams,' consisting of the buyer, planner, allocator and replenisher," Atherton explained.

Although this task will be moved to headquarters, Atherton said the knowledge provided by the stores will continue to be invaluable. "We will continue to value the input we receive from our store managers."

#### TFE PLANOGRAM

In deployed areas, the new tactical planogram for tactical field exchanges (TFE) has updated the availability of tactical items to the needs of servicemembers.

Atherton said the new planogram, which debuted in May 2008, has an objective of "concentrating store space and inventory into the items that the majority of our soldiers are buying."

The planogram comes in many sizes to fit the situation, ranging from 8 feet for smaller stores to 24 feet for larger venues. Atherton said assortments were created based upon the predominant service at a given location, resulting in Army, Marine Corps or Air-Force-specific planograms.

Atherton reported that \$14 million in sales were recorded during the planogram's first year compared to total tactical sales of \$37.2 million, which also included various items — hydration packs, knives, lights, eyewear, clothing, footwear, gloves and packs — that were not carried on the planogram.

"Continued adjustments are being made to the TFE planogram to keep evolving with the needs of the Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, and Sailors," Atherton said.

#### NEW PRODUCTS

Both stateside and deployed planograms are continually shaped to meet the needs of servicemembers, and new products are inserted as these products are designed and produced.

One of the products that may eventually find its way onto AAFES's tactical planograms is the CamelBak ArmorBak hydration packs. "These hydration systems will attach directly to the interceptor body armor (IBA) or to the MOLLE vests, taking away the added shoulder

straps that servicemembers have to contend with on the current systems," Atherton said. "This will integrate the hydration system right into the full ensemble of the servicemember."

AAFES has also been working on bringing in a line of airmen battle uniforms (ABU) -patterned hydration packs for Air Force personnel. "This will allow them to carry a patterned hydration system that blends in with their uniform," Atherton said. "The ABU hydration systems will meet all color, shade, pattern and near infrared (nIR) requirements the Air Force has set."

Atherton said that lighting is another area that has seen some innovations in the last year due to requests being made by individual soldiers and the Army. Innovations include lights made out of lightweight, high-impact composite materials as opposed to the traditional aluminum cases.

"Other enhancements allow variable light intensity from the same light, allowing the servicemember to carry a single light that can be used for protection purposes or, at a lower light level, to read maps and paperwork," Atherton said. "Some of these lights even have built-in colored LEDs allowing further applications of that same light," he said.

#### MEETING NEW REQUIREMENTS

Tactical requirements, and the planograms that reflect these requirements, will continue to adapt to the needs of servicemembers. Atherton said that the change in focus from one world hotspot to another will also have an impact on the MCSS stock assortment.

"Tactical gear has been a growing category for the last five years and will continue to grow, but changes are going to have to be made to meet the new requirements that our Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines are going to face as they move from Iraq to Afghanistan," Atherton said. "Store managers will need to closely monitor their assortments and inventories and work to ensure that they are in compliance with the planograms to make sure that they are carrying the best sellers in the assortments. This will allow them to meet the requirements of the majority of our servicemembers and maximize their stores' limited sales floor space."

—E&C News

### AAFES FISCAL 2008 TOP SALES-GENERATING MCSS CONUS STORES

Stores	Sales
1) Fort Hood, Texas, Army MCSS	\$12.15 million
2) Fort Bragg, N.C., Army MCSS	\$10.8 million
3) Fort Lewis, Wash., Army MCSS	\$7.8 million
4) Fort Lee, Va., Army MCSS	\$6.45 million
5) Fort Bliss, Texas, Army MCSS	\$6.42 million
6) Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Army MCSS	\$5.45 million
7) Lackland AFB, Texas, Air Force MCSS	\$5.42 million
8) Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., Army MCSS	\$4.87 million
9) Fort Jackson, S.C., Army MCSS	\$4.69 million
10) Fort Benning, Ga., Army MCSS	\$4.36 million

**Note:** The top five OCONUS MCSS Stores based on fiscal 2008 sales activity were Camp Liberty, Iraq (\$5.96 million); Schofield Barracks, Hawaii (\$4.85 million); Camp Buehring, Kuwait (\$4.47 million); Bagram AB, Afghanistan, Air Force MCSS (\$4.17 million); and Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Air Force MCSS (\$3.78 million).

Source: AAFES