

## A Long Road to the CMA

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I was introduced to the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) certification in 1999 when I was a Captain and student at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif. The civilian finance and accounting professors encouraged students pursuing graduate degrees in finance to become members of IMA® (Institute of Management Accountants) and sit for the CMA exam.

After graduating and receiving a master's degree, I applied to sit for the first two parts of the CMA exam in early 2000. I passed both parts in 2000 and early 2001 while working at the Pentagon. Further exam preparations were put on hold, however, after the events of 9/11.

On September 11, 2001, I was working in an office at the Pentagon when a hijacked airliner crashed into the building. I was relocated to another building after my office was damaged by smoke and water. Thus began many long days and nights preparing cost estimates and budgets associated with the Marine Corps' response to the events. Even after I moved back to the Pentagon, the immediate work priorities outweighed the need to complete the CMA exam.

Over the next four years, I was assigned to Okinawa Japan, deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, participated in tsunami relief operations in Indonesia, and engaged in mudslide relief operations in the Philippines. During this time, I never lost my desire to complete my CMA. I was reassigned to the Pentagon in

2006, and I immediately contacted IMA about finishing my CMA certification.

IMA informed me that I had one year of eligibility. I immediately began studying, and I received my CMA designation in 2007. It had been a long road since I had taken the first exam in 2000, and I truly felt I accomplished something very important—something with a mark of excellence in the private sector and something that would set me apart from my peers in the public sector.

Many service members ask me about the benefits of the CMA. I tell them there are many benefits, but primary among those are gaining a broader understanding of management accounting, identifying best practices, being part of a larger network of accounting professionals, and continuing the process of lifelong learning. These tangible benefits result in career advancement in both the public and private sectors.

As a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marine Corps, I don't always know where my next assignment will be or the operating environment I'll be working in. I must be prepared for all contingencies. But I do know the CMA provides the tools to be a better problem solver for senior management—whether they're in the C-suite or wear stars on their collars.

I am truly grateful to the professors who encouraged me to become a CMA and to IMA for the opportunities that the CMA provides me in my career today.

Semper Fidelis! **SF**