



All Things Financial Management

Episode 4: Kathryn VanScoy, A Day in the Life: Pursuing the Army Audit Opinion

INTRO: Welcome to “All Things Financial Management,” an ASMC podcast sponsored by Guidehouse, where we discuss all things under the auspices of the Comptrollers’ Office and address top-of-mind issues in the financial management community.

TOM: Good Morning. My name is TOM. I'm a Partner with Guidehouse, where I work with clients across the DoD to transform and optimize their finance functions. I will be your host for today’s Podcast. For those of you who may be new to this podcast series, let me take just a moment to provide some background on the American Society of Military Comptrollers. The American Society of Military Comptrollers, or ASMC, is the non-profit educational and professional organization for persons, both military and civilian, involved in the overall field of military comptrollership. ASMC promotes the education and training of its members and supports the development and advancement of the profession of military comptrollership. The society provides professional programs to keep members abreast of current issues and encourages the exchange of information, techniques, and approaches.

Today we have with us Ms. Kathryn VanScoy.

So happy to have you, Kathryn. As mentioned in your bio, that you're serving as the Chief of Audit Readiness for the Army Materiel Command at Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama.

KATHRYN VANSKOY: Yes. Thank you, Tom. I hope that after today's podcast, or during the podcast, that both folks will be able to relate to some of my past experiences and where they're at with their career track and tie it into their day-to-day functions and how it relates to audit readiness as well.

TOM: Having said that, Ms. VanScoy, you have a really neat story. Starting with enlisting in the Army and then, when you left the Army you were at GS-1, a summer intern. And the rest of your career until now you're a GS-15 at your current role, as we mentioned, serving as a chief of audit readiness. Would you feel comfortable sharing a little bit of your history, or story, with our listeners?

KATHRYN VANSKOY: Sure. So, as you've mentioned when I got out of high school, I was trying to figure out, like most folks the next step in your life’s plan lifespan. So, I joined the Army. And I was an accounting specialist for about seven and a half years.

My first duty station was at the Military District of Washington, and I worked at an office building at Buzzard Point, which is really close to Fort McNair as a first duty station it was very exciting from an on-the-job training perspective. The personnel, the civilians that we worked with, were very helpful in helping us understand our role that we played in processing different accounting transactions and how what we did tied to the overall mission of the MDW activities.



I was there for about two years before we moved to Germany. And, when I went to Germany, I worked in the disbursing office. Which, at the time was pre-EFT processes. So, one of our major activities was cashing payday checks so that the soldiers and civilians, could go and pay their rent to their landlords.

So, we did a lot of Deutschmark check cashing so that we could have the money out there for local purchases, as well as processing the Treasury checks to U.S. vendors. And processing Deutschmark checks for any of the German vendors that were owed payment for U.S. bills on the Kaserne.

We were there for about two years and then we went to Fort Hood, which was a different job experience sect for me. I was assigned to finance separations. And so, I was on the front counter for military pay and had to quickly learn on the fly all of the different codes and transactions that were required to properly pay a soldier in the army.

In 1996, I made the decision to get out of the service. My husband was still active duty, and with three children it was a little challenging balancing different requirements with a dual military couple. So, I made the decision to get out and I started attending college classes and then, I also was a GS-1 summer hire in the budget office at III Corps. So, I supported the budget analysts in the G3 and helped them find supporting documentation to properly support the obligations. This is in support of the JRP program. Once they had the funding obligated, I would find the supporting documentation that would support the disbursement and if there was any residual funding left and they could make that deobligation and return that available fund back for other bill payers.

After I finished that, I was hired on as a budget assistant in the G3 training shop and finished my bachelor's in business administration while we were at Fort Hood.

When my husband was PCS'd to West Point, New York I made the decision to leave federal service and I was a business analyst at a themed entertainment company, which, in itself, was just vastly different from the Army community that I had known. But I learned a lot because we implemented Oracle Financial Systems in this role. So, it was interesting to go into a more, robust ERP system, that was my first exposure into an ERP and so, understanding how the different modules related to each other was a very welcome skillset to add to my tool bag.

After I spent two years there, we PCS'd to, back to Germany and I joined DoDEA, where I was a staff accountant for the Kaiserslautern school district. And one of the things that fell under my purview was going out to the different school within the K-Town schools district and performing many audits, if you will, on the registration packets, the purchase card transactions, and making sure that children who were enrolled in the school that were not sponsored by DOD, that they paid tuition and that the tuition was properly collected and turned into Treasury.

After we finished our time in Germany there, we moved to Redstone Arsenal, where I joined AMCOM, which is one of our current subordinate commands, as a financial management analyst. And that was my first exposure into the Army Working Capital Fund (AWCF). This experience also was pre-LMP, so I learned about progress payments and worked the AWCF JRP program in a legacy system known as CCSS.

Then in 2008, I joined the AMC family and have been here for 11 years working in different offices; under policy, accounting team lead, and then, eventually we set up the AMC audit readiness cell. And I started with the general fund, audit readiness for SBR pieces and eventually, became the chief of the cell currently. Where we oversee AMC's portion of the two general fund audits for the SOC 1 for OM&S, and



then the general fund audit. And then, we have a major role in the AWCF audit, as well. So, that's my history in a nutshell.

TOM: Ms. VanScoy, what an array of experiences. You know you've had experiences, in uniform, you've had experiences as a federal, a civilian, you've had experiences serving overseas, and at different bases within the United States.

Now, in all these different experiences that you've had, what are some of the different cultures that you've experienced? And, and how have those different cultures, impacted the way you operate today in your current role?

KATHRYN VANSKOY: So, one of the most important things is each of the different agencies and entities that I've been fortunate enough to work for, the environments were very friendly and welcoming, and there was a lot of collaboration and teamwork.

Many years ago, when I first started in the FM community, this was pre-DFAS. In the office we would I'll just use TDY as an example, we had, many, many, aged TDY vouchers that needed to be processed. So, understanding what the entitlements were, the receipts that were required to support the entitlements on these TDY vouchers, making the multiple copies of the receipt to make sure that every piece, every packet that was put together was complete and understanding what receipt tied back to what entitlement was, kind of, like the first example of tying the pieces together to make sure we had the supportable disbursement.

Looking back on it now, seeing how far we have come with the electronic, environment we are currently in, I remember going into different offices and there would be shoe boxes of invoices and things like that. And they weren't a shoe box, but they were in that shape.

So, just seeing how we have grown from the heavily, paper intensified processes, to the electronic age is amazing. We had typewriters that fed in the Treasury checks that had to be manually typed out. Which were far and few between but, they had these old printers where we could feed in the Treasury checks and they would upload a file, and the checks would process out. We would have to match that Treasury check with the correct corresponding payment package that went out and was mailed out to the recipient of the check. Whereas now, everything is either electronically or centrally mailed out.

Just seeing the different technological changes has been good. But, like I said, each place that I've worked at, everybody has helped, make sure if you didn't have an understanding, or you had questions about a process, they would take the time to mentor you and help you along so that that would make you a better financial management specialist, and a more well-rounded employee to have that overarching picture.

So, it's been great, and FM community has always been welcoming and supportive.

TOM: Ms. VanScoy, I shared on an earlier podcast, something that I read, which I think you just touched on again, which was that really effective mentoring programs make a huge deal in a person's career fulfillment and, and their ability to stay long term with an organization, and to flourish within that organization.

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It sounds like, whether you were active duty or a federal civilian, or whether you were overseas, or in the State side that you have always been able to have, that deep mentoring connections to others, which has helped you flourish in your career.

With these experiences that you've had how have they helped prepare you for your current role as the Chief of Audit Readiness at the Army Materiel Command?

KATHRYN VANSCOY: So, part of it is, with the variety of different offices and skill sets that I have worked, it helped put some of the puzzle pieces together. When you don't have all of the pieces, there is nothing wrong with saying that you need help and reaching out to get that help.

Whether it's within the financial management community, or any other community, everybody needs to work together to make the mission successful and to accomplish your goals. And it takes people from all levels.

So, understanding, especially in an organization, is that is, as huge as the Army, and the multi-levels and facets that fall under army and DoD as a whole there's no way that you're going to be able to put your arms around each of the processes. So, making those connections and knowing who to reach out to if you need help.

And then, when you're contacted to help, to make sure that you're helping the community as well and providing them with either advice, or POC, or information that that individual needs to be successful.

TOM: I like your reference to puzzle pieces, Ms. VanScoy. And as I step back and look at your situation as the Chief of Audit Readiness at a Major Command, it seems like there's so many moving pieces where you're working with supply support activities, you're working with major subordinate commands, you're working with army headquarters, with financial management and comptroller. You're working with service providers, whether it's DLA, or DFAS, or others.

It seems to me that you're a major piece of the audit readiness puzzle for the Army. And, thinking about that, what does a normal day look like for you, in your audit readiness world, where you've got both general fund and working on capital fund activities happening at the same time?

KATHRYN VANSCOY: It can get a little complicated at times. Understanding how each of these business processes intertwine and cross connect. And, understanding where different, parameters lie, and being able to explain that, or have somebody come in and explain, that process is key.

Part of understanding, which direction I might have to take, is also understanding from the information requester, what do they need, to move forward or to be successful? What is their goal? So that helps us understand and communicate that either down to the field level, what needs to happen or occur? Or even across to our service providers?

Understanding where we fit in so that we can, do some left seat, right seat, kind of transitions and making sure that what we're doing to move forward doesn't negatively impact the follow-on pieces. It is a lot of balancing, to make sure that from each of the levels on up that what is required is something that is actually achievable and if it's not achievable, then we need to collectively meet and talk through how can we get to desired end state in the current environment we're in? What could be put in place?



Or if it's something bigger than our organization, where do we go for help? So that we can make sure that we're still moving in the right direction to meet the audit objectives that have been placed on us.

TOM: Earlier you mentioned that through some of your experiences and the different cultures you experienced, that collaboration was so key. It sounds like, from your normal day, collaboration is just critical to your current role. Sounds you're collaborating with Army headquarters, different major sub-commands and service providers, and that is a critical element to your success.

KATHRYN VANSCOY: Yes. And, part of it having a decoder ring on words matter. As an example, we were on a site visit with KPMG and the DoD IG, and the word that we were struggling with was inventory.

If you go to a site and the request is, "We want to conduct an inventory", that means a whole different ballgame to someone who does that on a day-to-day basis, than somebody using that as "I wanna check these five things." So, it took us some time to talk through exactly what they were wanting to see and at the end of the day, they did not want to see an inventory, which everybody was relieved at.

But, taking the time to, talk through maybe, your word choice might not be the best the first time out of the box, but to continue to chip away at that communication and make sure that everybody's on the same page, is very, very important.

TOM: Ms. VanScoy, two-part question for you here. What is the best part of your job, would be part one? And part two would be, what do you perceive as the most challenging part of your job?

KATHRYN VANSCOY: Oh, goodness. I think the best part of this job, it could be a blessing or not is that every day you are constantly, constantly learning. There are so many different facets to this organization, and then the Army as a whole, or DoD as a whole. It's never boring. There's always a new challenge that pops up and presents itself to you. You have to figure out where that fits in the priority of the day and try and get that either answered or sent to somebody who can answer it relatively quickly.

On the flip side, the most challenging thing is that there are so many things to get through and we are just trying to balance the best that we can the amount of resources that we have, that can address all of these heavy lift priorities that we have to work.

The amount of transactions that make up the population is huge. So, that's hundreds and thousands of lines of data to comb through. So, that's kind of the flip side there are so many things that have to be collected together and everybody has to be going in the same direction to make this thing work. Whether it's for the audit or even just from a simple mission perspective.

Nothing is done in a silo to where it starts and finishes within one entity. So, sometimes it just takes a minute to get everybody on the same page and working on the same timeline and having the same understanding of what needs to be done. But the days fly by.

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TOM: Yeah, I'm sure they do. And it sounds like it's rewarding because you're helping solve very complex problems. Some people may not realize that as the Audit Readiness Chief at the Army Materiel Command, you have stewardship over the general fund, but you also have stewardship over the working capital fund, which, for those listeners who may not be aware of working capital funds, that's probably the closest thing we have in the federal government to commercial activity. Where you're, generating revenue. You're not selling goods and services and collecting on those goods and services. And with your ultimate goal to be to break even, not necessarily to generate a profit. And this adds so much complexity that other organizations may not be aware of. But it sounds like you're enjoying the ability to solve those very complex problems, which is rewarding.

KATHRYN VANSCOY: Yes. It is, and sometimes it's overwhelming. Some days I just have to take a step back and remember to just chip away a little at a time so that it doesn't become something that is just in the too-hard-to-do box. We definitely don't want to do that. And things might take longer to solve than others, but it is important that we get these items resolved so that we can have the accurate data and the accurate financial information, so that when leaders are presented this information for a decision, that they have the right information.

KATHRYN VANSCOY: One of the items that we are a part of in concert with DA, G4, and ASA(FM&C), is the munition SOC 1. So, Army is the manager for the munitions and so we have to achieve a SOC 1 report, which DLA is working on theirs, DFAS has theirs, so that our customers can rely on the controls that we have in place.

So, if they cannot rely on the controls in place, then their auditors will have to come in and count, or test whatever processes that are included in that SOC report.

So, this year, for the munitions piece, we have the Marine Corps coming in to count their assets that we may hold on their behalf. In addition to having the audit for the Army managed items, we have to, accommodate and help the other services with their audit goals, as well. So, we are working with the one service right now, and we continue to work to get a SOC opinion for the munitions, so that we can have that audit testing performed one time and the other services can rely on it. And that would minimize some of the impact to our subordinate commands because they are the ones that have to go out there and, support those visits too.

TOM: Thank you, Ms. VanScoy. One last question. So, being where you are now, and knowing what you know now, what is one piece of advice that you would share with someone just starting out their career in the DoD FM workspace?

KATHRYN VANSCOY: Oh, goodness. We are very, very blessed to have subject matter experts out in the field. So, when you are starting out in your position, learn everything you can from your colleagues. And if you can get a mentor, get a mentor, because they will provide you and arm you with some different background or thought processes to help you become the best financial management analyst you possibly can be.



KATHRYN VANSCOY: And that's part of having a variety of experiences. You may leave that position, and then you never know when a question may come up in that topic area that you have to reach back in your mind and provide some assistance for that particular business process. Or even reach out to the individual who is still working in that area, to help solve a problem, or understand, what would need to be incorporated from an audit test for that business process. Or what does not make sense to incorporate into a checklist item. Because that would not necessarily be a control for financial statement reporting, it might be something more operational based. So, just from day-to-day, it goes back to having that wide variety of experiences, because audit covers every single business process. So, you just never know when you are going to need to pull back or reach into the past history that you've had as you grow into your career field.

TOM: Thank you, Ms. VanScoy. And, thank you so much for your time today. And thanks to all of you listening. We want to ensure that this podcast is relevant and timely to all our listeners. So, please feel free to reach out to us with your feedback, or suggestions, or for specific topics you like us to address. Thank you and have a good afternoon.

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