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Retirees, others called to arms to give blood at Tripler Army Medical Center

**Photo and story by Staff Sgt. Michael Westerfield
Tripler Army Medical Center Public Affairs Office**

HONOLULU--They've already served their hitch in previous wars but retired service-members have an opportunity to contribute to the war on terrorism by donating blood.

The Tripler Army Medical Center Blood Donor Program needs to collect 100 to 150 units, or pints, of blood each week to support ongoing military operations in the Pacific Theater.

The most consistent source of blood donations has been the active duty service members stationed in Hawaii. That source is drying up as deployments send Soldiers Sailors, Airmen and Marines to fight the war on terrorism.

"Even when they return, they have to wait one to three years before they can donate again," said Capt. Michael Bukovitz, TAMC Blood Donor Center, officer in charge. "Depending on where they deploy most will be exposed to various things that will make their blood unacceptable for a period of time."

To make up for the reduced number of active duty donors the Tripler Blood Donor Program is trying to include more family members, government employees and retirees in its donor base.

"Some family members, retirees and government employees give regularly but we want to reach out to those who haven't yet," said Lt Col. Karen Burmeister, M.D., TAMC transfusion services medical director. "We need to make sure there will be no interruption in the blood supply."

The TAMC Blood Donor Center coordinates blood collection and distribution operation for all services. The blood collected serves active and retired military members and their families. The Blood Bank of Hawaii is a completely separate system supporting the civilian population of Hawaii. In times of need, the military blood system can purchase blood from other mainland sources based on availability. Sometimes it takes up to a week to receive blood from those sources.

All blood collection for the military take place on military installations. TAMC blood collection activities take place daily at the TAMC blood donor center. There are regularly scheduled blood drives held at military installations across the island.

"Sometimes we have four or five blood drives in a week. Those are long days," said Spc. James Cain, TAMC Blood Donor Center lab technician. "After the blood is collected part of the team processes the blood while others process the paperwork."

A successful blood drive might collect 20 to 30 units and last all day. As potential donors are screened many have to be turned away.

"Many are surprised when we turn them away," said Bukovitz. "When they go on TDY (temporary duty) or deployment to certain areas or even when they get a tattoo there is a waiting period before they can donate again."

"The donors represent our very best,' said Cain. "They serve our country or support those who do and on top of that volunteer to give blood. Is it comfortable? No. Is it something everyone looks forward to? No. Does it make some people nervous? Yes. But these people line up to give. Even retired guys give. They might not serve actively but they still want to contribute."

"Some of our regular donors are veterans," said Raquel Duran, TAMC Blood Donor Center, platelet pheresis nurse. "Although they gave greatly in service to America they frequently volunteer to give more. Lots of veterans

give because of their loyalty, patriotism and sense of duty.”

“After 9-11 I decided to become a regular donor,” said Rear Adm. C. Bruce Smith, (Ret.). “I was giving to the Blood Bank of Hawaii until I found out the military had a separate blood program. It’s the right thing to do to support our service members in their war on terrorism. I give once every two months. I don’t think I’ve missed once.”

The blood donated to TAMC supports not only the service members but also their families and the retirees and their families.

“We work closely with donors not patients. It’s like working with the manufacturer rather than the customer,” said Cain. “The blood we collect goes here and throughout the Pacific. We never know who the blood is going to. The person you help might be the kid next door or your battle buddy.”

A fresh blood supply needs to be available at all times for routine and emergency operations as well as mass casualty situations and combat.

For more information, please contact the Blood Donor Center at 433-6148.



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Comments or suggestions to the [Public Affairs Officer](#)

Tripler Army Medical Center
1 Jarrett White Road
Honolulu, Hawaii 96859-5000
(808)433-6661