

# Soldiers can save Lives one pint At a time

By Spc. Matthew MacRoberts

Servicemembers are putting their lives on the line, often sustaining life-threatening injuries, every day in Iraq, Afghanistan and other hotspots around the globe. The donation of one unit of blood can save as many as four of their lives.

The Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP), comprised of the Army, Navy and Air Force blood programs, supplies 1.3 million servicemembers and their families with blood every year. Since the Korean War, 1.5 million units of blood have been used to treat servicemembers injured on the battlefield, according to Lyn Kukral, the program's spokeswoman.

"The importance of the ASBP cannot be overstressed," Kukral said. "Now that the United States is engaged in multiple operations around the world that endanger the lives of servicemembers daily, the need for blood is at a premium."

Military hospitals transfuse more than 54,000 units of blood a year. The ASBP must maintain 65,000 units of frozen whole blood and 5,000 units of liquid cells at all times. If volunteers do not step forward to maintain the mandatory levels of blood, it must be purchased from civilian agencies at an average cost of \$200 per unit, according to Kukral.

Technology has advanced, expanding the number of blood products that can be produced from one unit of whole blood and extending the shelf life of those products. But conversely, the numbers of eligible servicemembers has dwindled due to



Photos courtesy of the Armed Forces Blood Program

*Staff Sgt. Sara Berschet prepares to draw blood from Spc. Jennifer Campbell at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center blood donor center.*

restrictions based on previous duty assignments. The theoretical threat of exposure to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), commonly known as Mad Cow Disease, prohibits many servicemembers who have spent time in Europe from donating blood. A complete list of criteria that disqualify an individual from donating blood can be found at [http://www.tricare.osd.mil/asbpo/donor\\_info/deferral.htm](http://www.tricare.osd.mil/asbpo/donor_info/deferral.htm).

A trauma victim can use 40 units or more of blood and/or blood products; a leukemia patient uses eight units of platelets daily during treatment; and a single pint of blood can sustain a premature baby's life for two weeks, Kukral said.

Servicemembers, their families, Department of Defense civilians and retirees are eligible to donate blood to the ASBP. It takes approximately one hour to fill out the paperwork and donate a unit of blood through a DoD blood donor center. Unit representatives can set up blood drives through a blood donor center. The centers can be located by accessing <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/asbpo/activities/components/bdc.htm#bdclocations> on the Web.

Soldiers coming from Advanced Individual Training (AIT) are prime candidates for blood donations. They have not been stationed in areas that

prohibit them from donating blood. Their training and the healthy lifestyle during AIT have conditioned their bodies to be in top condition for donating blood, Kukral said.



**All types of blood are needed every day, but Type O blood is particularly useful in emergency situations because anybody can use it.**

Units may consider establishing a reward system for donating blood to encourage hesitant soldiers to donate. Supervisors may include donating blood on soldiers' nominations for the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. Units may offer other incentives and command-sponsored programs, such as releasing soldiers early from duty after donating blood at a unit-sponsored drive. First sergeants may also offer passes or other favorable actions to soldiers who reach the goal of donating a specified number of pints. "The competitive nature in many soldiers can be used to motivate others to donate blood," Kukral said.

For more information on the program, check out <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/asbpo>.

*(Editor's Note: Spc. Matthew MacRoberts is a journalist assigned to the Fort Bliss (Texas) Public Affairs Office.)*

## Factoid

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