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SURVEY PARTICIPANTS SOUGHT

The Marine Corps is trying to locate the parents of children born or conceived while living in base family housing at Camp Lejeune between 1968 and 1986. Military.com reports that the parents are being sought to participate in a study that will determine if the children are more at risk for birth defects and diseases, such as leukemia. The study is being conducted 15 years after the Marine Corps discovered that Camp Lejeune's drinking water was contaminated during those years with trichloroethylene and tetrachloroethylene, substances which have been linked to greater health risks among children. To join the survey, call the National Opinion Research Center toll-free at (800) 639-4270. For more information about the survey, call the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry at (888) 42-ATDSR, extension 5132. You can also call the Marine Corps toll-free at (877) 261-9782 and visit their Web page for the survey at <http://www.usmc.mil/camlejwatersurvey>

Meanwhile, the Associated Press reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has expanded its Agent Orange Registry to include veterans who served in Korea in 1968 and 1969. Under a little-publicized directive by the DVA, 80,000 veterans who served in Korea during those years are now eligible for free examinations for diseases and medical conditions associated with exposure to the herbicide. Like Vietnam veterans in the registry, the Korean-based veterans will be surveyed and tracked in research and receive newsletters and other information. The new directive does not entitle Korean veterans to compensation for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure, but offers free physical examinations and counseling. For more information, contact your nearest DVA office or VA medical center. You can read the related VHA Directive 2000-27 at <http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12000027.htm> To learn more about the Agent Orange Registry visit <http://www.va.gov/pressrel/ao1297.htm>

SAVINGS PLAN AVAILABLE SOON

Thanks to a provision in the 2001 Defense Authorization Act, military personnel will be able to use the Federal Employees Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) beginning sometime next year. The American Forces Press Service reports that active-duty and Ready Reserve service members will be allowed to invest up to 5 percent of their basic pay in the plan and all of any special and incentive pays they may receive (including bonuses) up to a total \$10,500 annual limit. Service members may also be eligible for matching government funds in certain instances. DoD officials are currently determining how to get the program up-and-running. Currently, the DoD hopes that service members will be able to enroll in the TSP beginning in October 2001, which will mark the start of a special 60-day open season. Forms and educational materials will be sent to service members so they can make informed decisions during the open season. For more information on how the program works for civilian employees, visit the TSP Web site at <http://www.tsp.gov>. Information on TSP for the Uniformed Services should be available at that Web site soon.

FREE HEPATITIS C KITS FOR VETERANS

Several major veterans service organizations and the American Liver Foundation (ALF) are making available free in-home hepatitis C test kits to all U.S. veterans from Nov. 9-19. An American Liver Foundation press release reports that the test kits, valued at \$70, will be made available free to veterans during that time. To

request a kit, visit <http://www.liverfoundation.org> or call the toll-free help line at (888) 888-HEPC. Veterans will be required to pay a \$6 shipping and handling fee. With this easy test, a person collects a small blood sample in the privacy of their own home, then mails it to a certified blood-testing laboratory. Using a personal identification number that guarantees confidentiality, the person can then call a toll-free number to learn their test results within ten business days. A study conducted by the Veterans Health Administration shows that 8 to 10 percent of all veterans in the VHA system have tested positive for Hepatitis C which, left untreated, can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

DOSES OF FLU VACCINE RECALLED

Stars and Stripes reports that more than 70,000 doses of flu vaccine destined for military bases in Europe and the Pacific have been recalled after they were shipped from the United States at improper temperatures. Along with a worldwide shortage of the vaccine, the shipping error means overseas military personnel will not receive their flu shots until after the flu season is underway. The vaccine was shipped at temperatures that were too cold to assure proper potency. Military officials expressed optimism that the recall would not seriously disrupt the military's flu vaccine program. However, the flu season is approaching in Japan. European bases will still receive their full allotment of flu shots, but at this point the delivery date is in the hands of the manufacturer. Some doses in the recalled shipments were given to patients in Europe and to Air Force personnel in the Pacific. While receiving those doses pose no health threat to the recipients, they will not protect them from the flu virus due to the damaged potency of the vaccine.

SOME DISCHARGED CAN SUE FOR BONUSES

Many of the 20,000 people discharged for obesity from the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force between 1992 and 1995 can now sue the Pentagon for bonuses that were taken from them upon discharge. The Washington Post reports that a federal judge ruled last week that a lawsuit filed by three people who claim the Pentagon illegally took back their enlistment bonuses can now be expanded to a class action lawsuit. Many of the military personnel discharged during those years lost all or part of the money they had received when they signed up. Plaintiffs' lawyer Michael Feldman said the money amounts to thousands of dollars for many of the plaintiffs, and as many as 10,000 people could now join in the lawsuit.

BACK PAY FOR SOME RESERVE CAPTAINS

More than 1,500 reserve-component captains may be eligible for nine months to a year of back pay with adjustment of their dates of rank. The Army News Service reports that the opportunity comes under the second phase of a program to review the records of about 6,000 Army Reserve and Army National Guard officers. Officers affected in phase II of this program should receive application packets and instructions in mid-November. The date of rank review stems back to an oversight that occurred when the Army implemented revised promotion policies under the Reserve Officers Personnel Management Act (ROPMA). As a result, some officers were required to serve eight years as a lieutenant instead of the seven years generally served under ROPMA. Officers who believe they are eligible under the second phase of this program and do not receive their application packet by Dec. 1 should contact: Office of Promotions (Reserve Components), ATTN: TAPC-MSL-N (DOR), 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri 63132-5200.

NEW HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR RETIREES

Marine Times reports that the new TRICARE-for-Life program, or TRICARE Senior Health Care, for military retirees will take effect Oct. 1, 2001. This new program allows TRICARE to serve as a second-payer to Medicare if the retiree is enrolled in Medicare Part B, which covers doctors' fees, lab fees, and some other outpatient services. It is still not known when older retirees will be able to enroll in TRICARE Prime, the military's managed-care health program, or whether retirees living overseas will be covered. Older retirees will get a military prescription drug benefit as long as they are enrolled in Medicare Part B. A Department of Defense press release reports that eligible beneficiaries should do two things now to ensure their future eligibility for TRICARE benefits. (1) They should update their Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) record with their correct address and any changes in family status such as marriage, divorce, birth, or adoption. Home address is important because the address on file with DEERS is used to send out information on benefits. Also, health benefits could be denied if DEERS is not updated to reflect a new spouse or child. Retirees may update their DEERS by going to the nearest military personnel office, e-mailing changes to <mailto:addrinfo@osd.pentagon.mil>, or mailing the changes to DEERS Support Office, ATTN: COA, 400 Gigling Road, Seaside, CA 93955-6771. You can also call the toll-free DEERS Support Office

telephone numbers: (800) 334-4162 (California only), (800) 527-5602 (Alaska and Hawaii), or (800) 538-9552 (for the rest of the United States.) (2) Eligible beneficiaries should also enroll in Medicare Part B if they have not already. To enroll, beneficiaries must submit an application for Medicare Part B directly to the Social Security Administration. For details on enrollment in Medicare Part B, call the SSA toll-free number (800) 772-1213 or visit any Social Security office. You can also find more information on the Medicare Web site at <http://medicare.gov> TRICARE Management Activity officials, who will administer the new benefits, say eligible seniors should NOT immediately cancel their current "Medigap" insurance coverage. The DoD is working with the Health Care Financing Administration, which administers the Medicare benefit, to provide the most accurate information on the appropriateness of continued enrollment in "Medigap" insurance. TRICARE will continue to update its Web site at http://www.tricare.osd.mil/ndaa/fast_facts.htm with the latest information.

POST OFFICES ALLOW BIGGER PACKAGES

Military members overseas will soon be able to mail bigger packages at the cheapest parcel rate through their military post offices. Marine Times reports that the size limit for Standard Mail will increase to 130 inches (length plus width). All military-specific limits on the size of packages will be replaced with U.S. Postal Service limits for fourth-class parcel post, known as Standard Mail B. The changes will not affect military Standard Mail headed overseas, nor will they affect the current 70-pound weight limit on packages being sent back to the United States. Military postal officials will send notices to overseas post offices when the changes take effect.

ARMY W-2'S COMING SOON

The Army will be mailing its calendar year 2000 W-2's by mid-month January 2001. The Army News Service reports that some year-end adjustments will not be included in the original W-2's but will be included in a corrected W-2 (Form W-2C). If soldiers believe their individual W-2 forms do not include all pertinent data, and they have not received W-2C forms, they can call their servicing finance office. Separated soldiers can call Military Pay customer service toll-free at (888) PAY-ARMY or commercial (317) 510-2800. This year's Army National Guard W-2s and Student Loan Repayment Plan W-2s will be sent to the U.S. Property and Fiscal Offices for distribution. Army Reserve personnel will continue to receive W-2s mailed to their address of record. For assistance with Army pay or Leave and Earnings Statement problems, soldiers should first contact their servicing finance office. If that does not work, they can call the DFAS-Indianapolis Military Pay customer service hotline at (888) PAY-ARMY, DSN 699-2800, or commercial (317) 510-2800.

CASTING CALL FOR ARMY SOLDIER SHOW

The 2001 U.S. Army Soldier Show is recruiting cast members and technicians. Army News Service reports that active-duty and reserve component soldiers with a minimum of one year left in service from January 2001 are eligible to apply and must submit their packages by Dec. 31, 2000. Packages should include a VHS performance videotape not more than ten minutes in length. The 2001 theme of the show will revolve around the stories of soldiers' lives, so if a soldier has an interesting life story to tell, it should be included in some way on the audition tape. The show also needs technicians who have experience in stage management, stage lighting, and audio engineering. Duty with the show is a six-month tour similar to a deployment, and applicants must submit a letter of recommendation from someone in their chain of command. Application details are online at http://trol.redstone.army.mil/mwr/soldiers_show/00/

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