JSDF medical staff supports Pacific Partnership 2011

By MC1 R. David Valdez,
Pacific Partnership 2011 Public Affairs

POHNPEI, Federated States of Micronesia (NNS) -- Medical officers from the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) provided support at a medical civic action project in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, in support of Pacific Partnership 2011 July 8.

JSDF joined the mission in Timor-Leste after initially pulling out due to the scope of recovery efforts following the earthquake and tsunami near Japan in March 2011.

The Japanese government and non-governmental organizations have participated in Pacific Partnership since its first mission in 2006.

"This event is very important for the stability of the Pacific region," said Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Maj. Toshihiro Yamasaki, Japan Ministry of Defense Joint Staff joint medical plans and operations officer. "We believe that our work as a multinational team with a common goal is valuable, not only for us, the partner nations, but it sends the right message to our hosts as well. We are all one community."

In the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the JSDF contingent brought their expertise and support when the Pacific Partnership medical team needed it most.

"The mission here in FSM is spread out over an area that covers about one million square miles," said Cmdr. Michael Smith, director of medical operations for Pacific Partnership 2011. "Here in Pohnpei, we have an additional emphasis on subject matter expert exchanges, and quite a bit of our team is operating in the other three states, Chuuk, Kosrae and Yap. While we're enthusiastic about serving this many people, having the additional support of these consummate professionals couldn't have come at a better time."

HM3 Celina Sweat cleans dental instruments during a dental civic action project site at Nanpei as part of Pacific Partnership 2011 July 8. Pacific Partnership is a five-month humanitarian assistance initiative that that will make port visits to Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, and the Federated States of Micronesia.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Michael Russell

The JSDF joined the multinational team that includes representatives from Australia, Canada, Malaysia and Spain. New Zealand, France and Indonesia participated in the first half of Pacific Partnership 2011.

The presence of the JSDF contingent serves to highlight the importance of the key dimensions of Pacific Partnership: interoperability, preparation for humanitarian assistance/disaster response crises and sustainable improvements in the quality of life for the citizens of host nations in the Pacific.

"I am truly humbled by the resilience of the Japanese people, who in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake and tsunami, still provided support for this mission," said Commander, Destroyer Squadron 23 Capt. Jesse Wilson, mission commander of Pacific Partnership 2011. "The lengths the Japanese have gone to support this mission demonstrate its importance in this region."

The Federated States of Micronesia is the fifth and final mission port for Pacific Partnership 2011, which has completed operations in Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste. In four mission ports, the Pacific Partnership team has treated more than 36,000 patients, cared for more than 1,500 animals, conducted more than 40 community service projects and completed more than 20 engineering projects. Pacific Partnership is an annual humanitarian assistance initiative sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Born out of the aftermath of the 2004 Indonesian tsunami, Pacific Partnership began in 2006 and has gone to many countries in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, treated more than 240,000 patients and continued to enhance interoperability with partner nations.

NPC reminds Sailors to register dependents in DEERS

By MC3 Andrea Smithluedke, Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

MILLINGTON, Tenn. (NNS) -- Navy Personnel Command (NPC) reminded Sailors July 5 to enroll new spouses in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

In addition to marriage, Sailors must update DEERS within 60 days of any other life-changing event such as divorce, birth of a child or adoption and death of a dependant. Failure to do so could result in breaks in eligibility for family members.

"DEERS is an automated information system which maintains critical data on service members and dependents, that is used to determine eligibility for military benefits and entitlements," said Kathy Wardlaw, NPC records management and benefits division director.

DEERS maintains more than 23 million personnel-and-benefits records for active-duty, reservists, retired military, Department of Defense (DoD) contractors and civil service personnel and their families.

The system is also responsible for producing DoD identification (ID) cards, including common access cards, and supports delivery of medical, dental, educational and life insurance benefits.

Previously, DEERS could be accessed though the myDoDbenefits Portal on the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Web site.

The online system has been upgraded and can now be accessed through the website milConnect.

Sponsors and eligible beneficiaries can still access DEERS through the DMDC website under 'Beneficiaries' or users can go directly to the new milConnect website, http://milconnect.dmdc.mil/.

Sponsors, spouses and eligible beneficiaries over 18 years old are able to perform the following functions on milConnect: update contact information in DEERS instantly, view current health care eligibility, manage TRICARE enrollments, locate the nearest military ID card issuing facility, view personnel information, transfer post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits to eligible family members, update civilian employment information, view Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) information, obtain proof of insurance if currently in a TRICARE-managed program, find answers to frequently asked questions about health care eligibility and more.

"Most Sailors assume that changing their Record of Emergency Data (Page 2) will automatically update their DEERS status, but they are two separate data systems," said Wardlaw. "The Page 2 is a Navy data input into the Navy personnel system and DEERS is the official DoD repository for family member information."

Contact information in DEERS can be updated online, in-person, by phone, fax or mail. Two secure online options are either the new milConnect website or TRICARE Beneficiary Web Enrollment Web site. Both are available to people who have an active Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS)-issued myPay personal identification number.

For those who would like to update their DEERS information in person, the Real-time Automated Personnel Identification System (RAPIDS) site locator online allows service members and beneficiaries to locate RAPIDS site nearest to them.

More than 900 RAPIDS sites in 23 different countries use DEERS data to provide ID cards or related personnel support to eligible persons.

Beneficiaries can call the DMDC support office at 800-538-9552 to update addresses, e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

Changes can also be faxed to 831-655-8317, or mailed to DMDC Support Office, 400 Gigling Road, Seaside, CA 93955-6771.

Any other questions regarding DEERS can be directed to the NPC Customer Service Center at 1-866-U-ASK-NPC.