

"Vet Tech" Warrants: 1981 -2001

By CW3 Elizabeth Holmes

Since 1916, the Veterinary Corps has played an important role in the safety of foods designated for consumption by the military. Initially, only animals slaughtered for military procurement were inspected- ante mortem and post mortem – by Doctors of Veterinary

Medicine. As the need for veterinary medicine and food safety grew, the responsibilities of Veterinary Officers broaden to encompass the entire aspect of military food purchasing, storage and retail. Although assisted by a highly skilled Noncommissioned Officer Corps, public health, food safety and animal medicine responsibilities overwhelmed the Veterinary Corps. The need for a food safety specialist was recognized.

In 1981, a warrant officer career field known as Food Inspection Technician (MOS 051A) was created. In the mid-1980's the specialty was renamed Veterinary Services Technician (MOS 640A).

Today, the United States Army Veterinary Services serves as the Department of Defense Executive Agent for Food Safety. Veterinary Services Warrant Officers perform a wide range of duties around the world. They are considered experts in the field of food safety and sanitation for all branches of the military.

The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) utilizes Veterinary Services Technicians as regional food safety consultants while the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) rely upon their knowledge during the contract award process to food manufacturers. Veterinary Services Technicians are assigned to the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Center, Army Center for Excellence (Quartermaster), and the Natick Research Institute. This is merely a sampling of the many positions these Warrant Officers fill.

Much of the "day-to-day" job of a Veterinary Services Technician is to conduct commercial sanitary inspections of food establishments within their geographic area of responsibility. The military has a requirement that only foods from sanitarily approved sources be purchased for consumption by armed forces personnel. These sanitary inspections provide the assurance that foods originate from facilities utilizing Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMPs). Also, Warrant Officers advise and counsel Veterinary Commanders on all matters pertaining to food safety and quality.

The training and education of Veterinary Services Technicians is an ongoing process in order to keep abreast of changes relating to food safety. Many of these officers attend seminars in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point, the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service and Food and Drug Administration programs. Every year, two to three officers are selected to attend universities around the country and complete bachelor or master degree programs in Food Science. The military pays for all tuition and books in addition to the officer's normal salary. After training, the Warrant Officer must complete a tour that utilizes this unique training.

The current outlook for career fields within food safety is tremendous. Upon completion of military service, Veterinary Services Technicians find employment with food manufacturing, sanitation consulting and federal, state and local health agencies. Their specialized training and experience affords above average entry-level salaries.

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