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Final Issue

THE RESPONDER

Telling the Joint Task Force-Haiti story

a call to duty
May 17, 2010



*Building partnerships...
building hope*



As the duties of Joint Task Force-Haiti transition to the more traditional U.S. Southern Command theater security cooperation missions, I am sure that Lt. Gen. Ken Keen shares my pride in the tremendous job done by our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast guardsmen and Department of Defense (DoD) Civilians. The strength, compassion and mission focus of our Armed Forces has never been more evident than here in Haiti during Operation Unified Response. The massive and rapid support in assisting the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) immediately after the earthquake devastated Haiti, as well as the following crisis response, was unprecedented. Constant, consistent engagement by our forces with USAID, other United States Government agencies, MINUSTAH and numerous nongovernmental organizations saved lives and alleviated human suffering from the outset. After the crisis was abated, JTF-Haiti immediately went to work to mitigate the ill-effects of weather on the displaced population. In doing so, JTF-Haiti moved over 7,000 Haitian people to safe areas and put mitigation measures in place in "at-risk" camps, protecting the population from flash floods and mudslides. None of our service men and women and DoD civilians who have served here will forget Haiti; we will all remember its sights, its smells and, most of all, the gratitude on the faces of the Haitian people every time they see an American in uniform. My most heartfelt thanks for a job well done goes out to the outstanding men and women who serve our nation. You did an outstanding job and our nation could not be more proud of you.

-Maj. Gen. Simeon G. Trombitas, commanding general, JTF-Haiti



“Everything begins somewhere”

by Col. Richard Gary Moore
JTF-Haiti Command Chaplain

Clive Staples Lewis, 20th Century writer, whose literary works include “Mere Christianity,” “Miracles” and “The Chronicles of Narnia,” are translated into more than 30 languages; he served on the English faculty of Oxford University in England and was a good friend of J.R.R. Tolkien who wrote, “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy. Lewis, one of the original thinkers of the twentieth century, makes

a short pithy statement that may encourage us four months after the Haiti earthquake: “With the possible exception of the equator, everything begins somewhere.”

With the hard work of tens of thousands of people and millions of dollars, the Jan. 12 earthquake may prove to have two epicenters; one for the physical earthquake and another epicenter representing a new start, a beginning for this nation whose name means “land of high mountains.”

From a recent helicopter mission to Les Cayes, Haiti, I was amazed by the beauty of the countryside, the valleys and the mountains. I grew up in south Florida so I am quickly drawn to coconut trees, hibiscus like flowers, the white slender egret birds, and the shoreline areas. But I’m mostly drawn to the coastal blue-greens and turquoise of the Caribbean Sea. This is a beautiful nation with unlimited potential for commerce and tourism!

I appreciate America’s commitment to this Caribbean neighbor. Yes, we are still decisively engaged in other countries that are eight and nine and one half time zones away, but as a nation for all seasons we have also reached out to Haiti because that’s who we are – the United States of America. It’s our identity to help the Haitian people condition a new beginning, their own beginning. Every service member on mission here has been positively affected by Operation Unified Response. Everything begins somewhere.

MPs become customs experts

by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall
11th PAD

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- Nine Soldiers from the 209th Military Police Company, deployed from Fort Polk, La., arrived in Haiti with the general mission that they would be assisting in the relief efforts. What they did not know was that shortly after their arrival, they would be trained on custom procedures and put in charge of the customs operations at the seaport.

“I didn’t think I was coming to Haiti to do customs,” said Spc. Nicholas Vespa, military policeman, 209th MP Company. “I’m happy about it though and glad I was able to get this experience in Haiti.”

Vespa was put in charge of the night shift crew. His team would report at 7 p.m., get an update on the number of items cleared through customs for the day and continue the customs inspection throughout the night.

“We make sure there is no dirt or contraband on the vehicles and containers,” Vespa said. “We make sure the Haitians get the hot spots. If they miss a spot, we just point it out and they go over it again.”



Contracted Haitian crews assisted in the cleaning of over 800 containers and 2,000 vehicles that were cleared through customs. The Haitians assisted Soldiers with the 209th Military Police Company, deployed from Fort Polk, La. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall/11th PAD)

Local Haitian crews were contracted to assist in cleaning the equipment as more units redeploy. Vespa said the only difficulty they encountered was the language barrier, but that got easier as time went by.

Sgt. Justin Condon, military policeman, 209th MP Company, said he didn’t expect to be doing customs.

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Medical exercises continue in southern Haiti

by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall
11th PAD

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- Over the past couple of weeks, the Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE) held in the Port Salut area provided almost 5,000 Haitians with free, basic health care. Now, service members hope to repeat those numbers during another MEDRETE being held in the Les Cayes region May 10-19.

As the MEDRETE opening ceremony began May 10, Cmdr. Rhonda McLain, MEDRETE officer in charge, Operational Health Support Unit (OHSU), stepped up to the lectern and looked at the Haitians attending and gave them hope for the future.

"We look forward to working collaboratively with the Haitian people to meet the health care needs of the population of Les Cayes and its surrounding communities," McLain said. "We are honored to be able to partner with you as your country moves towards a new horizon."

Sailors with OHSU, deployed from the Great Lakes region, moved throughout the American University of the Caribbean where the clinic is being held; each preparing their medical station for the first day of the MEDRETE.

"Our mission is to provide medical support to the Haitian population of Les Cayes," said Capt. Joan Olson, nurse, OHSU. "We can only [provide] level one care, which is basic care, but we anticipate level two, three and four care that will be asked of us. Unfortunately, we can't provide that [care] so we have resources and referral networks in place for those patients."

Each station is situated in a classroom on the first floor of the university. The stations are set up so that each room has an open area with several rooms on the side in case a patient prefers privacy.

"The first stop is a preventive medical area where [patients] will learn tooth brushing [skills]," Olson said. "We'll provide toothbrushes and toothpaste."

At the preventive medicine area, the patients also will be given vitamins and a class on proper hand washing, Olson added. After the class, patients will be assisted by Navy personnel and translators in determining which station to visit next.

"The patient will present [what is wrong] and who they want to see," Olson said. "We hope to be able to provide two services [per patient, per day]."



Uruguayan Soldier, Nicolas Gonzalez, assigned to MINUSTAH, listens to an infant's heart-beat during the Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE) on May 12. Uruguayan Soldiers are assisting U.S. Navy personnel and Haitian doctors in providing Haitians in the Les Cayes communities with immediate, basic health care. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall/11th PAD)

Should a patient come through the clinic complaining of more than two medical problems, Olson and her staff will ask the patient which two are top priority.

"We will ask them what their two top priorities are today and make sure they can come back tomorrow for the third one," Olson said. "We want to be able to provide as much as we can for each person."

The staff also has 4,000 eye glasses donated by the Wisconsin Lions Club to provide to patients who may have trouble with their vision.

The staff of 41 Navy personnel are being assisted during the MEDRETE by Haitian translators, Uruguayan doctors and nurses assigned to MINUSTAH and local Haitian doctors. The Haitian National Police are also assisting the 209th Military Police Company, deployed from Fort Polk, La., with security for the exercise.

"Locals are being used as translators and some of the students who attend the university have stepped up, saying they will help us if needed," Olson said.

The MEDRETE in the Les Cayes area will be held for nine days. Doctors and nurses are anticipating at least 400 patients each day.

"We're going to be busy, which will be wonderful," said Lt. Cmdr. Amy Rohs, medical officer, OSHU. "We're going to see a lot of people that need our help.

The most important thing is just showing support for [them] and comforting those who need care."

Along with providing as much care as possible, Olson expects her troops to be watching and learning.

"We're going to take back the stories of Haiti," Olson said. "We'll see many different types of illness and injury for [the staff] to learn from."

Rohs used what she learned on her first MEDRETE three years ago to assist in the Les Cayes MEDRETE. She created signs that explained the purpose of each medical station.

"When I was on my first MEDRETE, we didn't have signs for our clinics," Rohs said. "I tried to find a way to make it look colorful and make it very clear that we're in a collaborative operation with [Haiti]. So all the signs have flags of Haiti and the U.S. to show the partnership involved with the [MEDRETE]."

The Port Salut and Les Cayes MEDRETEs are only a preview of what is to come. Beginning in June, New Horizons humanitarian assistance exercises are planned for communities outside of Port-au-Prince. The exercises will include MEDRETEs like these, as well as many engineering projects throughout the summer.

Rear Adm. Guillory visits Haiti

by Cpl. Jake Marlin
11th PAD

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- Rear Adm. Vic Guillory, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and the U.S. 4th Fleet, stopped in Haiti May 10 to visit Seabees and take a tour of the projects they completed. Guillory stopped at several locations during the visit, including LSA Hope, Ancien Aeroport Militaire internally displaced persons camp, and the Corail Cesselesse resettlement camp.

Engineer and construction assets from throughout the Navy played a crucial part in projects in and around the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince. Guillory took time at LSA Hope to talk with the Seabees stationed there. The Seabees at LSA Hope are assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 7, from Gulfport, Miss., and have been in country since just after the quake, taking part in missions from debris removal to flood prevention projects inside IDP camps.

"I wanted to take a look at all the work you did," said Guillory, "and I really appreciate the gravity of how fragile this place is."

Starting just days after the Jan. 12 earthquake, the Navy had boots on the ground. Capt. Roger Motzko, chief engineer, JTF-Haiti, worked alongside the troops who were some of the first ones in the country after the disaster.

"The first thing you do is ask what is wrong," said Motzko, "and how do we go about fixing it."

When Navy engineering assets first arrived in country, several key projects were identified. The seaport was damaged and the airport had to be repaired to support the number of aircraft coming in on a daily basis. Without those two ports open, the people of Haiti could not get the aid supplies they needed.

Seabees from Underwater Construction Team 1 and Amphibious Construction Battalion 2, both of Norfolk, Va., went to work immediately on the seaport. They worked nonstop to repair damaged pier pilings to help open the port to shipping. This allowed supplies from all over the world to pour into Haiti.



Rear Adm. Vic Guillory, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and U.S. 4th Fleet, stopped at LSA Hope in Port-au-Prince to visit with the Seabees of Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 7 during a visit to Haiti. (U.S. Army photo by Cpl. Jake Marlin/11th PAD)

Engineers from the JTF-Haiti engineer cell did an initial assessment on the condition of the Toussaint Louverture International Airport. The runway was caked with rubber and large chunks of concrete were coming out of the ground, posing major hazards to the numerous flights coming to and going from the airport every day. The engineers quickly contracted a crew to remove rubber build up from the runway and the Seabees are now working to repair holes in the airport ramp.

Seabees were also tasked with assisting with recovery missions in Haiti. Seabees with Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit, deployed from Norfolk, Va., operated equipment and removed rubble from the Hotel Montana site to clear the way for international search and rescue teams to go in, search for survivors, and recover remains. Seabees also assisted with the oversight in the removal of 14,000 cubic yards of debris in just 51 days from the site, making it possible for the recovery teams to provide closure to the families of individuals lost at the site.

After the initial operations, internally displaced persons camps started springing up all over Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas. These impromptu shelters were set up anywhere there was space, even in places prone to mudslides and flash flooding. When the Government of Haiti identified "at-risk" camps, the Seabees began mitigation efforts to preserve the lives of the people in danger.

"We were trying to provide basic human services so no one else would lose their lives," said Motzko.

The Seabees placed gravel and sandbags and dug drainage canals throughout the camps to prevent flooding. Camps such as Golf Delmas 48 in Petionville were improved to keep the people living there safe.

Working closely with United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) forces, naval engineers with JTF-Haiti designed and helped construct two resettlement camps, Corail Cesselesse and Tabrare Issa, in the Haitian countryside. Seabees assisted in building roads, preparing the area and installing things such as drainage canals to make the new resettlement camps livable.

"The intent was to decongest the camps," said Motzko. "Mitigating loss of life was the biggest thing we were trying to do."

The Seabees and engineers attached to JTF-Haiti have had their hands full.

With JTF-Haiti transitioning its mission to traditional U.S. Southern Command theater security operations and exercises, Guillory's 4th Fleet will assume some of the responsibility for the area.

Sailors and Seabees from the U.S. Navy will continue to come to Haiti as long as they are needed in a continued effort to improve the lives of the Haitian people. NMCB-25, from Fort McCoy, Wis., will replace NMCB-7 and begin building hardened structures in Haiti to provide much needed services like schools and clinics.

"You Seabees put a passion into your work here," said Guillory, "and it really shows."

CUSTOMS continued from p. 2

"We got put into the class and a few days later we took charge [of customs] at the port," Condon said. "I was told 'when in charge, take charge,' so we did."

Condon and nine other Soldiers rotate on 12-hour shifts, making sure every piece of equipment is clean.

"Every military piece of equipment, and even some civilian equipment, was cleared by us," Vespa said.

The MPs have cleared more than 2,000 vehicles and numerous containers.

"We cleared more than 800 humanitarian aid containers in four days," Condon said.

Although all the Soldiers came from the same company, they did not all come from the same platoon. But that did not stop them from working as a team.

"Between all of us, we learned to work as a team," Condon said. "From the get-go, there was no platoon competition or someone working harder than another. We're one team."

Condon and his Soldiers faced not only the challenge of running customs on their own, but also answering questions from units throughout the joint task force.

"We had units coming to us and asking us questions [on customs regulations]," Condon said. "So a lot of nights, we stayed after to research online more information."

Condon added that all his Soldiers shared the information and knew as much as he did, which is why Condon allowed younger ranking Soldiers to run the wash rack.

"My Soldiers needed to know the answers to questions without saying 'go find my sergeant,' because most times I was working somewhere else," Condon said.

Due to the demand and busy schedule, at one point Condon had a private and private first class running the wash rack. He said because his Soldiers understood their mission, he felt comfortable leaving them in charge.

Despite the unexpected change in mission and no time to prepare, the MPs of 209th adapted and drove on to maintain customs for several months in support of Operation Unified Response.

"We've worked hard here and hit the ground running," Condon said. "I'm proud of these guys."

Comedians visit JTF-Haiti

by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall
11th PAD

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti- After months of long hours working to assist the people of a country devastated by an earthquake, service members of JTF-Haiti had a chance to sit back, laugh and relax.

Comedians Jennifer Rawlings and John Fugelsang performed for troops deployed in support of Operation Unified Response May 11-12. The duo was part of the Armed Forces Entertainment tour, Here Comes the Laughter, which made several stops at military camps around Port-au-Prince.

"Jennifer Rawlings and I came down [to Haiti] with AFE to do stand-up comedy for the U.S. troops [assisting] in the humanitarian relief mission," Fugelsang said. "It's been one of the greatest thrills and honors of my professional life to be here."

Rawlings and Fugelsang spent two days performing shows for the troops, but also saw internally displaced persons camps throughout the city.

"It's just heart wrenching to see the poverty that exists here and then on top of that, the Jan. 12 earthquake where so many people lost their lives," Rawlings said. "I wanted to come and see with my own eyes and see what the troops have done."

Rawlings began performing for the troops 10 years ago in Germany and said she was hooked after that.

"I've done about 300 military shows and [Haiti] is the first time I've come to a humanitarian deployment," Rawlings said.

It was a little different for Fugelsang, who had never toured with AFE before.

"It was my first time performing for the troops," Fugelsang said. "I was a bit nervous about it because I'm a political comedian. I dropped everything, cancelled radio shows and some stand-up appearances. There was nowhere else I'd rather be."

At LSA Dragon, the duo took some time to tour the camp and sit down for dinner with troops before their performance.

"The best part [of this trip] was the time I got to spend with the troops," Fugelsang said. "I had so many great conversations with so many outstanding men and women that I can't wait to come back and do another show like this."

For Rawlings, the memory of the devastation will stick with her when she returns to the states.

"The sites were heart wrenching, especially driving through the streets and seeing people standing in garbage," Rawlings said. "I want to keep [those memories] in the forefront of my mind and think every day 'how can I help at least one person?'"

Fugelsang said he had always wanted to come to Haiti, especially after the earthquake hit. He said his brief stay has helped make him a better man.

"I think the people of Haiti have a resiliency and a strength that's grounded in their faith," Fugelsang said. "We live in a culture where people get outraged because their pizza came with the wrong topping or the latte didn't have enough foam. And then you see the [Haitians] and the devastation. I only wish more people in the states knew what was going on in Haiti."

Both comedians said they'll take back their memories of the Haitian people and will tell the story of their resiliency as well as how the military is helping rebuild a nation suffering from poverty and devastation.

"It was an amazing trip and I think that the mission here is really important for everyone," Rawlings said.

Fugelsang said his first AFE tour has left a great impression on him and he won't forget it.

"This mission is the sort of thing that makes me proud to be an American," Fugelsang said. "It's very inspiring."



Jennifer Rawlings, comedian with the Armed Forces Entertainment tour, Here Comes the Laughter, sat down for a meal with Soldiers at LSA Dragon. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Samantha D. Hall/11th PAD)

Joint Task Force-Haiti



Operation Unified Response

