



All Hands Messages

Coast Guard Activity in Haiti

To the Men and Women of the United States Coast Guard:

Exactly one week ago today, a little before 1700 EST, a violent earthquake devastated Port Au Prince, Haiti. Without waiting for tasking, Coast Guard men and women from all over the country made immediate preparations to assist the beleaguered Haitian people. The next morning, Haitians witnessed President Obama's pledge – "You will not be forsaken and you will not be forgotten" - become reality when the cutter FORWARD arrived with the rising sun as the first American asset on-scene. Amidst the devastation, FORWARD delivered damage assessments, critical command and control capabilities, and most importantly – hope.

I am incredibly proud of the performance of all our personnel during this challenging period and like you, my heart goes out to the Haitian people who have suffered so greatly. Coast Guard units were the first on-scene in Port Au Prince and have been working around the clock with our interagency partners to provide humanitarian assistance, evacuate U.S. citizens, and help the most seriously wounded.

On-scene, the cutters TAHOMA and MOHAWK quickly established a makeshift trauma unit with the Haitian Coast Guard and triaged hundreds of injured people (read the story here: [APPENDED]). TAHOMA's crew even delivered a baby boy from an injured Haitian woman on their flight deck and a second baby at their shoreside clinic. C-130 aircraft performed damage assessment flights and the cutter VALIANT conducted a port assessment of Cap Haitian to create another entryway for supplies that were backing up at the airport. The cutter OAK continues to survey Port Au Prince harbor and repair the primary pier to allow much needed supplies to flow directly into the city. Aircrews from Mobile, AL; Elizabeth City, NC; Sacramento, CA; Barbers Point, HI; Detroit, MI; and Jacksonville and Miami, FL are also assisting with overflights and evacuations. Follow these links to view our Guardians in action (<http://coastguard.dodlive.mil/> and www.d7publicaffairs.com/go/site/586/).

Supporting our forward operations have been thousands of Guardians working inside and outside of the Coast Guard. The Seventh District Commander has been leading the Homeland Security Task Force South East which is a key coordination point for the federal government's collective response and evacuation efforts. A joint FEMA-Coast Guard team has been deployed to Port Au Prince to support United States response operations being directed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We are also supporting U.S. Southern Command Joint Task Force Haiti with individual augmentees. Our Area Commanders have worked seamlessly to flow forces rapidly including moving the cutter HAMILTON through the Panama Canal from the West Coast. The Chief of Staff, exercising his mission support responsibilities, has skillfully integrated and deployed logistics elements demonstrating the maturation of our new support model. Here in Washington, our staffs have integrated with key partners including DOD, FEMA

and USAID. I have worked with FEMA Director, Craig Fugate, in support of Secretary Napolitano and Deputy Secretary Lute at a number of White House meetings.

We continue to surge people and assets because we will have to sustain our response efforts in Haiti. HAMILTON and LEGARE will soon be on-scene pushing our total number of Guardians in theater to over 700. We are also recalling Coast Guard reservists to augment our humanitarian efforts and ensure maritime safety and security for relief supplies arriving in theater. Our immediate and sustained response illustrates the value of the Coast Guard's flexible command structure, ability to operate across the interagency and international spectrums, and the initiative of our people to take action. This is why the Coast Guard is so valuable to the American public and the global maritime community.

Our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Secretary of State Clinton commented "our Coast Guard has been unbelievable." At a press conference last week, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen stated "the Coast Guard was magnificent from day one. First, they were medevacing people literally within the first 24 hours. And I want to give them a great deal of credit for their response capability as well." Those comments are directed at all of you who executing or supporting our operations.

Many have questioned how the Coast Guard can do so much so quickly, and I simply reply: "This is what we do". Our Guardians are committed to protecting, defending, and saving without having to be told to do so. Along with all Americans, I am truly inspired by the Coast Guard men and women operating in theater, backfilling for deployed units, or providing the necessary support to make it all possible. As always, our Guardians are here to protect and ready to rescue at a moment's notice. That is who we are and why we serve.

I cannot describe it any better than a young petty officer assigned to TAHOMA in this email to his family:

"There is an eerie feeling in the air amongst our crew tonight. Those who remained shielded on the cutter today see in the eyes of those who went ashore what a major disaster can do to a nation. I have never seen so many grown men and women with tears in their eyes. Those who did go ashore experienced first-hand the severity of the situation.

I've been shielded today only talking over the radio to those who have seen it. Never once was there a question of professionalism in their voice. I remember in boot camp being told that the U.S. Coast Guard on the right side of our chest takes priority over our name. Today the men and women who went ashore wore coveralls without their names on them. All that was visible were the letters USCG.

Today was the first day I think I've truly been more thankful to be an American. Not because of our infrastructure or the freedoms given to us, but because as a country we will be there when a country of less fortune is in need. Haiti rarely exports anything to our country. They have no oil or major cash crop we use. But as a county we will stand together and put aside our different opinions of healthcare, war, or economy and help out those in need.

Right now we are taking it hour by hour, aftershock by aftershock, every little bit helps. I'm going to try and get some sleep, as I've already put in a solid 16 hours. Tomorrow will be longer."

Well said.

Thank you and Semper Paratus!

Admiral Thad Allen
Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

Guardians Report In: HS1 Larry Berman

Sunday, January 17, 2010

The following account comes from Health Services Technician First Class (HS1) Larry Berman. HS1 Berman serves as "ship's doc" aboard the CGC Tahoma and was one of the first medical responders to the Haiti earthquake. The words that follow are his and we've included Coast Guard photos to try and help tell the story. As Guardians continue to report in from Haiti, we will do our best to bring you their stories here at Coast Guard Compass.



HS1 Larry Berman reviews medical supplies for the make-shift Haitian Coast Guard Medical Clinic. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

Today (Saturday) was day three that the Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma and Mohawk manned up the small Haitian Coast Guard Medical Clinic. All three days, we have treated the local Haitian people for broken bones, lacerations, huge open wounds, etc. The outer court yard is filled with desperate people wanting medical attention.

Myself and HS2 Elias Gomez have taken the lead on who gets treated and who has to wait. Both boats are helping in some capacity or another, medical treatment, security, supply room, small boating Coast Guardsmen back and forth from the ships. So, many people from the two boats are

helping. Some have to man the daily operations of the two boats, but everyone is eager to volunteer to come ashore and lend a hand.

HS2 Gomez and I, and a couple of people with EMT experience, have training on mass casualty scenarios, but in that situation there are helos and ambulances to take people to hospitals. Not so here. Until today, we have treated the people and they stay. Their homes are wrecked, the streets are clogged, and there have not been any medevacs.

Today, day three, was the first day that we got a few people out; I think the count was 10. The primary goal each day has been to treat and evac those needing amputations. My happiest moment came this morning as one man with a left crushed arm, 30 medical staples and sutures to the face, and a scalp wound was evacuated to a hospital. The first day, as triage goes, we thought he was near death so we deferred to stronger amputations who were a mess, but much alive. The following day, when we saw that he was still alive, HS2 Gomez and I decided that he would be our priority. That was yesterday. I scrubbed what was his arm with Betadine, tourniqueted the arm and wrapped it in a red contamination bag. HS2 stapled a huge facial wound with the medical staples and sutures. HS2 Elias Gomez was a master, caring for the patient. I cleaned maggots from his scalp wound and sutured that up. We also hit him up with antibiotics. As I said, today he flew to a hospital. That my friends was an outstanding moment for HS2 and myself.

We have treated more patients than we can count, then they go out to sit in the outer court yard.

The scene includes about 30-40 Coast Guardsmen and about 20 Haitian volunteers with various experience. A couple of Haitian nurses and doctors have joined us, but the leadership of the clinic has been HS2 and myself. I believe that the Haitians have recognized the discipline and order that the Tahoma and Mohawk have demonstrated. OS1 Sweetman, YN1 Winslow and ETC Frownfelter have lead the security for the compound. They keep order. The Mohawk has taken leadership over the supply room. I wish that I could tell you their names, but there is one Chief that has done a great job with the stock room.

Both Mohawk and Tahoma crewmen are willing to do anything. I have seen our Engineering Officer LT Sanzo out in the courtyard bandaging people. I saw our Executive Officer LCDR Fisher hold the hand of a little girl while her wounds were being painfully scrubbed. I was able to come and administer a small amount of morphine to the little girl which made the XO's job easier.

Today was the first day also that the decision was made to use morphine. The compound fractures and skin ripped off some of their bodies warranted it as we had to clean the infected wounds. Morphine is mercy.

For the past 3 days, Tahoma and Mohawk have had to make hundreds of decisions on how to help these people. We are all exhausted. We are all running on adrenalin. We are working in the heat, sweating. No one goes to the bathroom until be get back to the ship from 0830 to 1715 Hrs. Both Gomez and I have been ordered to take breaks. It is non-stop. Today, I had to ask what day it was. I had no idea. Thank God we are starting to get a few people out. Tomorrow we hope to get at least 12 of the worst out.



A baby is born to a young Haitian woman on the deck of the CGC Tahoma. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

Today at about 1430 I finally obeyed our XO and YN1 Winslow to take a break and eat. Then after about 15 minutes I was called on the radio to get back to the clinic. Someone was going to have a baby! I ran from the pier to the courtyard, about 200 yards to see a 21 year old Haitian woman sitting and looking weak with people holding her hand.

She told me that the baby had not moved since that morning. I felt her abdomen and could not feel the baby move. She appeared to be full term. Gomez, who from here on out I will call by his first name, Elias, brought her into the clinic and got her up on a table. We examined her to see if

she was crowning which she was not. We could not feel the baby move at all. We both placed stethoscopes on her and could not hear a sound from the baby. As best as we could we were beginning to think the worst, so after we were told that there would not be any more flights out, the command listened to us and got her and one more amputee to the Tahoma for medevac.

A short time later, I was shouted to by OS1 Sweetman to get to the small boat back to the Tahoma, a baby boy was born on the flight deck! What?

As I got in the small boat, a Lieutenant who I had never seen before was in the boat next to me. After 3 days of prayers God sent us a Flight Surgeon. Elias and I and many of our church members have been praying for a surgeon to help us. I apologize, as I write this at 2339 Hrs, after a long day, I can not recall his name.

The crew of the Tahoma delivered the baby. I know that OSC Watkins and DC2 Schrewsbury and about 15 others had parts in the delivery. The Flight Surgeon and I got there and assessed the health of the mother and baby boy. I took the vitals and listened to the baby's heart. It was making sounds now Elias! Pink, warm and well. The flight Surgeon lead the delivery of the placenta on the flight deck and several of us cleaned the baby after its first BM. Then they were medevaced off the hospital.

To my great joy, the Navy arrived. Two surgeons from the USS Carl Vinson and 3 Medical Corpsmen came to join us. Help has arrived. Tomorrow fresh minds will lead the clinic. To be honest with you, Elias and I could run the clinic for a 4th day, but we are slowing, just a bit, after making all the decisions at the camp involving medical care. I do not think I could pull a day 5.

Tomorrow, Elias and I will be able to perform the way we prefer. The Medical Officers make the tough calls and we follow their lead. Tomorrow we will get a break, I think, and take lesser roles.

However, we are told that we are starting earlier. Rather than leave for the clinic at 0830, tomorrow, which comes in 7 minutes, we leave at 0730.

I am writing this to wind down. Everyone on the CGC Tahoma and CGC Mohawk has a story to tell. There are dozens and dozens of stories of brave acts from the crew and the Haitian people. Oh, we all felt the earth shake today. It was a small but noticeable shake.

HS1 Larry J Berman
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USCGC TAHOMA (WMEC-908)
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