Humanitarian assistance supplies bound for relief effort in Japan

Story and photo by MC2(SW) Casey H. Kyhl, *USS Essex* Public Affairs

The forward-deployed amphibious assault ship *USS Essex* (LHD 2) on-loaded humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) supplies March 15 during a replenishment at sea in preparation for aiding Japan after it was hit by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami March 11.

More than 45 pallets of surgical masks, water containers, water purifying tablets, health and comfort packs, blankets and insect repellant were brought aboard during a vertical replenishment-at-sea with the dry cargo-ammunition ship *USNS Matthew Perry* (T-AKE 9). Essex can navigate the supplies ashore using its amphibious craft and air assets if tasked to assist with Operation Tomodachi in Japan.

"We are looking at how we can help the Japan Self-Defense Forces and how we can help move much-needed supplies to the people that need them the most," said Capt. Bradley Lee, Amphibious Squadron 11, commander. "As always, the safety of our Sailors and Marines is essential. We will take all the necessary precautions to make sure that we send people into a safe environment and that they are poised for success."

Essex Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) ships are capable of carrying out a variety of HADR operations using helicopters assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and the Navy's Helicopter Sea Control Squadron 25 or amphibious craft assigned to Beach Master Unit 1 and Assault Craft Unit 1.

During the replenishment-at-sea, *Essex* air and combat cargo departments worked to bring the supplies from the flight deck to the hangar bay where Sailors from supply department secured them for sea.

Sailors assigned to the amphibious assault ship *USS Essex* (LHD 2) watch as an MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter transports humanitarian assistance supplies from the Military Sealift Command dry cargo and ammunition ship *USNS Matthew Perry* (T-AKE 9) to *Essex* March 15. *Essex* is underway to Japan to provide humanitarian assistance following a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

"Supply is playing a major role in these HADR operations because we are in charge of coordinating all of the cargo we bring on board," said Logistics Specialist 2nd Class (SW/AW) Alejandra Gutierrezalba. "During any replenishment, everyone available from supply department is on hand to account for these supplies, organize them and get them into storage until they are needed. Of course, we couldn't do any of that without the 150-man working party of the ship's crew and Marines of the 31st MEU."

The supplies will remain aboard until *Essex* is specifically tasked to take part in Operation Tomodachi.

"*Essex* ARG Sailors and Marines see the suffering that is going on and we know that we can help. It's what we are trained to do," said Lee. "We can't wait to get on station to get started in helping Japan restore some normalcy in the affected areas."

"It's unfortunate that things like this happen, but this is our mission in the Navy," said Gutierrezalba. "I'm glad that we are out here ready to assist the Japanese people."

The *Essex* ARG is comprised of the forward-deployed amphibious assault ship *USS Essex* (LHD 2) and the dock landing ships *USS Harpers Ferry* (LSD 49), *USS Germantown* (LSD 42) and *USS Tortuga* (LSD 46).

USS John S. McCain, others takes part in SAR operations in Japan

Story and photo by MC1(SW) Talley Reeve, *USS John S. McCain* Public Affairs

The guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) departed from Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka March 12, to provide humanitarian assistance in support of earthquake and tsunami relief operations in Japan as directed.

"We had just pulled into Yokosuka when I got the word to head back out and proceed north. We're now part of the search and rescue operations taking place off of the coast of Japan," said *John S. McCain* Commanding Officer Cmdr. Matt Lehman.

"As a member of Destroyer Squadron 15 and the *George Washington* Carrier Strike Group, we'll be working side-by-side with *USS Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) and other Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) ships, helping with any humanitarian operations that come up," he added.

McCain's mission involves using rigid-hull inflatable boats to search for anything adrift in the water and providing support for any helicopter operations by acting as a refueling station; an operation also known as "lily padding."

"I'm really proud of my guys," said Lehman. "We got the call late at night, right when we returned from an exercise and here we are again doing our thing. It's a real testament to the all the Sailors in the U.S. Navy that we can get underway in such a short period. I'm proud to be part of this operation and I know we'll do the best we can do and help everyone we can."

McCain, along with the destroyers *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) and *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) will assist Japanese authorities off the Miyagi Prefecture of Japan to provide at-sea search and rescue recovery operations.

GM2 Levi Delker fires a line from the guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) to the Military Sealift Command fast combat support ship *USNS Bridge* (T-AOE 10) during a refueling at sea March 15. *McCain*, along with *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) and *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) will assist Japanese authorities to provide at-sea search and rescue operations off the coast of northern Japan in support of Operation Tomodachi.