Navy wraps up humanitarian assistance efforts in Indonesia

By MC2 Greg Johnson, CTF76 Indonesia HADR Public Affairs

The Navy concluded humanitarian assistance efforts in Indonesia Oct. 16, by redeploying military units that had been assigned to Amphibious Force U.S. 7th Fleet.

The withdrawal comes after the departure of *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85), forward-deployed from Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, and the amphibious transport dock *USS Denver* (LPD 9) earlier this week.

"I couldn't be more proud of the efforts of everyone who helped out over here," said Amphibious Force 7th Fleet Rear Adm. Richard Landolt. "We've had countless people come up to us and thank us for everything we've done, and it is a direct reflection of the hard work and sacrifice of our Sailors, Marines, soldiers and airmen."

Service members from all branches worked side by side throughout the joint-service operation, successfully delivering more than 182 tons of food, water and medical supplies. Medical personnel also treated almost 2,000 patients at the Humanitarian Assistance Rapid Response Team (HARRT) field hospital.

"The operation went pretty smooth," said Cmdr. Fred Rischmiller, Indonesian Humanitiarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) chief of staff. "We had a combined team on the ground and that truly facilitated dialogue between the services."

An AS332 Super Puma helicopter assigned to the Military Sealift Command dry cargo ship *USNS Richard E. Byrd* (T-AKE 4) departs the guided-missile destroyer *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) during a vertical replenishment Oct. 13. *McCampbell* is underway as part of Amphibious Force U.S. 7th Fleet at the request of the Indonesian government for assistance and support for humanitarian efforts.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Byron C. Linder

Supplies were delivered from Ta Bing Airfield in Padang, where the 353rd Special Operations Group (SOG) established a command and control center to coordinate communications and logistics between five U.S. military centers of operation. Pallets were delivered with CH-53E Sea Stallion and SH-60S Sea Hawk helicopters assigned to Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 265, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), as well as S-330J Super Puma helicopters assigned to *USNS Richard E. Byrd* (T-AKE 4). Those operations were primarily conducted using visual flight rules, due to the extensive damage caused by the earthquakes.

"This mission presented a real challenge because we were looking at landing in some pretty tight locations, and many of the navigation aids were destroyed in the earthquake," said Marine Lt. Dustin Howe, a Sea Stallion pilot with HMM-265. "Great communication with the 353rd's combat controllers and some pretty good flying were huge factors in the success of our mission."

Most of the members of the joint-service team brought experience from numerous previous humanitarian assistance missions.

"This is what we're trained to do," said Air Force Maj. John Traxler, 353rd SOG ground force commander. "We come into austere airfields, get established and get air operations going. It's a job that we're well-prepared to do and I feel everyone here did an outstanding job carrying out this mission."

For others however, the relief operation served as a learning experience.

"For me, basically, it's like being a college freshmen or an NBA rookie," said Airman 1st Class Robert Bell, assigned to the 353rd SOG. "Until you're put in the game, you don't really know what it's like. I've been waiting for my chance and finally got it. It feels really good to know that what we did out here made a difference."

Amphibious Force 7th Fleet, coordinated U.S. Navy assistance to victims of the recent earthquakes in West Sumatra with the Indonesian government. The efforts were conducted at the request of the Indonesian government and underscore the ability of naval forces to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.

Women will serve on submarines, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus says

By John Kruzel, American Forces Press Service

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus said Oct. 6 women soon will serve on submarines, suggesting a reversal of the long-standing ban by the Navy.

Appearing on Comedy Central's "*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*," Mabus signaled that the Navy is moving closer to allowing coed personnel on submarines.

"It will take a little while because you've got to interview people and you've got to be nuclear trained," he said.

Officials previously have cited a lack of privacy and the cost of reconfiguring subs as obstacles to allowing female crew members to serve aboard the vessels.

But Mabus is one of several top Navy officials recently to call for an end to the policy. The Navy secretary's comments yesterday amplify his previous endorsement of ending the ban.

"This is something the [chief of naval operations] and I have been working on since I came into office," Mabus, who was confirmed as Navy secretary in May, said last week. "We are moving out aggressively on this.

"I believe women should have every opportunity to serve at sea, and that includes aboard submarines," he told reporters following a tour of Northrop Grumman Corp.'s Newport News shipyard.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughhead acknowledged that special accommodations would be a factor in the decision, but one that's not insurmountable.

"Having commanded a mixed-gender surface combatant, I am very comfortable addressing integrating women into the submarine force," he said in a statement released earlier in the month. "I am familiar with the issues as well as the value of diverse crews."

Roughead said he has been personally engaged through the years in the Navy's debate of the feasibility of assigning women to submarines.

"There are some particular issues with integrating women into the submarine force – issues we must work through in order to achieve what is best for the Navy and our submarine force," he said. "This has had and will continue to have my personal attention as we work toward increasing the diversity of our Navy afloat and ashore."

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen addressed the issue with the Senate Armed Services Committee last month.

"I believe we should continue to broaden opportunities for women," Mullen is quoted as saying in response to written questions posed by the Senate Armed Services Committee. "One policy I would like to see changed is the one barring their service aboard submarines."

Mullen, a champion of diversifying the services, said this month that having a military that reflects the demographics of the United States is "a strategic imperative for the security of our country."

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus speaks to Marines following his tour of *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Aug. 29. Mabus said women soon will serve on submarines, while appearing on Comedy Central's "*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*," Oct. 6.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Kevin S. O'Brien