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## Navy ships provide critical resources in Haiti

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The Navy continues to play a major role in the Defense Department's efforts to help the people of Haiti, a senior naval officer said Jan. 27.

The Navy is providing hospital ships and off-shore sea bases of operation for Marine Corps units working on the ground and is carrying millions of pounds of food, medical equipment and other supplies to help the Haitian people recover from the Jan. 12 earthquake that devastated the island nation, Navy Rear Adm. Ted N. Branch, commander of Carrier Strike Group 1 aboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), told participants in a "DoDLive" blogger's roundtable.

The Navy is a small part of a broad international effort in Haiti, working in conjunction with dozens of non-governmental organizations, international groups and the Haitian government itself, Branch said. Because some of those organizations have worked in Haiti for years on other humanitarian missions, he added, they are familiar with local customs.

"What we're striving to do, and being able to do in many cases, is partner with [other organizations] and let them tell us the best places for relief distribution, the best contacts we need to make in the local community and local government and use their experience to our best advantage," Branch said. "We get them into the process and we keep them in the process [of providing aid and supplies]."

Fostering relationships among the Sailors, Marines, civilian aid workers and Haitian population is central to the relief effort, Branch said. Creating an environment the Haitians can uphold when no more aid is needed is one of the primary goals for the Navy and for the operation as a whole, the admiral said.

"Obviously, we're working here as an international team - we're working through the [United Nations] and through the government of Haiti," Branch said. "The objective is to make sure the Haitian people are able to sustain and the organizations that are helping them in that effort are fully in the mix, and in the lead, as we go forward."

So far, Branch's strike group has performed 1,979 flights, nearly 1,600 of which were mission-related operations, delivering personnel and supplies. Medical evacuations made up 375 of the sorties.

These flights made up "the bulk of the vertical lift used" in the Navy's effort, he said.

Branch said the Navy as a whole has brought more than a million pounds of cargo to Haiti, including 87,000 gallons of water, nearly 162 tons of food, 345,400 pounds of medical supplies, 75 tons of support equipment and 3,300 people to help in relief efforts.

Branch's group - which consists of 12 ships deployed to Haiti, including the Carl Vinson Strike Group ships, the USS Nassau (LHA 4) and USS Bataan (LHD 5) Amphibious Ready Groups and the hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) - is expecting a lengthy deployment. While no estimates have been given regarding the duration of operations in Haiti, it's been made clear by many officials that Operation Unified Response Haiti won't be a quick turnaround.

As long as they're needed, Branch said, his ships will stay there to help.

"We'll continue performing the missions and supporting the functions we've done since we arrived," he said. "In the 12 days we've been here, we've seen a lot of improvement and we're still making a difference. Today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today."

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