SRF-JRMC supports tsunami victims in northern Japan

Story and photo by Keichi Adachi, CFAY Public Affairs

The U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility and Japan Regional Maintenance Center (SRF-JRMC) Yokosuka, Japan has been heavily involved with Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) in coordinated efforts for Voluntary Military Assisted Departure (VMAD) and Operation *Tomodachi* (friend) since the launching of both efforts.

During the two weeks since the quake and tsunami of March 11 that devastated so much of northern Japan, SRF-JRMC has helped with the movement of personnel, provided essential information to employees, their families and other commands, raised donations for the victims, and helped ships get underway, including those in lengthy Chief of Naval Operations maintenance availabilities.

Volunteer members of the SRF-JRMC Spouses' Club, assisted by Department of Defense (DoD) civilian, military, and contractor personnel from the command, have been sorting and packaging new and used donation items to send to the victims of the disaster.

Since the third week of March, the volunteers have been accepting and sorting donations of clothing, food and other necessities in *Niban* (Number Two) and *Sanban* (Number Three) Towers, daily, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

SRF-JRMC military members, DoD civilians and contractors volunteer to sort various items and supplies donated for quake and tsunami victims before packaging them for shipment.

The team of volunteers first focused on winter clothing because the Japanese media reported that the weather in the areas where the victims took refuge was getting colder.

Afterward, the team also started accepting dry and canned foods and sanitary supplies, including adult and baby diapers.

"We originally focused on clothing because so many of the people in Northern Japan lost everything they owned," said Amy Cronin, president of the SRF-JRMC Spouses' Club and the Yokosuka Middle School Parent Teacher Organization. "Many escaped with only the clothing they were wearing. We decided to replace what basic necessities we could like diapers, wipes, bath products, toothpaste and other consumable items, along with winter clothing, jackets, footwear, socks, underwear and blankets. Once the relief efforts became better organized and transportation more readily available, we expanded our collection effort to include food and water, with the idea being if we were in this kind of situation, 'What would we want people to do for us, and what items would we need to survive?'"

In the beginning of the clothing drive, only Cronin and Sara Glatz, another SRF-JRMC spouse, were available to accept donations.

USS Cowpens (CG 63) Port Engineer Mark Moehlenbruck, who works at SRF-JRMC, soon joined them. According to Cronin, Moehlenbruck has been invaluable in arranging packing and shipping logistics.

Eventually, via word of mouth, postings on Facebook, posters at the Red Cross and Starbucks, and requests to the base schools, numerous volunteers have joined in the effort.

The volunteers helped organize the multitude of donations from the local community.

"A Japanese friend of mine told me that tons of donated items and supplies were sent to shelters, school gyms, and facilities for evacuated people," Sara Glatz said.

So far, the drive has exceeded all expectations.

"From this base we have sent six trucks of clothing and blankets, four trucks of diapers and wipes and water. We organized the shipment of four tons of donations from the Yokohama International School and we are arranging for four tons to be transported from a church in Tokyo," said Moehlenbruck.

According to Cronin, none of this would have been possible without the generosity of people and the help of all the volunteers.

SRF-JRMC Spouses' Club members and other volunteers from the Yokosuka community, sort donated items at Niban Tower bound for Japan quake and tsunami victims.

"We are successful because the people of CFAY, Ikego and Negishi housing detachments, and the surrounding community are willing to donate the items and time to make the relief effort work"

The people of the Tohoku (northern eastern) region of Japan are already benefiting from the humanitarian effort.

"The good thing is that we are making a difference and helping those in need," stated Cronin. "The items we have collected have reached those who need them most."

According to Cronin, the effort is ongoing as there are still many people in need.

"The drive will last as long as people are willing to give," Cronin said. "The earthquake victims not only lost their homes and belongings, but also their jobs and places of business. Their needs are not only immediate, but for the long term. We need to continually replace the consumable items, such as diapers, wipes, toothpaste, soap, food and water."

Additionally, SRF-JRMC Sailors have been helping load people and baggage onto buses at the VMAD processing centers located at the James D. Kelly Fleet Recreation Center and Personnel Support Detachment onboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY).

"…we're helping with the voluntary departure by carrying luggage and pets because many of the sponsors aren't here to help their family members," said Navy Diver 1st Class (DSW/AW) Clessie Simmons. "It's really important for us to help the families when our shipmates can't be here."

Helping to ensure that the SRF-JRMC efforts were well coordinated was Chief Interior Communications Technician (SW/AW) Courtney Tillman, who took on the role of "VMAD Coordinator." She performed two primary roles in keeping the command and families informed. Tillman was instrumental in gathering, packing and passing the large inflow of base and community information for the command and families. She also assisted in the processing of families requesting VMAD.

Many entities were involved from SRF-JRMC Administrative Department to the Navy Passenger Transportation Office and the Commercial Ticket Office to the VMAD Center at the Fleet Recreation Center. Tillman's contributions were invaluable as they kept the command, spouses and family members informed, and helped reduce stress, permitting SRF-JRMC employees to focus on their jobs and the mission to "Keep the 7th Fleet operationally ready".

To keep up with the hectic pace of the VMAD that was approved for military and civil service family members, it became apparent that getting the rapidly evolving information to everyone, including families, was a challenge. Facebook was the tool of choice used by CNFJ and CFAY. Therefore, and in less than two days, SRF-JRMC launched its own Facebook site to make it easier to share information with spouses and families, as well as employees who were on Temporary Additional Duty orders, or on leave.

The Facebook effort that Tillman led proved invaluable to distributing information quickly, 24 hours a day, and optimized SRF-JRMC coordination of VMAD for family members. The SRF-JRMC Facebook site also allows family members who leave Japan the opportunity to stay in touch with what is happening in Japan on a daily basis.

When the disasters struck, *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) and *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) were both in the midst of their respective Selective Restricted Availabilities (SRAs).

SRF-JRMC, in cooperation and coordination with Puget Sound Naval Shipyard was soon tasked with making both ships ready for sea and within 10 days after the earthquake; as requested, both ships were able to get underway on their own power. This was quite a feat as George Washington was almost exactly at the midway point of her 17-week SRA.

In the case of *Lassen*, SRA progress was about 60 percent, with nearly six weeks remaining until completion of the maintenance availability. Significant work that the SRF-JRMC team had to accomplish to get the ship underway included closing two major openings in the hull and laying new non-skid on the flight deck to certify *Lassen* for emergency helicopter operations. Approximately 300 production jobs were screened and deckplate engineering services provided to ensure *Lassen* was certified "safe for underway."

Most recently, SRF-JRMC Shop 99 Temporary Services assisted CFAY Port Operations in getting two water barges underway that the Navy donated to the government of Japan for use in cooling the crippled nuclear power plants at Fukushima Daiichi.

With the current state of disarray in norther Japan, the logistical support of SRF-JRMC is paramaount in helping to stabalize and improve the situation.

"Keeping the 7th Fleet operationally ready is the SRF-JRMC mission, and during times like these, when our ships are on station contributing countless hours to humanitarian aid efforts, it means that much more," said SRF-JRMC Master Chief Engineman (SW) Mike O'Brien. "In the words of my master labor contract (MLC) *Sensei* (instructor), Ryouichi Suzuki, '*Kizuna* (the bond that brings people together) is why it is important for not just SRF-JRMC, but for all of us to help those most in need.' Everyone at every level of the chain of command has given so much of their time and energy to support the relief effort – this is the American spirit, and why we are part of *Kizuna*."