Earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes

By Chaplain Douglas Vrieland

Once again the headlines are all about natural disasters. This time we are reading about tornados in the heartland of the United States. According to Stars and Stripes, a quarter or more of the city of Joplin, Mo., has been damaged - 2,000 buildings in all. This was the deadliest single tornado in 60 years. For those of us here in Japan, this news reminds us of our own experiences being in the headlines just three months ago following the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor meltdown that began March 11. Our lives continue to be affected by these events, as we face the call for conservation of electricity this summer and the threat of rolling blackouts.

Disasters like these affect us emotionally, even when we are not directly involved. Such comments as "our hearts are with you" and "we are praying for you," are automatic responses to the victims. There is a natural desire to reach out in some kind of tangible way, either through financial contributions, the collection of needed supplies such as food and blankets, or more directly by volunteering to help with the clean up.

The Yokosuka community is to be commended for the way they have reached out to the members of our host nation over the last few months. We collected somewhere in the neighborhood of 13,000 pounds of food, paper products, blankets and other items to distribute directly to the victims. Those who attend the services at the Chapel of Hope contributed more than $25,000 to the American Red Cross through the Religious Offering Fund - at a time when our attendance numbers were significantly down because of the voluntary evacuation of so many of our family members! Others in the Yokosuka military community gave to their favorite relief organizations directly.

We need to remember, however, that clean-up and relief efforts continue long after the media has moved on to the next big story. Volunteers continue to spend their vacations in Mississippi and Louisiana to help with the rebuilding effort following Hurricane Katrina, nearly six years after that record-setting storm. It is important that we do not forget the needs of those who have been affected by disaster, and that we continue to offer our support.

Here at the Chapel of Hope, with the support of Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen, we have designated all of the offering money collected on the first Saturday and Sunday of the month through October for the American Red Cross Japan relief efforts. Those who do not attend the services here on base are still encouraged to continue to provide support through your favorite charity to those who have been affected by natural disasters.

When we reach out to those who suffer, we are modeling God himself. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures constantly portray God as a God of compassion. For example, consider Psalm 103:8, a text that is echoed in Exodus 34:6 and Jonah 4:2 - "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." Jesus is pictured as a man of compassion in several places in the gospels. One of my favorites is Mark 6:34, "When Jesus… saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." When we reach out to those who are hurting, we become God's instruments of care and compassion. I can think of no more honorable way to invest our lives and our energy.

VFW ceremony honors veterans

Representatives of the United States, foreign militaries and the VFW pay their respects in the Yokohama Commonwealth War Cemetery of Hodogaya, during a Memorial Day Service May 29.

Story and photo by MC3 Matthew R. Cole, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States held their annual Memorial Day ceremony, in front of the mausoleum at the British Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Yokohama May 29.

Representatives from multiple branches of the American and allied military services came to honor their fallen service members.

"Every year the VFW holds a Memorial Day service the Sunday before Memorial Day," said Joseph Francis Mortimer, commander of District 2 mainland Japan Pacific area. "We're here so the public can benefit by remembering those who have gone before them. Giving them a chance to talk to those who provided us with the freedoms we have, and we benefit by being able to meet here and speak to other veterans, the young men and women who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, who may have not fought in the same war as us but have gone through the same things. It's a way to relate to each other."

The Yokohama Commonwealth War cemetery or the *Eirenpo Senshisha Bochi*, its Japanese name, contains the graves of Commonwealth service men and women who served and fell in Japan during World War II and those who died while in service to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force from 1946 to 1948.

"It's important to remember them, to remember friends in the past," said Lt. Col. Robert S. Peterson of the Marine attaché of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. "It's important because I'm still here and they're not, they gave the ultimate sacrifice."

A cross of sacrifice stands at three sections of the cemetery representing World War II forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand. The memorial at the north wall of the cemetery honors those who served with the occupational forces in Japan, also commemorating those who's burial or cremation information does not exist.

"It's incredibly important to come here and honor all the vets, because of what they have done effects every aspect of our liberty and our way of life," said Lorey-Eillen Geary, a member of the Navy Junior Reserves Officer Training Corps (NJROTC). "I'm proud to be here because every thing we have depends on those who served our country."

The Yokohama Commonwealth War Cemetery was built in 1945 and is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on behalf of the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Pakistan.

FISC Yokosuka hosts Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month gala

By H. Sam Samuelson, FISC Yokosuka Office of Corporate Communication

Employees, families and guests joined to celebrate Asian-Pacific American Heritage at the headquarters of U.S. Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Yokosuka May 26.

The elaborate commemoration featuring song, dance, demonstration and display, highlighted FISC Yokosuka's diverse workforce said FISC Commanding Officer Capt. Matt Feely, during opening remarks.

"This year, we are celebrating diversity, leadership and empowerment," Feely said. "These are the distinct qualities that differentiate people who were raised in different cultures, with different cultural norms and sometimes vastly different world views. And yet, we can see that – while those of us with different backgrounds may not share a cultural past – we often benefit from coming together to pursue a common vision of the future."

Feely used the occasion to recognize the efforts of FISC to assist Japan following the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

"Let me take just a second to make a final comment about our diversity and leadership," he said. "Following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated northern Japan – and the subsequent issues associated with the Fukushima Daiichi power plant – I cannot think of a more inspiring and meaningful example of diversity and leadership in action when every great member of this command responded to the immediate and ongoing needs of our host country citizens.

"I would suggest that the level of devotion to the assistance we provided from every level of this command was – in fact – a perfect example of the power of diversity and leadership that formed a basis for the extraordinary work you did."

(Second from right) FISC Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Matt Feely joins FISC employees LS1 Lenworth Griffith, Rie Hamano, Cassandra Allen, MM3 Shrese Davis, SH1 Showandra Williams and LS1 Man Yin Chan, who are wearing traditional Japanese kimono during a FISC Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month celebration May 26.

Photo by Yohsuke Onda

Presented under covered awning of the FISC main building outdoor veranda, the program included traditional Thai dancing and concluded with a special selection of diverse Asian cuisine.

"This is always an occasion that I feel especially proud to express my thanks for diversity and the opportunities I was presented by joining the U.S. Navy," said Lt. Rhyss Hizon, the celebration's guest speaker, who has held numerous assignments at FISC, from security officer to customer service officer. "My story is the American dream. I left my country 22 years ago, went half-way around the world, and learned important lessons: hard work, the patience to bear sacrifice, the courage to dream and the confidence to live life to the fullest in service to humanity and country."