Lassen Sailors participate in Thailand flood relief efforts

Story and photo by MC1 Johnie Hickmon, *USS Lassen* Public Affairs

BANGKOK, Thailand – Approximately 40 Sailors from the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) provided manpower to assist in flood relief assistance efforts at the National Blood Center at the Thai Red Cross Central Distribution Center in Bangkok.

The ship moored at Laem Chabang on Nov. 16 to provide assistance to victims of flooding that claimed hundreds of lives and left many without food, water and basic supplies beginning in late July. Working in conjunction with the Thai Red Cross Society, Sailors helped to load more than 6,000 supplies onto trucks that would be distributed throughout the areas affected by the floods. The supplies were donated to the center from various local and international communities and organizations.

Although the work was strenuous, Cryptologic Technician (Technical) 2nd Class Casey Brown said volunteering for the event was only natural, considering the U.S. and Thailand frequently work together during exercises such as Cobra Gold.

"I think us being here shows our support for the government and people of Thailand," he said. "We're always willing to help when it's needed."

For Fire Controlman 1st Class Justin Baudier, he said he could relate to the pain the flood victims are going through. As a native of New Orleans, he understands the struggles the victims are enduring.

"It can take a long time to recover from something like this," he said. "That's the main reason I decided to volunteer today."

In addition to helping with supplies, a few Sailors decided to take volunteering a step further by donating blood during a blood drive. Sonar Technician (Surface) 2nd Class Joseph Johnson said although he had never donated blood before, he volunteered to do it because it was the right thing.

"People need it," he said. "It's all about answering the call of duty in their time of need."

Several workers at the center, including the assistant head nurse for the Red Cross, Wallapa Suksirimuch, said they were thankful for all the help the Sailors provided.

(Center) SH2 Lillian Caulker and EMFN Leslie Candido from the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) place a box of food onto a pallet at the Thai Red Cross central distribution center Nov. 18. *Lassen* is assisting with disaster relief efforts for victims of flooding in the Kingdom of Thailand.

"We appreciate all their hard work today," she said. "Many blessings to them."

Lassen Command Master Chief Jason Haka told the Sailors how he was proud of the hard work and long hours they provided during the event.

"Herculean job," he said. "Great work! Great work!"

USS Blue Ridge completes sea trials after maintenance period

Story and photo by MC3 Mel Orr, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) completed three days of sea trials after extensive training, a planned maintenance period and a successful light off assessment.

According to *Blue Ridge* Damage Control Assistant, Lt. Jerry Belmonte, the crew was fully-engaged in preparations leading up to sea trials after a two-month maintenance period with Ship Repair Facility (SRF) at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka.

Flanked by QMSNs Korey Booker and Rodger Weaver, QMC Andrey Mihaylovski points towards a navigational aid to assist on the bridge wing aboard U.S. 7th Fleet command flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Nov. 16 as the ship returns to its forward-deployed port in Yokosuka, Japan. *Blue Ridge* was underway conducting sea trials after a two-month routine maintenance period.

"We conducted testing on equipment that was repaired during SRF to ensure everything worked properly," Belmonte said. "The crew put in a tremendous level of hard work to get the job done right and it paid off."

Such testing included bringing the ship to full power, flexing the boiler plants, and testing relief valves, boiler safety and electrical generator plants.

Additionally, crew members participated in damage control exercises, proving proficiency within repair lockers and setting material conditions of readiness in an expeditious manner.

"The Engineering Department and program managers performed safely and professionally throughout the assessment in demonstrating material checks and program reviews," said Commander Task Force 76 Training and Readiness Officer and Senior Engineering Assessor, Lt. Cmdr. Eric Williams, "The engineering spaces were at the highest standards of material readiness, looked amazing and minimum discrepancies were noted. All programs are in place and program managers are heavily engaged."

Leading up to sea trials, engineers put in long hours to get ready for a light off assessment, which was conducted by Expeditionary Strike Group 7 with assistance from Afloat Training Group Western Pacific. The ship's engineering department conducted a series of checks and a main space fire drill as part of the assessment. During the assessment, each engineering system was verified as functional.

"Failing this assessment was not an option," Engineering Department Leading Chief Petty Officer, Master Chief Machinist's Mate (SW) Gilfredo Belantes said. "Our Sailors were motivated to provide a quality example of damage control knowledge and ship readiness."

Blue Ridge Commanding Officer Capt. Dan Grieco, expressed his appreciation to the crew for its efforts in getting the ship ready.

"I am tremendously proud of the crew's performance during Sea Trials," Grieco said. The entire team pulled together to make this a success.

"I give great credit to the engineers, combat systems technicians and flight deck teams for their tireless efforts to return the ship to underway operations and full certification after an extensive maintenance period," he added.

Blue Ridge is commanded by Capt. Daniel Grieco and serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7/Task Force (CTF) 76. Blue Ridge is the command ship for Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa Japan with an operations detachment in Sasebo, Japan.