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PACAF specialized medical team conducts a first for peacetime missions

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JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR HICKAM, Hawaii -- Pacific Air Forces deployed the first-ever peace time Critical Care Air Transport Team to transfer a critically-ill patient from Naval Hospital, Guam, to Tripler Army Medical Center, Hawaii, Nov. 17.

The CCATT is a specialized, three-person medical team whose primary mission is to provide critical care management for critically ill or injured patients who require transport to advanced medical treatment facilities. The team was alerted and within three hours, boarded a commercial airliner to meet the aeromedical evacuation crew and KC-135 Statotanker in Guam and successfully transported the patient to Tripler within 24 hours.

"This was a very successful mission for our team and a great way to start our first peace-time mission here in Hawaii," said Maj. (Dr.) Aaron Fields, PACAF's CCATT East element chief, who is an anesthesiologist and an intensivist. "Transporting the patient to Tripler safely and expeditiously was our primary concern. The patient is now receiving more advanced medical treatment."

The 13th Air Force Surgeon General's Theater Patient Movement Requirements Center-Pacific here, which oversees PACAF's two CCATTs, received the urgent request for a cardiac patient from the Naval Hospital through the Transportation Command Regulating and Command and Control System on Nov. 16.

The PACAF CCAT is a limited, rapidly deployable resource with an East element positioned at Tripler Army Medical Center and a West element positioned at the U.S. Naval Hospital, Camp Lester, Okinawa, Japan, to maintain clinical sustainment skills. Together the teams support, on average, more than 30 high-acuity missions per year in the Pacific Theater. CCATT East element will routinely support missions east of the international dateline, while CCATT West element will routinely support missions west of the international dateline.

However, these operating locations are not static for the two CCATT elements. On Nov. 22, CCATT West element supported a patient movement request from Naval Hospital, Guam, for a brain hemorrhage patient requiring urgent transport for neurosurgical intervention at Tripler. CCATT West element was alerted and within three hours joined the 18th Aeromedical Squadron crew at Kadena Air Base, Japan, to travel via KC-135 to Guam to prepare the patient for transport to Hawaii.

CCATTs were designed around a war-time model and have traditionally supported contingencies like Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. What is unique about CCATT East and West is they are designed around a peacetime mission. During peacetime movements, CCATTs transport critically ill beneficiaries of the military health care system, as well as supporting humanitarian assistance missions such as airplane crashes and natural disasters.

"Deploying the CCATT in support of peace-time missions is a tremendous step forward in transporting critically ill patients to more advanced care facilities," said Major Fields. "This reduces the burden on other operational assets that are supporting the mission in other ways."

The team can provide care to critically ill or injured patients with multi-system trauma, shock, burns, respiratory failure, multiple organ failure, or other life-threatening complications. Each team can care for a maximum patient load of three critically injured, monitored patients, or six lower acuity stabilized patients during a realistic duty day of 16 hours of patient care. CCATTs are equipped to provide sustaining medical care until the patient is transported to an advanced treatment center. The team can create and operate a portable intensive care unit on board any commercial or military transport aircraft during flight, including the KC-135 Statotanker and the C-17 Globemaster III.

The CCATT is normally an additional duty for medical personnel; however, for PACAF East and West elements, the CCATT is their primary job.

"With the CCATT being our primary job we greatly increase our chances of a successful mission because we get to consciously focus on this mission alone as well as training and working with the same personnel for pretty much every mission," said Major Fields.

The CCATT members receive 10 days of training at the U.S. Air Force School of Aeromedicine, Brooks City-Base, Texas, and two weeks of at the Air Force's Center for Sustainment of Trauma and Readiness Skills for the CCATT Advanced Course at University Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, where they receive more advanced medical training using human and aircraft simulators, clinical immersion, and practice new skills on a live aeromedical evacuation mission.

The PACAF CCATT is on 24 hour stand-by and prepared to respond to any medical mission in the Asia-Pacific region within three hours and is augmented by the 13th Air Force Surgeon General's Joint Medical Attendant Transport Team here.
