

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH REAR ADMIRAL TED BRANCH,
COMMANDER, CARRIER STRIKE GROUP ONE, ABOARD THE USS CARL VINSON, VIA
TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: OVERALL NAVAL EFFORT TO OPERATION UNIFIED
RESPONSE-HAITI TIME: 11:00 A.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense
for Public Affairs): I would just like to welcome you all to the
Department of Defense's bloggers roundtable for Tuesday, January 27th --

ADM. BRANCH: Hello. Admiral Branch here.

LT. CRAGG: Great. Hello, sir. Thank you so much for attending
today's bloggers roundtable.

ADM. BRANCH: Hello. This is Admiral Branch. Can you hear me?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, sir. We can hear you loud and clear. ADM.
BRANCH: Okay. I understand loud and clear. Who am I talking to on the
other end, please?

LT. CRAGG: Sir, this is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg. I'm with
Defense -- (inaudible). I'll be moderating today's bloggers roundtable.

And sir, we'll go ahead and get started. If it's okay for you,
I'm just going to introduce you, and if you'd like to start with an
opening statement and then we'll go to questions. I just wanted to let
everybody know, my name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of
the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and I'll be moderating the
call today.

A notice to the bloggers and online journalists, please remember
to clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking
your question. And an admin note, if you haven't put your phone on mute
or if you have to put your phone on hold, please, don't put it on hold;
drop the call, call back in. If you put it on hold, we'll hear your hold
music. Please put your phone on mute also.

Without further ado, I'd like to introduce you to U.S. Navy Rear
Admiral Ted Branch. He's the commander of Carrier Strike Group One

aboard USS Carl Vinson. Without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir. Rear Admiral Branch, if I could start with an opening statement and we'll go to questions. Sir, the floor is yours.

I think I might be having technical difficulties, everybody on the line. So as soon as they can hear us, we'll go ahead with questions. Lieutenant Commander Cronnan (ph), can you hear me?

MR. : Hello.

LT. CRAGG: Yes.

MR. : Hello. Carl Vince -- (inaudible) -- group here. Are you still on the line?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, sir. We're still on the line. We're ready. If you'd like to start with an opening statement, sir, please go ahead.

ADM. BRANCH: Okay. Thank you very much. This is Admiral Ted Branch, the commander of Task Force 41. That's the Joint 4th Maritime component commander in charge of development of the naval forces down here off the coast of Haiti, supporting this earthquake relief.

In our 12th day here now with Carl Vinson and the embarked helicopters that we have aboard, we continue to provide relief, aid and assistance to the international effort, the government of Haiti and interagency effort here for earthquake relief. Our mission is essentially unchanged since we got here. We provide the bulk of the vertical lift that's being used in this effort and assist with command and control of those assets. I've been around throughout the area of operations both on the ships at sea and ashore with the Marines and the Navy units that are doing relief aid work on the fore, and I can tell you, the sailors and Marines that are out here doing this work are motivated, they are -- they really feel like they're making a difference. They're very proud to be here doing what they do and they're doing just an absolutely bang-up terrific job. With that, I'll take your questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Dale, please go ahead.

Dale Kissinger, please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. This is Dale from MilitaryAvenue.com. I had a question about how much medical supplies, water, MREs and sorties that your aircraft have flown and ships have provided. Can you give us an update on that?

ADM. BRANCH: So far we've flown 19 -- I think -- well, this is as of close of business yesterday -- we've flown 1979 sorties. Of those -- of that number, 1595 of them were mission drops or LV operations delivering either people or relief supplies into the affected areas. That's about 900 flight hours. So far we've conducted 375 medical evacuations.

Total cargo pushed by the Navy down here so far is 1,183,300 pounds. Of that, about 87,000 gallons of water, 161.6 tons of food, 34,000 -- I'm sorry, 345,300 pounds of medical supplies, about 3300 personnel, and 75 tons of support -- (inaudible). Over.

Q Yes, sir. That's great. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Dale. Thank you, sir. Laslo, please go ahead.

Q Good morning, sir. This is Laslo -- (inaudible) -- a Hungarian news correspondent -- (inaudible).

My question to you is what are the difficulties you are facing aboard USS Carl Vinson? Thank you.

ADM. BRANCH: We've gotten better every day with our procedures and our flow. Right now, we really don't have -- I wouldn't say we have too many hard spots with the Carl Vinson and its distribution efforts and its flow from the sea base. Obviously in Haiti, there are still issues with the road distribution networks and the ability to get food on the ground wherever it needs to go. There are some places obviously that are not conducive to resupply by helicopter, particularly in the downtown areas and whatnot.

And the World Food program, USAID, the Joint Task Force, the U.N., the international coalition has made significant progress in trying to work through those and discuss (?) the challenges, and get that relief where it needs to be. We're still participating in that effort, but we are in support of that from the standpoint of we bring the vertical lift relief society and asset where that's appropriate and desired.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Laslo. Phil, please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. Phil Ewing with the Scoop Deck Blog in Washington.

I wanted to ask about how Marines' V-22 Ospreys have been figuring into your flight ops down there. Are you using them for all of the missions you would use your normal helos for, or do they have special jobs or how has that been working?

ADM. BRANCH: We've been able to use the V-22s for everything we use helos for and others. The mass RR (ph) and --24th MEU with the V-22s embarked has used those assets to do aerial reconnaissance and ground surveys. What they will do is they will get assigned areas -- they will be assigned to the certain areas where -- (inaudible) -- land with the Marines out on the ground to interact with the local population, make contact with the NGOs, the government of Haiti officials and the U.N.

They will assess conditions in those places, both medical capacity, medical supplies, food and water, population, whether or not their injuries are beyond the scope of that area to treat in clinics or hospitals. They can do medevacs and have them medevac'd with the V-22s.

So we utilize them fairly extensively in that regard. We also utilize them back and forth to our logistics -- (inaudible) -- Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for a lift. Obviously the V-22 has a substantial capacity to bring in relief supplies and other logistic concerns, and the airspeed, the fact that it has a much higher airspeed than a regular heavy-lift helicopter makes it particularly effective in that role also. As we continue our mission, I see the V- 22 being increasingly used in those capacities. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Phil. Paul, please go ahead. Q All right. Paul McLeary from DTI.

I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about how you're working with and through NGOs, other civilian agencies and international partners. Is it all go into SOUTHCOM at the JTF Haiti?

ADM. BRANCH: Well obviously JTF Haiti is our immediate commander on the scene down here. There's a very concerted effort to work with and through the government of Haiti, the U.N., the non-governmental organizations where we find them. And in fact, we've found here in Haiti that the non-governmental organizations, there are many of them and they have been here in some cases for many years. They have the local contacts, they have the local knowledge.

And what we are striving to do and what we've been able to do in these cases is partner with them and make them help us -- make them tell us the best places for relief distribution, the best -- the contacts that we need to make in the local community with the village leadership, and use their -- use their information and their experience to the best advantage to help get them into a process and keep them in the process.

The best example probably in our operations of that is the 22nd MEU. It's embarked in -- (inaudible) -- amphibious ready group. They are working primarily out to the southwest of Port-au-Prince, and they have been very involved in -- (inaudible) -- beach, where they had a Haitian -- coast guard -- where there is a Haitian coast guard station, you know, working with Sisters Mission Hospital Outreach, Operation Blessing -- (inaudible) -- Orphanage. Moving down the coast to -- (inaudible) -- again, there are another four or five NGOs and international organizations working with us there.

Onto the west in -- (inaudible) -- area, NGOs, Doctors Without Borders, Lifeline Christian Mission, U.S. Medical Teams, Star of Hope International, Heart to Heart Haiti. And moving on down further in the -- (inaudible) -- U.N. and program manager is down there, Cooperative Housing Foundation, international United Brothers Association for the Development of the -- (inaudible) -- Jesuit Missionary, National Police Directorate, Engineer Ministries, International Missionary Adventures and the list goes on and on.

So obviously we're working here as an international team. We're working through the U.N. We're working through the government of Haiti. And the objective is to make sure that the Haitian people are able to sustain and the organizations that are helping in that effort are fully in the mix and in the lead as we go forward. Over.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Paul. Dan, please go ahead.

Q Yes. Dan Deluse (ph) with Agence France-Presse, AFP. I wanted to ask you how has the role of the strike group evolved since you first arrived, and how do you see it progressing now in the coming weeks. And do you have any even rough idea of how long that division will be out there?

ADM. BRANCH: Well that last question first. We're here until we're relieved, and those decisions will get made at a higher level than me, certainly. We're still employed, we're still I think making a difference out here and we will continue performing the missions and supporting the functions that we had done since we arrived. I'll tell you that we've gotten better, as you'd expect. You know, 12 days later we've gotten better as we've gone -- today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today.

We keep -- we're refining our processes and smoothing -- (inaudible) -- the command-and-control functions that we exercised. Obviously with practice and experience we've streamlined those and made them better. And our -- (inaudible) -- group was I think really quite good. So as long as there is a need for us here, we'll continue to operate and function as we have. Over.

Q If I could just follow up, how would you describe your mission and your role now compared to -- you know, when you first arrived? Is it basically the same fundamentally even though some details might change?

ADM. BRANCH: It is fundamentally the same. We came down here with a large-deck aircraft carrier and 19 helicopters that will provide the vertical lift that was absent. There is still no replacement for that vertical lift. I mean, we -- by and large, the Navy helicopters that are down here are certainly the bulk of the U.S. armed forces (?). The Navy and Marines -- the Navy and Marines helicopters that are here have provided the bulk of the vertical lift that's on scene.

And, you know, that vertical lift is used to -- (inaudible) -- of relief supplies, move people around. You know, these are things that we can do -- distribution points and what not as we have since we got here.

The process on the ground has gotten better like everything else. You know, we go through control distribution points with those is

helicopter assets. Either -- (inaudible) -- helicopters offloaded onto the ground and have it directly under control of USAID, World Food program, U.N. at that site, or in some cases, particularly in the southwest where the -- (inaudible) -- MEU are operating, we take the -- vertically take supplies into landing zones or we bring them in across the beach from the -- (inaudible) -- offshore, and then we partner with the U.N. and NGOs and we transport those supplies to the various distribution sites that are being run by those agencies. So we don't do the distribution at the point of arrival of the supplies; we further transport from there with the ground-based transportation assets that the Marines have brought with them, and then hand it over to the organizations that are in place to do the distribution.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dan. I know that one other person joined us. Can I get your name, please.

Q Yes, this is Richard Lowry with -- (inaudible, off mike).

LT. CRAGG: Great, Richard. I just sent you a note so thank you. Richard, go with your question, please.

Q Yes, Admiral.

Could you please tell me how many ships you have -- (off mike) -- and how aircraft you're using?

ADM. BRANCH: Right now we have -- I have a 11 -- I'm sorry, I have 12 ships that are under my control, under my -- (inaudible) -- and there are five in addition to that. We have two other ships. I can run down the names of those if you don't have them. I don't know if you want to use the bandwidth here for me to do that or if you want to follow up with that in an e-mail.

But I have -- in big terms, I have the Carl Vinson strike group -- (inaudible) -- Carl Vinson and the crews of Bunker Hill. We also have the crews of Normandy and the -- (inaudible) -- frigate Underwood down here. And then we have the ships of the Baton Arg and the Nasal Arg, along with USS Pumper. Those are the ships that are under my control.

Also in addition to that, we have U.S. -- (inaudible) -- and USNS Tinson (ph) where are here to participate in -- (inaudible) -- opening, and they are working for Task Force 42. He's in charge -- Admiral -- (inaudible) -- he's in charge of the -- (inaudible) -- effort.

Also here are some military -- (inaudible) -- command ships, the Jack Neumass (ph) -- (inaudible) -- and the big horn. Jack Neumass (ph) brought down heavy equipment rolling stock and some -- (inaudible) -- and port-opening-type equipment and the -- (inaudible) -- are -- (inaudible) -- in fact, we're doing another way -- Carl Vinson is doing another -- (inaudible) -- as we make this phone call with people on the one side getting fuel and -- (inaudible) -- on the other side -- (inaudible) -- getting us supplies by vertical replenishment. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Richard. And since we're coming to a close to the blogger roundtable today, I wanted to make sure, is there any follow-on questions from anyone? Any lingering questions leftover?

Q Yes, I'd like to ask one more if I may.

LT. CRAGG: And who is this? I apologize. Q This is Phil Ewing with Scoop Deck.

LT. CRAGG: Phil, please go ahead.

Q Admiral, I just wanted to ask very quickly if you could tell us how you're using your qudez (ph) and frigate ships that you have down there: Higgins, Normandy, Bunker Hill, and Underwood. What jobs have you given them and what tasks have they been doing as part of this effort?

ADM. BRANCH: Well, all of them, as you know, are helo-capable ships. And so in the initial stages they were here as another landing platform and another place that helicopters could get fuel and help in the relief effort as we started out.

As we have evolved, they continue to perform that function. In the case of the cruisers, we do -- they help maintain the air -- (inaudible) -- they help maintain the link and the service and air -- (inaudible) -- assets in the area for better situational awareness and -- (inaudible) -- and control. Those are kind of coordinating functions for those guys to do.

In addition to that though and especially in the last probably week or eight days, we have pushed those -- (inaudible) -- or assets out along the both in the Southern -- (inaudible) -- of Haiti here and on Laganobi (ph) Island, around Laganobi (ph) Island. They find where people need help. And there has been reporting on that already, particularly with Bunker Hill and I think the Higgins had some pieces in the press.

But what they would typically do is they'll have an embarked helo or we will -- if they don't have a helo then on board, we will give them a helo -- (inaudible) -- of the day -- (inaudible) -- aerial survey, find villages, fishing villages, towns where assessments have not been done, and they'll either go in by helicopter or they'll go in by small boat, meet the local leaders, engage with any NGOs or nongovernmental organizations or other authorities that they might find, and determine what need is required on the fore, and then they'll fill that need.

They'll make -- (inaudible) -- very often they'll find a need for medical supplies. We have sent medical teams on board and helped treat people that were beyond the capability of the local clinics or doctors to take of, and in some cases, we've medevac'd people out of those villages. And we'll have a revisit rate and try to get them up and running.

Particularly noteworthy are the engineering capabilities that these Navy ships bring with them, and they have been able on a number of occasions to repair generators, repair wells, water wells -- (inaudible) -- pumps and some distribution infrastructure to obviate the need for continued relief supplies of water and basic necessities. A lot of these places that we're visiting, we've found that while there has been some earthquake damage there, in some cases significant earthquake damage, in some cases less, there's been -- (inaudible) -- all of them in that they in many cases got their supplies from Port- au-Prince, and obviously with all of the damage in Port-au-Prince, that supply line has been broken. And so in several of these cases, the U.S. Navy sent the small decks -- (inaudible) -- have been the first contact these people have had with the outside since the quake.

They have really made a remarkable difference. And I'll tell you, for the sailors that are on those ships to be able to go in and see the appreciation of the people on the ground when they come in and they bring those supplies is really heartwarming for the sailors and it really makes them feel like they're filling a need and doing something worthwhile. Over.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

Q Jennifer, I have one more quick question. This is Dale from Military Avenue.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, quick, Dale. We're going to wrap up.

Q Yes, sir.

Admiral, how many patients have the ships been able to treat in their hospital capability?

ADM. BRANCH: You know what, I don't have that number right in front of me as far as total numbers. Let me see if I can scramble around in the pile of paper here. On Carl Vinson -- on Carl Vinson, we've had 60 patients pass through here. I think the number on Baton was in the 20s so far. Let us get back to you with those numbers. I don't happen to have it in front of me.

Suffice it to say, that all of the large decks, the Carl Vinson, the -- (inaudible) -- the Baton have all taken Medevacs. They've all treated patients here. Typically, I would -- (inaudible) -- what we'll do is we'll take the patients onboard. The first -- (inaudible) -- the first priority, the first -- the site of first resort is the Comfort. If we can take them directly there, we do. Comfort has a throughput; they can only take so many.

And when we find that there are more within that, what we'll do is we'll take them to the other ship, whether it's Carl Vinson -- (inaudible) -- Baton. We'll treat those Medevacs there, stabilize them there. And then if they're releasable from there, then we'll cycle them through the Comfort for release. If not, if they need higher quality or

higher level of care, then we'll take them over to the Comfort when there's time to do that and process them that way. Over.

Q Thank you, sir. LT. CRAGG: And everyone on the call, when I get those update numbers, I'll make sure all of you get that along with the transcript. And with that, I'll pass it over.

MR. : This is Lieutenant Commander Jim -- (inaudible). I'll send the numbers to you.

LT. CRAGG: Roger that. Thank you, sir. So I'll make sure everybody on the call today gets those numbers. With that, I'm going to turn it back over to Rear Admiral Branch. If you'd like to close with any closing statements.

MR. : Is that it from our end?

LT. CRAGG: Good, the floor is yours again. Sir, do you have any closing thoughts for today?

MR. : Hello. Is that it?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, no, if you have any closing thoughts. Before we wrap up the roundtable, I wanted to turn it back to you if you have any closing thoughts, sir.

ADM. BRANCH: Yeah, you know, back on the patient care question, I do have the number for Comfort. Comfort has treated 1427 patients and performed more than 93 surgeries since her arrival. And currently there are 346 patients onboard the Comfort. So the Comfort has been a busy place. And again, we'll fill in the holes with the rest of those numbers. I should have had that in front of me; I didn't.

Just in closing, I want to say again we're -- I think this is important work. And I think if you ask any of our sailors and Marines what they've done in Haiti, they will probably tell you that they have had the opportunity to really make a difference in people's lives. And it has meant a great deal for the sailors and Marines that have been in the effort to know that they were part of this great relief, worldwide great relief effort.

It is a whole government approach. It's support to the government of Haiti, it's support for the U.N., it's support for the NGOs. And working with the interagency and all of those actors that are down there, I think we have really done some great work here for the people of Haiti. I'll tell you, it's not going to be solved in the short-term. The conditions on the ground are still -- you look out there at that other station and it takes your breath away. But like I said, we make -- we get better every day. There's progress every day on the ground and I think things are moving in the right direction. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And to wrap up today's blogger roundtable, I want to remind everybody that you can get a copy of the transcript produced by Federal News from

www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtable. There you will find the transcript as well as the audio file and a story from today's roundtable. With that, you've been listening to U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Ted Branch, commander carrier Strike group one aboard USS Carl Vinson. Thank you, sir. And thank you for the callers on today's bloggers roundtable. This concludes today's event.

END.