



MEBA member Eric Berndt and his wife Soona Kim were in Ko Lanta, Thailand by the beach at the time the Tsunami struck. The area absorbed a good deal of damage though the degree of destruction was considerably less than in other afflicted areas. Eric snapped a few photos as the onslaught developed before he was forced to flee. Here, at 11:00 a.m. on Dec. 26, a seismic wave gets ready to smash onto the beach.

MEBA SHIPS SURGE INTO S.E. ASIA ON TSUNAMI RELIEF MISSIONS

Some of the same vessels that had joined the fray in the Persian Gulf in support of our warfighters are pouring into Tsunami devastated areas of Southeast Asia on a mission of mercy. The horrific death toll spurred by the December 26th earthquake and subsequent Tsunami was approaching 300,000 souls at the time of this writing.

In the largest humanitarian relief operation in recent memory – termed Operation Unified Assistance – the U.S. military committed thousands of marines and sailors into the region to help staunch the bleeding.

A dozen Military Sealift Command Auxiliary vessels (with MEBA mariners aboard), that normally support Naval carrier groups, were promptly diverted to help alleviate the suffering in that region. They immediately set out to deliver critical food, medicine, fuel and construction equipment among other supplies that will help the devastated region begin a recovery that will stretch well into the future.

Two MSC fleet replenishment oilers -- USNS TIPPECANOE and USNS JOHN ERICSSON, as well as combat stores ships USNS SAN JOSE and USNS CONCORD initially got the call to provide fuel and other supplies to Navy ships in the area and for relief activities ashore. The MSC fast combat support ship USNS RAINIER is one of the MEBA vessels that support the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN carrier strike group. The LINCOLN and her contingent proved to be a major contributor to the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Another vessel crewed with MEBA officers that was summoned into action was the Maritime Prepositioning ship SS MAJ. STEPHEN W. PLESS. The PLESS helped transport equipment and supplies to support Marines as well as food,

fuel, medical supplies, construction and road building equipment, electrical power generating equipment and airfield matting.

The MEBA crewed MSC hospital ship, the USNS MERCY, was one of the more recognizable vessels sailing onto the scene. The ship, resembling a giant first aid kit, was activated from reduced operating status in San Diego on Jan. 1 and was underway five days later. The 894-foot ship, which has one of the nation's largest trauma centers on board, will serve as an enabling platform for relief efforts for the next several months. MERCY's medical staff was further augmented with a humanitarian assistance crew.

Lastly, two MSC oceanographic ships under MEBA contract were ordered into the affected area. Members aboard the Horizon Lines-managed USNS MARY SEARS and USNS JOHN McDONNELL, sailed from Japan days after the tragedy. The ships are conducting hydrographic surveys of the ocean bottom where the 9.0 magnitude earthquake occurred. They are mapping harbors and coastal channels in the area to identify navigational hazards and potential obstacles left by the tsunami. Once collected, survey data will be distributed to relief ships and involved countries, to ensure the safe delivery of badly needed supplies and personnel throughout the area.

MEBA is immensely saddened by this tragedy. Our prayers continue to go out to the victims and their families. ■



The hospital ship USNS MERCY departed her West Coast berth in January.



The MERCY carried a full engine room as she sailed for South Asia. The MEBA crew brought the plant up on New Year's Eve and deployed on January 5th. Left to right are 1st A/E Lars Andres, 2nd A/E Dan Zelenka, 3rd A/E Luis Torres and 3rd A/E George Burden. Not pictured are C/E Joseph Watts, 2nd A/E Bruce Johnson, 3rd A/E Fred Smith, 3rd A/E Michael Deramus, 3rd A/E Nick Washington and 3rd A/E Jason Kang. Cadet Dustin Wallace also sailed with the engine crew.



A restaurant close to the beach in Ko Lanta, Thailand begins to succumb to the forces of nature following seismic wave #3. Thanks to Eric Berndt and Soonae Kim for the photo.