

USNS Mercy Returns to San Diego, Concluding Pacific Partnership 24-1



By Ensign Lacy Burkett

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SAN DIEGO – Pacific Partnership 24-1 personnel assigned to the hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) returned home today as the ship pulled in to Naval Air Station North Island, concluding the four-month humanitarian and disaster relief mission.

More than 800 service members and civilian mariners returned to San Diego after participating in Pacific Partnership 24-1, the largest multinational humanitarian mission that takes place in the Indo-Pacific. Pacific Partnership, now in its

19th iteration, is an annual mission that focuses on strengthening capacity of host nations to respond to crisis and fostering enduring bonds of friendship and multinational cooperation through four lines of effort: medical, engineering, host nation outreach and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). This year's mission's five stops included the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, the Republic of Palau and two states in the Federated States of Micronesia, Pohnpei and Chuuk.

"Our annual commitment to the Pacific Partnership mission demonstrates our dedication to strengthening alliances and partnerships for an enduring free and open Indo-Pacific," said Rear Adm. Mark A. Melson, Commander, Task Force 73 and executive agent for this year's mission. "I am tremendously proud of our team of Joint service members, allies and partners who supported the 2024 mission. There is more work to do. We will continue to work shoulder-to-shoulder every year alongside partner nations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, to ensure we're ready together in times of crisis."

Born out of the devastation of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, Pacific Partnership is an enduring annual mission in the Indo-Pacific region. This year's mission was joined by partner nations from Japan, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany and Australia.

"Pacific Partnership is a multinational effort which means that we work with partner nations who share our values, who share our commitment to these developing nations who host us, and who share our common goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific," said Capt. Brian Quin, mission commander for Pacific Partnership 24-1. "We go because there's a need. We go because we partner with like-minded nations and like-minded people, and we go because we are asked. "

Pacific Partnership medical personnel alongside the host

nation medical teams and partner nations performed over 410 surgeries both aboard USNS Mercy and at the local host nation hospitals. Additionally, the dental team saw 3,665 patients and the optometry team saw 7,025 patients. In addition to medical services, the team also provided continuing medical education.

"I think a big focus of this has been education," said Cmdr. Matt Russell, medical planner for Pacific Partnership 24-1. "In addition to the continuing medical education lectures that our staff are giving, as well as our surgical colleagues, we have set up classes for basic life support, first aid for first responders, how to respond to trauma, and really all of these courses have been very well received and well attended."

Seabees from Amphibious Construction Battalion One (ACB 1) also provided their construction expertise to repair schools, hospitals, roads and increase host nation capacity. In Palau, Seabees constructed a community chicken coop which will allow for the local population to decrease their dependency on imported food.

Host nation outreach events (HNOE) involved sports days and band concerts by the Pacific Partnership Band comprised of a detachment from the U.S. Pacific Fleet Band augmented by two Royal Australian Navy musicians for the entire mission and three Japan Self Defense Force band members during the Palau mission stop. During the five stops, the Pacific Partnership team participated in 41 HNOE events and 53 band concerts with a total attendance of 23,500.

Humanitarian relief and disaster response (HADR) efforts include working with host nations to increase capabilities for preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies. During the four-month mission, U.S. Army Civil Engineers held boating safety classes, 21 subject matter expert courses and 4

search and rescue exercises.

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