Virginia-Based Sailors, Marines Return After Supporting Bahamas Relief Missions



A U.S. Navy Sailor surveys the terrain following Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. U.S. Northern Command provided military capabilities in support of USAID-led relief efforts for the Bahamian people. U.S Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Katie Cox

NORFOLK, Va. – Sailors and Marines returned to Norfolk this week after providing military capabilities supporting relief to the Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian, U.S. Fleet Forces Command Public Affairs said in a release.

The service members came from the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG); Helicopter Mine Countermeasure Squadron (HM)-14 and HM-15; and Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 and HSC-26.

Under the direction of U.S. Northern Command, the Bataan ARG provided support to the U.S. Agency for International Development that enabled the broader effort to address the acute humanitarian needs of the Bahamian people.

The Bataan ARG, made up of the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5), San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New York (LPD 21), Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ship USS Oak Hill (LSD 51), and Sailors and Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, operated in international waters off the Bahamas. Meanwhile, four MH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters were forward-staged at Homestead Air Reserve Base in southern Florida, 25 miles south of Miami.

“In the wake of the strongest storm to hit the Bahamas, I am proud of the hard work, dedication and professionalism of our wing,” said Capt. Shawn Bailey, Helicopter Sea Combat Wing Atlantic commander. “They rose to the occasion to help those in need.”

The Navy and Marine Corps provided several aviation and logistics capabilities around the geographically dispersed Bahamian islands:

- Medium-lift MH-60 Seahawk and heavy-lift CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters, along with heavy lift tilt-rotor MV-22B Ospreys, transported humanitarian supplies.
- Navy and Marine aircraft transported dozens of military and civilian medical personnel who provided water, food, medical supplies, search-and-rescue gear, tarps and solar lights throughout the cities of Eleuthera, Freeport and Marsh Harbour.
- The aircraft also transported USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team personnel to Marsh Harbour; United Nations Office for Coordination of Human Affairs personnel to Grand Bahamas; Urban Search and Rescue personnel to Marsh Harbour; and a U.S. Air Force Airfield Assessment Team to Marsh Harbour and Sandy Point, to evaluate the Grand Bahama International Airport in Freeport.
- Marine Corps CH-53Es, as part of joint military support to USAID, provided ground refueling of U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters.

To enable those air operations, air traffic control Sailors aboard New York and Bataan helped monitor airspace safety for military aircraft in critical areas near Marsh Harbour.

The Bataan, New York and Oak Hill also used their shipboard freshwater-making capability to fill pallets of water transferred by air to Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay and Moore’s

Island.