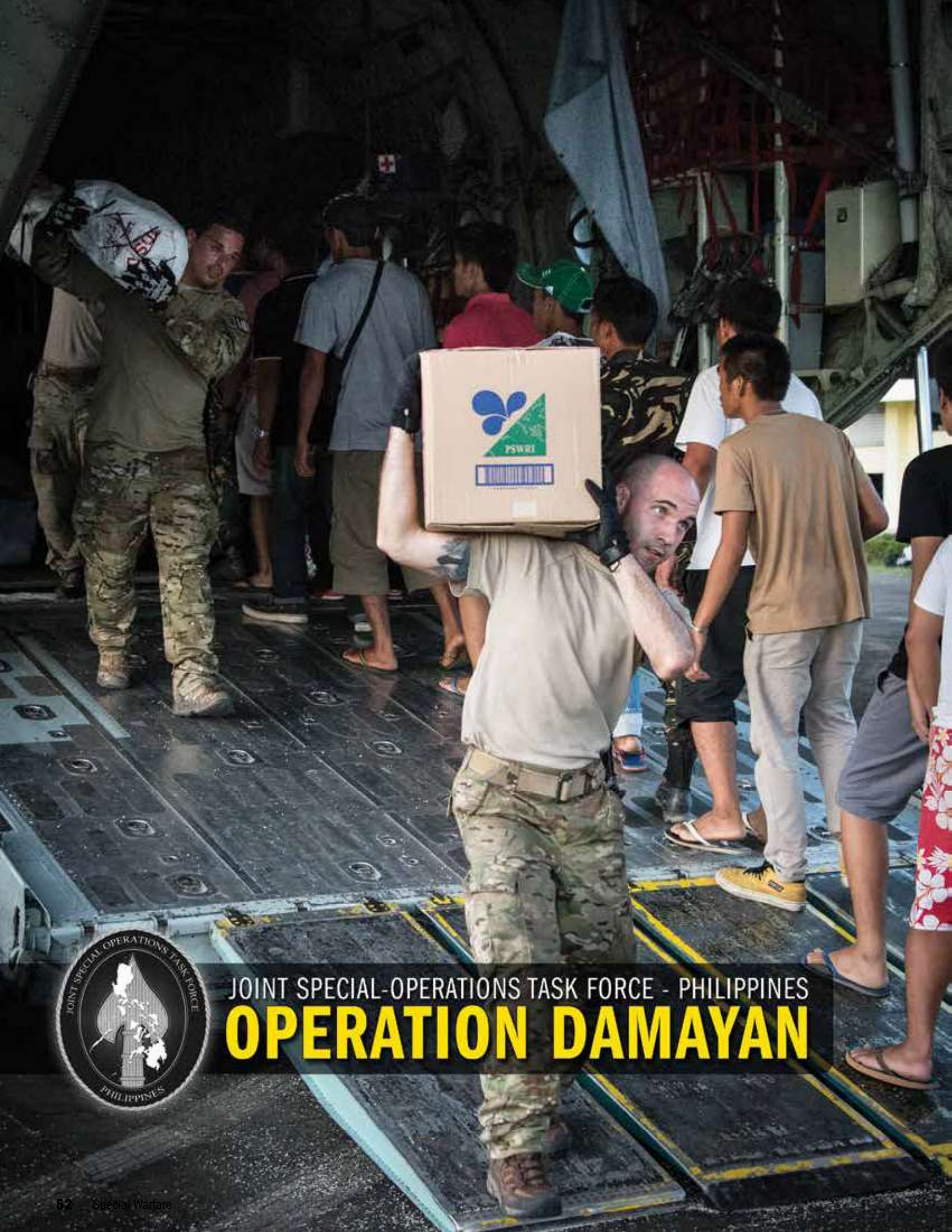

JOINT SPECIAL-OPERATIONS TASK FORCE - PHILIPPINES

OPERATION DAMAYAN

JSOTF-P Commander's Post-Mission Report of Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Response Support for Operation Damayan 10-22 November 2013

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Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) swept through the Philippines on Nov. 8-9, 2013 and was the strongest Philippine typhoon in history. Prior to its landfall, the staff at the Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines began conducting mission analysis and prepared to assist the Philippines Government should the need arise. Using historical lessons learned from the Typhoon Bopha (Pablo) relief effort in late 2012, JSOTF-P identified multiple tasks that it could support with organic personnel and assets located throughout the southern Philippines and on the northern island of Luzon.

Utilizing imagery attained through aerial-reconnaissance flown by JSOTF-P aircraft within hours of the storm's strike, JSOTF-P provided the first operational 'eyes on' to fully capture the scope and depth of devastation for the Philippines Government, U.S. Country Team and Pacific Command. This information helped formulate the U.S. response when the request for assistance was received from the Government of the Philippines.

To metabolize the magnitude of the destruction and influx of relief supplies, immediate assessment and organization were of absolute necessity. The rapid response time of the JSOTF-P to reposition assets and extend its reach to the affected areas enabled immediate employment of assets and personnel at key nodes to enhance ground truth and posture follow-on elements for success; consequently, JSOTF-P was heavily involved in the first critical 13 days of Operation Damayan, the newly identified operational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief for Typhoon Haiyan.

JSOTF-P's main effort was to assess the immediate problems affecting aid distribution, open up airfields and bridge the gap between local, national and international organizations to synchronize relief efforts. Our unique organization of special operations forces provided assessments of the damage, established austere communications where there were none, managed expeditionary airfield and air traffic control, identified and subsequently connected the networks of effort, and then facilitated the conditions for follow-on relief personnel.

This document provides the JSOTF-P Commander's assessment of the mission, operational environment and some discussion on the way ahead for the role of SOF in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. The information contained herein is not intended as a complete and thorough analysis of all aspects of JSOTF-P involvement and support. Rather, this document presents observations and perceptions of JSOTF-P's role in the relief effort. We have already noted in our own assessments and with the Commander of the III Marine Expeditionary Force, that overhead imagery is essential and some of those observations will be captured in another document.

Overview Points for JSOTF-P 13-day involvement:

- SOF agility directly enabled the rapid mobilization to facilitate relief efforts.
- With 11 years of operational experience in the Philippines, SOF teams leveraged their cultural understanding of Filipinos to form networks between local government units, Philippine Security Forces, relief organizations and U.S. forces.
- Unique SOF capabilities played a significant role in enabling coordination between LGUs, Armed Forces of the Philippines, relief organizations and U.S. forces.
- The magnitude of SOF core skills and dynamic capabilities enabled the fielding of tailored teams to support HA/DR.

> We strived to ask and answer the question, 'to what extent was the provincial government able to help itself and what can we do to assist them to the best of our ability.'

Summary of Events

JSOTF-P's response was immediate and among the very the first to send in response/assessment teams in Tacloban, Guiuan, Ormoc and Borongan to facilitate follow-on forces and relief.

The morning after Typhoon Haiyan made landfall throughout the islands of Leyte and Samar, JSOTF-P conducted aerial reconnaissance missions over the disaster-affected areas. As the full extent of the storm's impact began to be realized, JSOTF-P received the official order to assist with HA/DR operations and immediately began preparing to insert SOF teams into the areas. By 6 p.m. that evening, the first JSOTF-P SOF team, consisting of an Air Force OIC, a Combat Controller, two Civil Affairs NCOs and a Special Forces medic and communications sergeant, were successfully inserted into Tacloban Airfield, the epicenter of the destruction caused by the storm. In subsequent days, two similarly organized SOF teams were organized, equipped and inserted into airfields at Guiuan and Ormoc along with CCTs from the 353rd Special Operations Group (SOG) out of Kadena Air Base, Japan.

Over the coming days, JSOTF-P served a supporting role to the Third Marine Expeditionary Brigade Commander. The support by

the SOF teams was paramount to the III MEB HA/DR efforts. SOF teams provided critical leadership and organization as the Government of Philippines, UN, U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and nongovernmental organizations established the initial foothold in the eastern Visayas islands.

SOF first evaluated local security conditions for the III MEB Commander, the initial overall commander of U.S. forces supporting the relief effort. As each hour passed, the request for additional SOF teams and their unique skill sets increased. Teams were conducting ground and aerial movements around the clock to assess remote areas and interact with local populations and relief agencies. The SOF patrols gave III MEB and Joint Task Force 505, which eventually superseded III MEB, insight into the conditions of the affected areas and facilitated accurate planning for the allocation of Marine Corps and international assets, as well as, the tasking of inbound U.S. Naval vessels.

Throughout the time that JSOTF-P SOF teams were on the ground in the affected areas, their capabilities were influential and at many times reassuring. They interfaced with III MEB, numerous local and national Filipino agencies, international efforts and U.S. Navy maritime and aerial assets.

JSOTF-P provided overall air support for SOF and missions conducted at night through the Joint Special Operations Air Detachment and the 353rd Special Operations Group. The 353rd SOG was already inbound to the Philippines to conduct a series of combined exercises; once the Department of Defense was asked to assist with recovery efforts the 353rd SOG was placed under JSOTF-P's tactical control. The 353rd SOG was critical to the emplacement and support of JSOTF-P personnel, the movement of hundreds of internally displaced persons, and the delivery of thousands of pounds of relief supplies.

With assistance from the UN, USAID and other international government organizations and NGOs, the relief effort shifted to local and national Philippine governmental agencies. Each passing day saw the international relief effort becoming more established and the Government of the Philippines increasing stabilization in affected areas. After two weeks, JSOTF-P personnel had completed their assigned tasks and began redeploying back to their OEF-P mission locations to continue executing counterterrorism and foreign internal defense. The three airfields Tacloban, Ormoc and Guiuan, that SOF teams had been positioned in the first few days, were successfully transitioned to Philippine Civil Aviation Authority air traffic controllers and local government units. The 353rd SOG assisted JSOTF-P in facilitating the exfiltration of all SOF team personnel and equipment and then redeployed to their home station in Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan.

Rapid deployment of assets

Within the first 12 hours of the storm, JSOTF-P aircraft conducted critical aerial assessments to facilitate the actions of follow-on forces.

Prior to theater-level airborne collection assets arriving in the Philippines, JSOTF-P aircraft provided the bulk of near real-time aerial imagery. JSOTF-P assets surveyed and identified the conditions of airports, lines of communications in the vicinity of the airports, and general conditions of the islands of Leyte and Samar. While III MEB and JTF 505 were establishing operations in the Philippines, the JSOTF-P Intelligence Section bridged the collection-management function and initiated communications. JSOTF-P collections maps and imagery were used across relief-effort organizations to make a common-operational picture. Imagery of the devastated areas provided essential data that enabled JSOTF-P, III MEB and supporting

RELIEF EFFORTS *Left:* JSOTF-P team members assist in distribution of relief goods in the Philippines as part of Operation Damayan. *Center:* Ormoc City residents gather at Tacloban Airfield in preparation for boarding a Philippine Air Force C-130 that will airlift them to in Manila. *Above:* A JSOTF-P Civil Affairs Soldier discusses distribution of aid and needs in various areas of Ormoc City with officials at the City Hall. *U.S. Army photos by Spc. Andrew Robertson.*

agencies to initiate relief-effort operations and begin relief flights to disaster-stricken areas.

JSOTF-P pre-storm war-gaming, combined with JSOAD post-strike imagery of the damage created by the typhoon, enabled JSOTF-P to organize, plan and rapidly deploy forces when needed. JSOTF-P's organic aerial reconnaissance assets flew 28 sorties, with more than 140 flight hours logged. Aerial assessments and imagery helped locate 80 ground-to-air signals for assistance, 38 helicopter landing zones and 26 aid centers. The air assets surveyed 24 airports, 30 seaports, 150 towns, 350 miles of road and 330 miles of coastline during the initial days of the relief effort.

JSOTF-P's pre-storm disposition found SOF teams spread over an area the size of New York to Chicago. JSOTF-P marshaled these teams at airfields in Luzon and Mindanao and put together a variety of communications systems to provide each team with communication redundancy. The opening of airfields allowed for the follow-on SOF teams to conduct site surveys, assess the scope of damage and identify the prioritization of follow-on efforts. JSOTF-P organized SOF teams tailored for the specific mission requirements: rapid deployment of forces, opening airfields for day and night operations and the conduct of assessments. Upon completion of these initial tasks, SOF teams integrated and developed local networks that facilitated the flow of supplies and the positioning of relief forces.

SOF teams at each location consisted of a Special Forces 18A commander, for command and control; Special Forces 18E communications sergeant, to maintain communications; Special Forces 18D medical sergeant, to ensure lifesaving skills for team members; two 38 series Civil Affairs Soldiers for assessments; and an attached Air Force combat control team. Each skill set was selected to enable mission execution.

The SOF team commander's role was to coordinate with senior local government and military officials, direct assessment priorities, identify opportunities for relief — based on emergent conditions, and reporting to the higher headquarters. Special Forces communication sergeants were put to the test during the operation as JSOTF-P equipped each team with communications gear upon its arrival at the marshalling airfield, these sergeants had just a few hours to organize systems, conduct checks and ensure they would be able to operate for at least 72 hours without resupply. The reason for the assembling of communications gear at the airfields was due to the fact that operational sites in the joint operations area could not entirely be stripped. The CT mission was still ongoing, which required the JOSTF-P to maintain communications with the remote locations. The Special Forces medical sergeant's were not intended to treat the thousands of injured internally displaced personnel, this would be an impossible task. The medical sergeant's initially provided triage to the IDPs that were gathered at the operational airfields. These IDPs were hoping to ride a transport aircraft to Manila intending to link up with waiting family. American citizens were placed on an aircraft without being checked. These checks were done quickly, but it ensured that the force was positioned to help those in critical need before they boarded a plane. There would also be medical personnel from the Marines and host nation at the destination airfield to receive individuals who were cleared for the flight but would need assistance at the other end. When the 18Ds were able to depart the airfields and participate in the assessments, their input facilitated follow-on aid packages and the establishment of hasty clinics. The Civil Affairs Soldiers were the workhorse of this operation when it came to assessments, linking in NGOs and IGOs, establishing networks and providing a common operating picture that would help the III MEB Commander allocate

NECESSITIES Members of JSOTF-P work with the Philippine Army to build toilets for distribution to relief centers. *U.S. Army photos by Spc. Andrew Robertson.*

resources. Their familiarity with Government of the Philippine's disaster procedures provided invaluable insight — what to look for and who to speak with — for the post-disaster organization. The Civil Affairs elements were praised continuously by HN and senior U.S. leaders for their exceptional handling of the disaster created by the typhoon. They were instrumental in bringing organization to chaos when dealing with many of the LGUs.

The JSOTF-P was asked to provide ground truth, ground truth through the eyes of someone who knew what bad looked like and what needed to be done first. The magnitude of destruction would cause most to stop and fix the problems right in front of them or simply render reports that everything was gone and it was the worst storm they had ever seen; the leaders of the relief effort needed elements who could see beyond the first ridge line; they needed to help identify problems and solutions that would have the greatest impact in the shortest period of time to get things moving and people taken care of immediately.

The HA/DR networks developed by SOF teams were facilitated by JSOTF-Ps ability to rapidly establish distributed command and control from the southern Philippines, into the devastated areas in the Visayas Region and throughout key nodes in Manila. JSOTF-P would maintain the hub of communication and intel fusion at Camp Navarro in Zamboanga but mission analysis led to the establishment of four additional C2 nodes at Villamor Air Base with III MEB and PAF Headquarters, Clark Air Base with Marine and SOG Aviation Units, III MEF headquarters at the Philippine Staff College, and the Mactan airport (near Cebu) which served as the hub for international aviation and the relief supply depot. This JSOTF-P C2 network enabled rapid decision making, around the clock connectivity and a common operating picture that directly enhanced the situational awareness and mission effectiveness of the III MEB and III MEF Commanders. Most importantly, it provided the JSOTF-P Commander near real time situational awareness and a responsive control network to maintain operational agility despite the geographic size of the area and complex web of supporting entities.

Establishment of Aerial Points of Departure (APOD)

Upon identification of usable airfields, combat control teams performed a vital role in aerial point of debarkation operations.

The opening of airfields by CCTs was absolutely critical to the success of the entire relief effort and it was one of the most visible actions that showed the host nation and the world that help was coming to the Philippines. CCTs were deployed within 48 hours of the storm and their skill and expertise immediately alleviated the bottleneck of inbound traffic to the relief effort and outbound evacuees.

CCTs conducted around the clock operations. They enabled U.S. Marine Corps and international C-130s to conduct air operations during the day and SOF MC-130s during the night. The CCTs were essential for organizing host-nation cadre to manage airfield operations.

During its 13 days of support, JSOTF-P and the 353rd SOG assets were heavily employed and conducted around-the-clock operations. JSOAD and the 353rd SOG aircraft completed a total of 128 HA/DR airlift-sorties transporting more than 3,200 IDPs, more than 676K of relief supplies and evacuating two injured Filipino citizens.

In addition to the relief effort, JSOTF-P and the 353rd SOG aircraft supported the task force ground-operation mission by flying 59 sorties to move 138 JSOTF-P personnel and $50K worth of field gear and supplies. JSOAD and the 353rd SOG advisers were linked-in at all levels and phases of the operations — from being the first U.S. military personnel on the ground at Tacloban to advising Philippine Air Force senior staff at the relief effort's headquarters. SOG pilots and JSOAD advisers were an integral part in scheduling and deconfliction between PAF, host nation, U.S. and internal aid flights.

Assessments and synchronization of networks

SOF assessment teams excelled in identifying and synchronizing key stakeholders to integrate lines of communication within compressed timeframes. SOF's greatest capability was the ability to rapidly form strong relationships with the civil authorities, AFP, PNP, and IGOs/NGOs and then utilize those relationships to connect entities and create a friendly network.

TAKING REFUGE *Left:* Exhausted evacuees await transport. *Right:* Families carry with them any belongings they could salvage from the debris. *U.S. Army photos.*

Relief efforts could not take place without organization, direction and fusion among the myriad of victims and aid workers. In an environment consumed with chaos, SOF teams identified and connected the networks of Philippines Security Forces, aid workers and U.S. and international military forces. SOF teams organized and advised HN security and local leaders to provide a Philippine face on airfield security, the management of thousands of IDPs, the prevention of looting, receiving NGOs and the design and implementation of distribution networks to move life-saving relief goods to clusters of people in need.

Typhoon Haiyan had disrupted cell-phone towers and electricity in the majority of areas and thereby caused additional hurdles of communication. SOF teams targeted their primary effort to fusing the government, nongovernment, host and international effort together.

The use of native language speakers, cultural understanding, austere communications and a capacity to navigate in an uncertain environment with travel maps and local sketches allowed SOF teams to integrate all agencies to UN cluster meetings. Connecting the networks of relief efforts allowed for the synchronization of capabilities of all organizations to maximize relief support to end users — the storm survivors.

SOF teams were not limited to ground aid agencies. SOF teams coordinated with U.S. Navy, Philippine Air Force and other international militaries to conduct aerial reconnaissance. These relationships cross-leveled information and increased common situational understanding for planning, the effective distribution of supplies and for follow-on ground missions. The initial site assessments and follow-on linking of networks allowed SOF teams to coordinate the further insertion of supplies to remote locations, reducing duplication of efforts and systemic tracking of HA supplies distributed by both forces.

Recommendation

Open source geo-tagging. Typhoon Haiyan destroyed all cell phone and Internet connectivity in the wake of its path. Humans have become dependent upon these technologies and their temporary elimination added an additional problem set on how to communicate and coordinate. Equipped with a BGAN, laptop and cell phone, one of the assessment teams began geo-tagging pictures during patrols and then instantly uploaded them to an online map.

If geo-tagging is standardized on one system and replicated on a larger scale among all teams, SOF real-time planning and deployment could drastically improve. Furthermore, this use of technology has enormous potential to revolutionize the operating picture for future HA/DR civilian, military and governmental organization and response. With the establishment of off-the-shelf satellite connection and wireless routers, personnel and victims on the ground can use smart phone apps like Google's Photo Earth to rapidly build a common operating picture for relief efforts. With geo-tagged pictures online, relief efforts can immediately analyze the affected areas, identify resources needed, coordinate with other agencies, target the location of the supplies then collaborate with the authorities in place to receive the assistance.

Conclusion

The post-disaster environment is marked by complete disruption, austere conditions, stunned victims and piecemeal support from across the globe. Planning, operating and supporting for this environment requires highly adaptive personnel — proving the SOF imperative, *humans are more important than hardware*. The adaptive staff of the JSOTF-P, spread across the Philippines, was able to rapidly task organize SOF teams, complete the fielding of liaisons, establish the prioritization of efforts and demonstrate the ability to execute operations within a very short period of time when the commander identified a need.

SOF teams on the ground demonstrated that there is no substitute for culturally astute operators who can leverage existing relationships and rapidly build new relationships with both individuals and organizations. Philippine Special Forces and Philippines National Police Special Action Forces instantly recognized their U.S. SOF brethren and began collaboration. Experienced SOF operators intuitively knew where to go to find the centers of gravity in the Human Domain and force multiply by orchestrating existing networks. While SOF teams bring high impact, they are innately designed to be the small-footprint,

COMING AND GOING Members of JSOTF-P help download supplies from a C-130 to make room for the hundreds of evacuees waiting to board at the Ormac airport. JSOTF-P was postured to support immediately after storm passage and was well suited to operate out of short runways that were in less than ideal condition. In conjunction with the 353rd SOG aircraft and Combat Controllers, SOF was able to establish initial APOD opening to allow relief supplies to begin to flow. *U.S. Army photo.*

low-signature asset that enables others (HN and relief elements) to remain the epicenter of attention.

Humans are the core of SOF success, but hardware was essential in projecting forces into a geographically-isolated area that had lost all services. This disaster validated the utility of the forward-deployed Global SOF Network and its supporting mobility assets. JSOAD's C-12s, contracted Bell Helicopters, CASA 212s and C-146s allowed JSOTF-P to marshal assets and insert forces in hours rather than days. The rapid response and positioning of 353rd SOG assets cannot be lauded enough. At the height of media scrutiny and with large portions of populations suffering, the ability to open airfields and deliver supplies at night was a turning point for success.

HA/DR will continue to be a critical/no-fail mission for U.S. forces operating in the PACOM AOR. For SOF, this mission will always serve as a test and validation of its ability to support partner forces. When things go awry, SOF is frequently turned to and expected to help in some measure. The SOF teams that were employed were money in the bank (natural skills, the right equipment and grounded in cultural sensitivities). The fact that 353rd assets were available, enabled SOF to cover nearly the entire spectrum of HA/DR around the clock and do things in a much more rapid manner than other forces.

As natural disasters continue to increase in the PACOM AOR, there is no way that forces can be postured to always be on recall for response, but every mission into the PACOM AOR should be synced with Special Operations Command Pacific for response capability. The assets in theater that are under the operational control of the SOCPAC Commander must include HA/DR planning in their toolkit and be prepared to identify forces and capabilities that can be leveraged the fastest to respond. Further, the linkage to the U.S. Country Team cannot be underestimated.

In the Philippines, SOF has one of the most solid Country Team relationships in the entire PACOM AOR. The ability to communicate rapidly with nearly all 27 agencies in the embassy — especially the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group and the Ambassador, based on personal relationships and proven capability, enhanced SOF's effectiveness when the crisis arose.

The ability for SOF to maintain the ability to operate through and with other services cannot be understated. SOF prides itself in conventional force-SOF interdependence. That interdependence must be carried over to all of the services. Professionalism and competency are often proven in a few minutes, and once that bridge is built then success can follow rapidly. SOF must strive to ensure it has an understanding its sister cervices that may be present during HA/DR. The JSOTF-P did not understand all that it should have about the USMC that came ashore, but every operator understood how to define his capabilities to support the mission, demonstrated a professionalism that was all about team play and worked daily to identify where gap could be filled or bridged built. JSOTF-P worked itself out of a job — just like it is supposed to do with every mission that comes its way. **SW**

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