

## **RFA *Mounts Bay* delivers vital aid to Caribbean islands**

On 8 September the (UK) Ministry of Defence reported that RFA *Mounts Bay* had delivered six tonnes of emergency aid to Anguilla, the British Overseas Territory devastated by Hurricane Irma, and was due to steam to the British Virgin Islands to provide further support within hours.

The naval auxiliary has been deployed in the Caribbean since July in preparation for the hurricane season, ready to provide support at a moment's notice. Tasked by the Royal Navy, she was the UK's first military response to the Caribbean.

The ship carries a specialist disaster relief team – drawn from the Royal Engineers and Royal Logistics Corps (*see troops illustrated*) – as well as heavy plant for lifting and shifting and emergency kit and shelters (*illustrated*) provided by the Department for International Development. Also on board are the Royal Navy's Mobile Aviation Support Force – aviation specialists, meteorological advisors and flight deck crews.

Engineers were on hand to stop a potentially dangerous fuel leak at Anguilla's main petrol dump, restore power to the island's sole hospital and hand out shelters providing temporary homes for people left homeless by the storm. They also cleared the runway which was declared safe for relief flights.

RFA *Mounts Bay*'s Wildcat helicopter – from 815 Naval Air Squadron based at Yeovilton – also flew HE the Governor, Tim Foy on a flight over the island – which is 35 square miles in area (91 square km)– to survey the damage from the air during seven hours of continuous flying. The reconnaissance flight found widespread damage to infrastructure, schools, government buildings and power supplies.

As a result of the sortie, the island's leaders and ship's team decided to focus efforts on supporting the police headquarters as the hub of the relief effort, get the hospital on its feet again, and reinforce two shelter stations – particularly important with Hurricane José expected to barrel towards the region.

*Mounts Bay*'s Commanding Officer Captain Stephen Norris RFA said: '*My people worked tirelessly throughout the day with determination and flexibility to support the Governor and the people of Anguilla.*

*'Although Anguilla suffered extensive damage, normal signs of life were returning – some roads open and the local population beginning a recovery and clear-up operation.'*

The following day, 9 September, *Mounts Bay* arrived in the British Virgin Islands at first light having sailed overnight from Anguilla.

Her ship's company undertook reconnaissance of the islands and brought HE The Governor onboard where he was able to dial into the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) meeting chaired by the Prime Minister at No 10 in London.

The Governor gave the PM an update of the current situation and the *Mounts Bay* ship's company went on to deliver vital aid to the island.

As part of a wider military effort, Britain's flagship HMS *Ocean* has been diverted from her NATO mission in the Mediterranean to the Caribbean to help with the reconstruction effort – as HMS *Illustrious* did in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines four years ago.

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