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USS IWO JIMA DEPLOYS TO HAITI AS TROPICAL STORM APPROACHES

MIAMI - U.S. Southern Command directed the amphibious ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) to steam toward Haiti today in preparation for the forecasted arrival of tropical storm Tomas later this week.

Iwo Jima will deploy to Haiti from Suriname, where it arrived Thursday on its final country visit for Continuing Promise 2010, a four-month, humanitarian civic assistance deployment to eight nations in the Caribbean region. The ship is scheduled to arrive in Haiti later this week.

Large amphibious ships, like Iwo Jima, resemble small aircraft carriers and include the ability to support helicopter and landing craft operations to quickly move personnel and cargo, making it an ideal platform to support humanitarian-relief missions on short notice.

A crew of 1,600 military and civilian medical, engineering, aviation, logistical and other support personnel are embarked aboard Iwo Jima, including U.S. Navy engineers, a contingent of 500 Marines with logistical-support expertise, volunteers from the U.S. Public Health Service and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as medical, dental and engineering professionals from Europe, North America and South America.

Eight CH-46 Sea Knight, medium-lift, dual-rotor helicopters; two MH-60 Knight Hawk helicopters and two amphibious landing craft units (LCU's) are on Iwo Jima to support the ship's operations.

Iwo Jima is a Wasp-class amphibious ship capable of speeds in excess of 20 knots that can provide robust ship-to-shore, as well as shore-to-shore logistics support during contingencies ranging from traditional military operations to humanitarian and disaster-relief missions.

Because of the Caribbean region's history of severe-weather events during the peak months of the hurricane season, the ship has remained in the area throughout its present deployment, ready to support U.S. disaster relief efforts when directed.

Iwo Jima was in Port-de-Paix, Haiti, from July 24 through Aug. 3. It was the first stop on CP10 and the crew provided medical assistance to more than 4,000 Haitian citizens, performed 32 surgeries, completed six engineering projects, and delivered 231 pallets of humanitarian-assistance supplies donated by NGOs.

In September 2008, the amphibious ship USS Kearsarge deployed to Haiti