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US Hospital Ship Treats Quake Victims

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Doctors on board the U.S. Navy hospital ship *Mercy* are treating patients from the earthquake-ravaged island of Nias, off the coast of Indonesia. The humanitarian mission follows a trip to Aceh province that was devastated by an earthquake and massive tsunami late last year.

Doctors and other medical professionals aboard the *Mercy* helped thousands of victims in Aceh province, the hardest hit area after last December's earthquake and tsunami left more than 200,000 people missing or dead.

Late last month the crew had just begun to head to its home port in California, when word came that an 8.7 magnitude earthquake had struck the region, with the Indonesian island of Nias suffering major damage.

The commander of the medical treatment facility aboard the *Mercy*, Navy Captain Mark Llewellyn, told reporters via phone link from Nias that doctors have treated nearly 700 patients on shore and performed nearly 50 major surgeries on the ship.

"We have been forever changed by the warmth with which we have been received here and the relationships that we have established in both Banda Aceh and Nias Island," said Captain Llewellyn. "Our work here continues and we are committed to putting forth the very best medical, dental and support care we can provide from the *Mercy* team. Our guiding principle going in was to ask how can we help you? We went in representing the heart of America. We went with the spirit of cooperation, coordination and collaboration with the others already there."

The hospital ship *Mercy* is a converted oil tanker that is 272 meters long. Normally military doctors on the ship deal with combat injuries. However to help the people of Indonesia, dozens of private American physicians volunteered to come on board to assist in medical care ranging from orthopedic surgery to mental health counseling.

Captain Llewellyn says the partnership is working well.

"Yes, there were obviously some bureaucratic obstacles," he said. "Our job is to work together, which worked extremely well. Any obstacles here were instantly overcome. In fact we didn't have any obstacles here on the ship. Medical professionals working together, Navy medicine alongside top-notch civilian medicine, it was just a tremendous partnership."

Captain Llewellyn says he and the other medical personnel on board the *Mercy* expect to continue helping earthquake victims in Nias until at least the end of this month.

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Two volcanoes have recently come to life in Indonesia, with geologists tying the activity into the massive earthquakes that hit in December and again last month. One of the volcanoes is rattling the island hardest hit by the December quake and the tsunami it created. Villagers are evacuated from their homes nearby Mount Talang