

Navy helicopter crew honoured for Dominican humanitarian work

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A Royal Navy Lynx helicopter crew from RNAS Yeovilton has been praised for their outstanding efforts in bringing relief to thousands of people left homeless and without food following a tropical storm in the Dominican Republic.

Earlier this month Lieutenant Matthew 'Taz' Tazewell and Lieutenant Alastair 'AJ' Thompson, from 815 Naval Air Squadron based at RNAS Yeovilton, were embarked on RFA Wave Knight, a Royal Fleet Auxiliary replenishment vessel, when they were tasked at short notice to provide humanitarian assistance to the Dominican Republic which had been devastated by Tropical Storm NOEL.



Operating the ship's Lynx helicopter the crew deployed to the Azua region where they helped to transport food aid and vital supplies from central distribution points to Palmar De Ocoa, Yayas De Viaiama and San Jose De Ocoa, all of which had been isolated due to landslides and flooding.

Now, in recognition of their efforts, they have been awarded the Order of Merit from the Dominican Air Force as well as an official commendation from the US Government's Military Assistance and Advisory Group. The citation read 'for outstanding contribution in support of the Dominican Republic during Tropical Storm Noel. Your actions were instrumental in saving lives and preventing further human suffering'.

Lt Tazewell, the Flight Commander, said:



"In the course of five and a half days, the Lynx flew more than 33 hours and delivered seven tonnes of food, water purification devices, hygiene kits, clothing and bedding to communities cut off in the mountains. The majority of tasking was conducted between 40 and 80 miles from the military base, so fuel and load calculations needed to be carefully managed."

The Royal Navy Lynx also transported the UK and Canadian Ambassadors, the Chief of Staff of the Dominican Air Force and, although they were working with the US Coastguard and US Army helicopters, they still managed to fly more hours and shift more stores than any other crew involved with the operation:

"The feedback received has been very positive," Lt Tazewell added. "The Colonel from the US Army in charge of forces in the Dominican Republic has invited us back to the region next year to take part in an exercise to demonstrate our capability in the humanitarian role."

Before leaving the region Lt Tazewell and Lt Thompson, the pilot of the Lynx, attended a ceremony to receive their commendation and Order of Merit. RFA Wave Knight and its embarked Lynx Flight have now been released from their support role in the Dominican Republic for some well earned rest and recuperation in Tortola, British Virgin Islands.