

MERCY SHIP VISITS TIMOR-LESTE

In August 2010, the USNS Mercy sailed into Dili Harbour for a mission which would provide medical and surgical care for the citizens of this brand new nation.



USNS Mercy moored in Dili Harbour

The USNS Mercy is a converted super tanker, first launched in July 1975 as the SS Worth. She was converted to US Navy use as a hospital ship and relaunched in November 1986. Important facts about the USNS Mercy include an overall length of 894 ft, a beam of 106ft and a displacement of nearly 70,000 tons.

As a hospital ship, she has 1000 beds including 80 ICU, 20 recovery, 280 intermediate care, 120 light care and 500 limited care beds. Other services include 12 operating theatres, a full range of pathology services, radiology (including CT scan), CSSD, pharmacy, physiotherapy, dental and optical services and two oxygen producing plants. Her home port is San Diego, California.

Pacific Partnership 2010 is the name of the deployment and it is the fifth such excursion to the Pacific, aimed at strengthening relationships and providing assistance in medical and civil action projects. During Pacific Partnership 2010, the Mercy has visited Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and now Timor-Leste. Two other naval ships have visited Palau and Papua New Guinea.

The Mercy has a crew of civilians and naval personnel including 12 biomedical equipment technicians or BMETs. During the visit to Dili, the BMETs divided their time between servicing the ship's medical equipment and helping out in the National Biomedical Engineering Workshop. Each day of the two-week visit, BMETs were ferried from the Mercy to Dili's main wharf and bussed to the National Hospital to assist in repairs and maintenance. During the visit the Mercy's BMETs worked with the National Hospital BMET and advisors from the AusAID and World Bank funded HSSP-SP project. It had been hoped that the

BMETs would be able to visit the three District Hospitals within reach of Dili, but the logistics of such visits proved to be too much in the midst of a crowded medical outreach schedule.

They worked on a range of equipment from the hospital's CT scanner to laboratory and general medical equipment, supplying spare parts from on-board stocks where possible.



BMETs working on a patient monitor in the National BME Workshop

They successfully repaired suction pumps, infant warmers, a biohazard cabinet, a laboratory analyser and several minor medical devices. Other equipment faults were diagnosed and remedies suggested, mostly requiring spare parts that the Dili team will have to source. All in all a successful stay in Timor-Leste.

Towards the end of the deployment, the Mercy guys invited the BME staff from the National Hospital to have a look over the ship and their department. It was a beautiful afternoon when we set out for the 30 minute trip out the ship and the harbour was calm. The USNS Mercy, up close is truly awesome and on-board amazing. Firstly we visited the BME Department to see where the guys spend their days and then proceeded on an all-areas tour of the ship's facilities.

We saw all of the clinical areas which are as well or better equipped than any large teaching hospital back home. However to this writer, the most impressive things were not "the machines that go ping" but rather the big machines that rumble and vibrate. The engine room was massive with two huge boilers driving twin turbines, acting through a single screw. The flight deck was also impressive with a large hanger for the ship's two helicopters. Sitting on the bridge with my colleague driving the ship was another memorable moment.

Some photos tell the story...



Workbenches and parts storage on USNS Mercy



The Yankee BMETs discussing the day's operations



The job's not finished until the paperwork's done

Around the ship ...



Keeping fit in the on-board gym



Accommodation – not much room!



The Bridge where it all happens



Captain Cesar strengthening ties with the US Navy



The flight deck with helicopters garaged for the night



Looking out over the fore deck



The Engine Room- Two massive boilers driving two turbines and a single prop shaft



The Engine Room- Control desk



CT Scanner – a must have ...



Full Laboratory facilities available at all times



One of the Ship's Acuson ultrasound scanners



One of two X-ray rooms



*Intensive Care Unit – part of
80 intensive care beds*



Operating Theatre one of 12 Theatres



*US – Timor-Leste Cooperation
Cesar & Huerta*