



HMS CHATHAM



NEWS RELEASE 04/05

WORK PARTIES CONTINUE TO ASSIST IN BATTICALOA

HMS CHATHAM remains in company with RFA DILIGENCE, anchored on the east coast of Sri Lanka near the devastated town of Batticaloa. Boats crews from both ships have been busy ferrying working parties ashore, using a safe channel from the open sea into the lagoon, established following a survey conducted by CHATHAM's embarked Hydrographic Officer and Navigator, 2 days ago. Despite deteriorating weather and increased sea states, which has made transportation of teams ashore precarious, the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary crews have persevered and continued to carry out the good work they have started. HMS CHATHAM's Lynx helicopter has been busy supplying medical stores and aid to the village of Kallar, which remains cut off by flooding.

HMS CHATHAM landed three work teams today and the Fleet Support Unit, based on RFA DILIGENCE also landed a team. The boat maintenance team, working with the FSU members, continued to repair fishing boats and launched several today, allowing the owners to return to their livelihood. Some members of this party also continued to assist at the waterside Covent, St Teresa's, and with general clearance operations in shore side properties. A very good relationship has been struck up with the sisters in the convent and they have allowed their grounds to be used as a forward supply base and muster point for personnel.

A second party moved around the lagoon to the seaward side where the most severe effects of the tsunami were experienced. The aim was to continue with house clearance operations but the added and more important task was restoration of the wells in the area. All of the wells had been contaminated with sea water and debris, leaving the community without fresh water. Equipped with buckets, spades and a diesel-powered pump, the team drained and cleared numerous private wells, allowing the locals access to fresh water without reliance on water

supplies brought in. Working with the locals, they would clear the area around the well, allowing easier access for the team and getting the locals to begin to fend for themselves. The team then proceeded to a church and began to clear a larger communal well, which will continue tomorrow. A second day undertaking house clearance operations may seem a rather trivial task; however the local population has been deeply traumatised and appeared directionless and unable to help themselves. The team found that once they started clearing rubble the locals started to assist and work alongside the sailors.

The third party helped construct a tented village for up to 250 families, with tents donated by a UK based charity. The team found that spirits were higher in the new community of tents and there was even time for a friendly game of cricket, between the Royal Navy and locals. Fortunately for the sailors, the language barrier enabled the disappointing score to remain in doubt.

Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for the Department for International Development, visited the town today and after meeting with local officials and aid agencies he witnessed the work being undertaken by the various working parties. He was thus able to witness at first hand Britain's commitment to Disaster Relief in Sri Lanka, with the teams from the ships and aid agencies working together.

Captain Steve Chick, the Commanding Officer stated:

"Today, both ourselves and DILIGENCE have continued the good work started yesterday and allowed the minister to see the impact we are making in this area. The sea state and surf on the entrance has caused some problems, but all the teams got ashore and accomplished the tasks set to them. With one Helicopter defective, the other has been working hard to supply aid and continue with the vital reconnaissance to identify other isolated communities"

For further information contact: Lieutenant Commander Peter Sellers, Public Relations Officer, HMS CHATHAM, BFPO 253

Telephone: Ship's Mobile: 0044 7802 356488

Inmarsat: 323 458110

SSS: 9297 3087 800 (via Whitehall operator)

E Mail: 253-WEO@a.dii.mod.uk

Website: www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/1571.html