



Kentucky Airmen move Haiti relief supplies through DR

123rd Contingency Operations Group ensures steady flow of supplies.



U.S. Air Force / Tech. Sgt. Dennis Flora

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy
National Guard Bureau

Airmen from the Kentucky National Guard's 123rd Contingency Response Group help offload wounded Haitian refugees and medical personnel from Puerto Rico National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters at the air hub in Barahona, Dominican Republic, Jan. 25, 2010.

AS relief supplies and support continue to pour into Haiti, the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Contingency Operations Group has been one of the key elements that has helped to ensure a steady flow of supplies and equipment into the areas that need them.

Operating out of Barahona, Dominican Republic, the unit has set up an airfield to alleviate some of backed-up air traffic bound for the overwhelmed Port-au-Prince airport.

By doing that, the unit has been able to oversee the safe movement of cargo into the airfield where it is then moved by flatbed trucks across the border and into Haiti, said Air Force Lt. Col. Kirk Hilbrecht, public affairs officer for the Kentucky National Guard, who is with the unit in Barahona.

"So far we have moved approximately 575 tons of supplies, medical equipment, actual live donor organs and plasma into the Haitian area," said Hilbrecht.

The unit has also assisted with getting supplies off of U.S. Navy vessels docked at nearby ports.

When the unit first arrived, the airfield required some setting up before planes could land.

"The airport has been closed for 12 years ... we had it opened up and we are now running 24-hour operations," said

Hilbrecht, adding that even after re-opening it was initially closed to night operations because of a lack of runway lights.

Prior to the arrival of the 123rd COG, an assessment of the airfield was done by personnel from U.S. Southern Command and Air Mobility Command to ensure it was suitable for the types of aircraft that would be sent in.

Within two hours of arriving, the unit had in-bound aircraft landing at the airfield, he said.

The size and scale of the aircraft that have been landing—mainly C-17 Globemaster III and C-130 Hercules—took many who live in the area by surprise.

"At any given time, we could have two C-17 aircraft on the ramp," said Hilbrecht. "It has definitely brought a lot of the townspeople out as they were not anticipating that large of an aircraft ever on this airfield."

The ability to land a large aircraft in the Dominican Republic has made a difference in getting supplies to Haiti.

"I know we're making a big difference, specifically when it comes to giving the flow and the dissemination of the much-needed material into the country," said Hilbrecht.

