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JSOTF-P Assists with Philippine Superferry Search and Rescue

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ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (NNS) -- The Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines dispatched five boats and a civilian helicopter Sept. 6 to assist the Philippine Navy in search and rescue efforts after a Superferry carrying nearly 1,000 people capsized and sank off the coast of Zamboanga del Norte.

At the request of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, JSOTF-P sent two Mark V Special Operations Craft, two 11-meter Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs) and a Maritime Support Vessel (MSV) to assist Philippine Navy and Coast Guard rescue personnel. A civilian helicopter contracted by JSOTF-P also flew to the scene to provide search and rescue support from the air.

"The close relationship established between the U.S. forces and Philippine naval forces led to a quick and timely coordination of assets to support rescue efforts," said Lt. j.g. Mike Ameche, one of the U.S. officers on-scene conducting rescue operations.

Members of U.S. Naval Special Boat Team 12, along with SAR swimmers from U.S. Navy Seal Team 7, conducted organized searches over 30 square miles for 11 hours, checking nearly 30 life rafts for survivors and scavenging relief supplies from the rafts to deliver to more than 100 survivors on board a Philippine Navy vessel. The MSV crew provided 200 bottles of water for the U.S. teams to distribute with the relief supplies. Three JSOTF-P corpsmen were on-hand to provide medical evaluation and treatment to injured survivors on board.

"Many of the survivors suffered from dehydration and exposure, but of the 110 survivors on board the Philippine Navy ship, we only found three people who were injured," said Chief Hospital Corpsman Jason Henry, one of the U.S. Navy corpsmen on-scene.

One of the injured survivors, a 20 year-old female, was transported by U.S. Navy personnel from the Philippine Navy vessel to the MSV for medical treatment by JSOTF-P corpsmen.

JSOTF-P teams remained on site into the night to assist Philippine rescue forces in continuing search efforts. According to authorities, nine people died in the incident and several others were injured, while one person remains unaccounted for. The close coordination between Philippine Navy and Coast guard, U.S. military assets, and civilian craft led to the safe recovery of more than 950 survivors.

"Our contribution to the rescue effort was small, but we were glad to be able to assist," said Col. Bill



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ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (Sept. 6, 2009) Members of U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) help an injured woman from an 11-meter rigid hull inflatable boat onto another U.S. Navy vessel in order to provide medical care following the sinking of a super ferry Sept. 6, 2009 off the coast of Zamboanga del Norte. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class William Ramsey/Released)

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Coultrup, JSOTF-P commander. "The success of this search and rescue effort is due to the incredibly quick and effective response by the AFP, the Philippine Coast Guard and the civilian vessels who came to the aid of the sinking ferry. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who lost their loved ones in this terrible incident."

For more news about the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, visit www.navy.mil/local/pacom.

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