

## Air Traffic Controllers Overcome Obstacles, Keep Damaged Airport Functioning

III Marine Expeditionary Force / Marine Corps Installations Pacific  
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Inside the damaged Tacloban air traffic control tower, Cpl. Joseph A. Werner tracks incoming aircraft in flight, Nov. 20 as part of Operation Damayan. Due to efforts of volunteers and U.S. service members, the control services were restored quickly and aircraft have transported over 1,000 tons of relief aid to the city. Typhoon Haiyan impacted more than 4.2 million people across 36 provinces in the Philippines, according to the Philippine's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. Werner is an air traffic controller with Marine Air Control Squadron 4, currently assigned to 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade in support of Joint Task Force 505.



TACLOBAN, Republic of the Philippines- The deafening roar of a KC-130J Super Hercules surrounds the control tower overlooking Tacloban Airport Nov. 20. The towers' windows have all been blown out by Typhoon Haiyan, and the structure sustained severe damage. But now the control center contains a mix of service members and volunteers crowded together; safely and rapidly guiding aircraft during Operation Damayan.

On Nov. 7, Typhoon Haiyan crashed through the Republic of the Philippines, leaving a deadly path of destruction across 36 provinces. With the recovery process underway, service members and volunteers are working tirelessly to distribute relief supplies and board evacuees onto aircraft.

"When I first came here and saw the situation on the ground, I saw pure despair," said Jojo Porquez, a volunteer air traffic controller working in the tower. "We are working long days up here. I never count the hours. I just work in every way I can."

With many things to coordinate in the tower and on the ground below, it is critical that the air traffic controllers work as a team to ensure it runs smoothly, according to Marine Gunnery Sgt. Brent Loghry, an air traffic controller with Marine Air Control Squadron 4, currently assigned to 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade in support of Joint Task Force 505.

"It is critical that everything up here runs as smoothly as it can," said Loghry. "Without having any existing radar services, it is important for us to work closely with our Philippine air traffic control counterparts.

The vital need to land aircraft loaded with relief supplies, coupled with the necessity to evacuate people affected by the typhoon, created a busy yet manageable air space.

"It is a very (operational) working environment," said Cpl. Joseph Werner an air traffic controller with the 3rd MEB. "We have multiple aircraft coming in from every direction with only a single runway, and three spots to park the aircraft."

Due to so much destruction, the skills and professionalism of the air traffic controllers were put to the test as they worked around obstacles including the limited space on the runway, according to Loghry.

"Working on such a small runway causes us to be very limited in terms of parking the aircraft," said Loghry. "If one of the C-17s land, we cannot bring it onto the ramp. Instead we have to keep it on the runway and shut everything down while it loads and unloads."

In addition to having limited space on the runway, the aircraft controllers had to adapt to working without the usual airport radar services when managing the high volume of traffic, according to Loghry. Marines have also deployed a mobile military navigation system to help guide aircraft. "Villamor Air Base is currently in control of the aircraft until they descend to 10,000 feet," said Loghry. "Once they reach that point, they terminate their service with them and hand them off to us. In order to keep the aircraft apart we separate them vertically and horizontally. To do this, we are constantly getting back reports from the aircraft so we know exactly where they are in the air."

With so much at stake, the air traffic controllers are continuing to work around the clock in ensuring the airfield runs as smoothly as possible.

"This is what we live for as air traffic controllers," said Loghry. "We are here and just want to provide as much support that we can."