

Marines Deploy Mobile Air Traffic Control System

III Marine Expeditionary Force / Marine Corps Installations Pacific
Story by Cpl. Jose Lujano

Marines position the control arm during the final stages of set up for an air traffic navigational, integration and coordination system at Tacloban Air Base during Operation Damayan Nov. 18. The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade is assisting the Philippine government's ongoing relief efforts in response to the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. The Marines are with Marine Air Control Squadron 4 currently assigned to 3rd MEB in support of Joint Task Force 505. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Stephen D. Himes/Released)



TACLOBAN, LEYTE, Republic of the Philippines — Marines with 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, in support of Joint Task Force 505, set up an air traffic navigational, integration and coordination system at Tacloban airport, Leyte, Republic of the Philippines, Nov. 17 during Operation Damayan. The system allows air traffic controllers to contact incoming and outgoing aircraft and analyze flight patterns. Additionally, the controllers use the mobile system to guide pilots through their final approach to the runway when visibility is poor.

“The last time we were able to use the system was during an exercise, and now it is going to play an effective role during a real-world operation,” said Gunnery Sgt. Lee A. Pugh, a radar chief with Marine Air Control Squadron 4, currently assigned to 3rd MEB. The air traffic control tower at Tacloban airport was severely damaged by Typhoon Haiyan and is limited in its ability to manage the high volume of daily air traffic. The system will assist the Philippine Air Force in operations based out of Tacloban.

With the system in place the Philippine Air Force will better be able to manage multiple flights at once, according to Sgt. Jonathan Haasl, a radar electronics technician with MACS-4. With frequent inclement weather in the Asia-Pacific region, the system plays a vital role in assuring the pilots, crews, aircrafts and most importantly, the aid supplies make it safely to their destination, according to Pugh.

“There are several components that make up the system, like the portable electric units, air-surveillance radar system, radios and a precision approach radar system,” said Pugh.

The unit’s expeditionary capabilities are enhanced due to the mobility of the system.

“The unique feature of the system being mounted on multipurpose-tactical vehicles makes it easy for us to move to essential areas where it can make a difference, while not wasting valuable time,” said Pugh.

The system is a key capability of Marine Corps crises response around the world, whether a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief scenario or contingency operations.

“The system provides on the spot air surveillance and a rapid response, which is useful to expeditionary airfields like the one at Tacloban,” said Col. Brian W. Cavanaugh, the commanding officer for the 3rd MEB aviation combat element.

Besides bringing precision approach information to aircraft preparing to land, it is also useful in joint and bilateral operations, providing a safer environment for aircraft in the area, according to Cavanaugh.

“The safety of all the people on the aircraft is the most important part of the mission,” said Cavanaugh. “With this system, we can guide pilots to a three foot by three foot square safely and efficiently.”