

News story: RFA Mounts Bay delivers vital aid to Caribbean islands

The ship has been deployed in the Caribbean since July in preparation for the hurricane season, ready to provide support at a moment's notice. Tasked by the Royal Navy, she was the UK's first military response to the Caribbean.

The ship carries a specialist disaster relief team – drawn from the Royal Engineers and Royal Logistics Corps – as well as heavy plant for lifting and shifting and emergency kit and shelters provided by the Department for International Development. Also on board are the Royal Navy's Mobile Aviation Support Force – aviation specialists, meteorological advisors and flight deck crews.

Engineers were on hand to stop a potentially-dangerous fuel leak at Anguilla's main petrol dump, restore power to the island's sole hospital and hand out shelters providing temporary homes for people left homeless by the storm. They also cleared the runway which was declared safe for relief flights.

RFA Mounts Bay's Wildcat helicopter – from 815 Naval Air Squadron based at Yeovilton – also flew Governor Tim Foy on a flight over the island – which is about the size of Plymouth – to survey the damage from the air during seven hours of continuous flying. The reconnaissance flight found widespread damage to infrastructure, schools, government buildings and power supplies.

As a result of the sortie, the island's leaders and ship's team decided to focus efforts on supporting the police headquarters as the hub of the relief effort, get the hospital on its feet again, and reinforce two shelter stations – particularly important with Hurricane José now barrelling towards the region.

Mounts Bay's Commanding Officer Capt Stephen Norris RFA said:

My people worked tirelessly throughout the day with determination and flexibility to support the Governor and the people of Anguilla.

Although Anguilla suffered extensive damage, normal signs of life were returning – some roads open and the local population beginning a recovery and clear-up operation.

RFA Mounts Bay is now making for the British Virgin Islands – 90 miles to the west – to concentrate today's disaster relief efforts.

As part of a wider military effort, Britain's flagship HMS Ocean has been diverted from her NATO mission in the Mediterranean to the Caribbean to help with the reconstruction effort – as HMS Illustrious did in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines four years ago.

Meanwhile, three flights will shortly be departing RAF Brize Norton carrying Royal Marines, Engineers, medical supplies and aid including emergency shelter kits, rations and clean water. Tomorrow a further C17 will leave from Brize Norton carrying two Puma helicopters.