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Hanoi Conference huge success;

### *Prior conferences aided in tsunami communication*

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by Briana Kaya & Margaret Tippy

Pacific Regional Medical Center Public Affairs Office

HONOLULU—When the devastating tsunami hit Dec. 26th in the Asia Pacific Region last year, more than 300,000 lives were lost and more than one million people were left homeless -- one of the major natural disasters of modern times.

Help was desperately needed from the world, and the world responded.

Immediate communication was critical. There was no time for people from different countries to get to know one another. Countries had to move quickly – and they did, thanks in part to their participation in past conferences of the U.S. Army Pacific's Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference.

For 15 years, conferences have been held in different countries, building relationships in the Asia Pacific Region to assist in responding to just such situations. For instance, Lt. Col. Lawrence Connell,

USARPAC's deputy surgeon said, because he was friends with the Director Health Services of Sri Lankan Air Force, he was able to text message him and ask what he needed.

"You build friendships with key personnel from those countries and it's important for future events to know those people - seeing them at the APMMC," Connell said. "If you know those key leaders and you're friends with those people, they're more apt to open up their doors to you and you can successfully get things accomplished."

Connell was directly involved in working the medical logistics for the tsunami in Thailand earlier this year.

This year's conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, May 8 – 13, co-hosted by the People's Army Vietnam and USARPAC, continued to expand and enhance communication and cooperation among Asia Pacific countries.

"Nowadays, the primary theme for "Military Health - Friendship and Cooperation" is to enhance and expand cooperative relationship for each respective military health service", said Maj. Gen. Cuong Tien Chu, Director, Military Medical Department, People's Army of Vietnam.

Lt. Gen. John M. Brown III, commanding general, USARPAC, thanked the Vietnamese for co-hosting the conference – especially Maj. Gen. Cuong Tien Chu - and thanked conference attendees for making the conference the largest ever in the history of the APMMC with more than 600 delegates attending from more than 25 countries.

"...More and more as we enter in to responses to crises, we do so multilaterally," Brown said. "More often it is global (rather) than bilateral. ...No nation by itself can do it."

The coalition of 19 nations who responded to the tsunami relief effort, made a positive effect, he said. The military medical professionals who were on the ground were a positive influence.

"And now the relevant question (is) how can we save more lives if this ever happens again?" Brown said.

Many of those in attendance were from countries that had experienced the earthquake and tsunami devastation and continue to work on rebuilding.

“These relationships help when the tsunami hit,” said Retired Lt. Gen. James Peake, M.D., who is now executive vice president and chief operating officer of Project Hope. Peake, former U.S. Army surgeon general, was involved with the USNS Mercy – the U.S.’s 1,000-bed hospital ship – that went to the Asia Pacific Region to provide humanitarian support after the tsunami hit.

Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, and the U.S were represented.

The theme of the 15th annual conference was “Military Medicine: Cooperation and Friendship” and from the remarks of many of the delegates, the conference lived up to its mission.

The conference “is helpful and I am able to learn from others,” said Major General Tharit Thou of Cambodia’s Department of Health, General Department of Logistics and Finance, and Ministry of National Defense.

Maj. Gen. Achmad Hidayat of Indonesia’s Kapukes, Indonesia Armed Forces Headquarters, was interested in focusing on “the tsunami relief efforts and the civilian military relief cooperation that has been very good.”

When asked to reflect on her first conference as co-host, Maj. Gen. Gale Pollock, the USARPAC surgeon and commanding general of the Pacific Regional Medical Command said, “I think inspired is a really good term ... (as) I wasn’t sure what to anticipate.

“(What I experienced was a) ... desire and the willingness of everyone who has attended this conference to work together to address the fact that the majority of the world’s disasters occur in this region. (There is a) need for all of the countries to get along very well so that it is easy to support one another in the event of some kind of medical crisis.

“I think it’s more important now. I just think it’s more appreciated now,” Pollock said. “The tsunami enforced the importance of what we are doing.”

Topics were presented in lecture forums, small group sessions, and poster board presentations and included subjects such as medical readiness and interoperability, environmental medicine, medical aspects of humanitarian mission deployments, and technological advances in telemedicine.

“It covered a lot of very useful topics starting with tsunami, HIV/AIDS, malaria and humanitarian assistance and so many areas of common interest to us,” said Air Vice Marshal Nimal Guneratne, Director of Health Services, Sri Lanka Air Force. “I got to meet a lot of (people from other) countries and learn about training and cooperation.”

Guneratne is the chairperson of the HIV/AIDS project for the Sri Lanka Air Force. He plans to take the information he learned from the lectures and experiences in HIV/AIDS, especially from Thailand, and implement what they did for the armed forces in Sri Lanka.

The Royal Thai Army has been effectively fighting HIV/AIDS through strategic, operational, and tactical means for years, and has shared their medical solutions with other countries.

This year, Laerdal Inc. Asia, and Laerdal Inc. U.S., sponsored a half-day trauma workshop for about 50 selected Vietnamese and other delegates that was well received by participants.

“Simulation training techniques are an integral component of U.S. Army medic programs,” said Col. Benjamin Berg, M.D., scientific committee coordinator, and Tripler Army Medical Center’s chief of the Directorate of Health Education and Training. “Advanced simulation education systems are facilitating broader use of simulation training across a broad spectrum of medical disciplines. Simulation training represents an opportunity to engage across language and cultural barriers and to enhance international medical education activities.”

The sessions included rotations through three mannequin based scenario stations and one computer-based simulation program, Micro-Sim®, according to Berg. The practicum sessions were the highlight of the program. The sessions facilitated direct and substantive student-teacher interaction. This type of direct interaction within the context of medical problem-solving and simulated procedures was entirely novel for participants.

The educational processes, which were demonstrated, were enthusiastically received by all participants, Berg said. Program coordinators observed active participant engagement across all domains of the

program, including cognitive, skill development, and trans-cultural adaptive attitudes.

The Vietnamese hosts also provided a cultural tour of Ha Long Bay. Many of those in attendance commented on the warmth of the Vietnamese people and how welcoming they were to all.

“The conference is a success,” Chu said. “Tsunami (is) a big problem but now lots of people pay attention. Very important with military medicine.”

“Everyone wants a role in this meeting,” said Lt. Gen. Pravit Tanprasert, surgeon general of the Royal Thai Army Medical Department. “(Many) examples of friendship and cooperation (have been displayed here), and it is a good way to learn how we are going to get in touch.”

This was Pravit’s first visit to Hanoi, and he left with a very good impression of the people, the scenery and the excellent food, he said.

“This year’s conference is a landmark for us as part of a theatre engagement program for the Pacific Command,” Berg said.

“It’s been a tremendously satisfying experience working with our Vietnamese colleagues to put together this very complex multinational conference that has been executed over the last 15 years in a variety of countries,” Berg said. “We have found that the Vietnamese co-hosts this year have really risen to the challenge that exceeds all of our expectations and we hope meets all of their expectations.”

This was Col. Stephanie Marshall, Col. Dale Vincent, M.D., and Col. Benjamin Berg, M.D.’s last conference as U.S. active duty officers as all three plan to retire. All work at Tripler Army Medical Center. Marshall, Vincent and Berg have been guiding lights behind the scientific program for many years. Col. Joseph Pina, M.D., is scheduled to head next year’s scientific program.

“Having had the opportunity to visit Vietnam and meet the people of Vietnam, it has really reinforced for me how similar people are,” Pollock said.

“We are all human...we don’t want different things...we want safety, we want security, we want to be

able to care for our loved ones...when we look at our humanness we are very, very similar,” she said.

Next year’s conference is scheduled to be co-hosted by India’s Armed Forces Medical Services and held at the Taj Palace in New Delhi, India, March 26 – 31. The website for conference information is available at [www.apmmc.org](http://www.apmmc.org).

(Editor’s Note: Thanks to James McGee, director/producer, Directorate of Information Management, 30th Signal Battalion, who videotaped the people who are quoted throughout this article and Col. Joe Pina, M.D., who took many of the accompanying photos.)

#### U.S. Army photo

Vietnamese delegates work with a Laerdal representative on a simulation model during a half-day Trauma Workshop at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam.

#### People’s Army of Vietnam Photo

Senior delegates at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference pose in Hanoi, Vietnam.

#### U.S. Army photos

*Maj. Gen. Gale Pollock, USARPAC Surgeon center, poses with delegates, Col. Pascal Rajaonarison of Madagascar, left, and Col. Johanesa Rakotonirnia of Madagascar.*

Air Commodore Tony Austin, M.D., Defence Health Service - Australia, shakes hands with Col. Stephanie Marshall, Col. Dale Vincent, M.D., and Col. Benjamin Berg, M.D., who form the Scientific Committee for the Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference. Ret. Lt. Gen. James Peake, M.D., right, prepares to present the three committee members with special awards for their exceptional service to APMMC.

*The Honorable Michael Marine, Ambassador of the U.S. to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, right, shakes hands with Maj. Gen. Cuong Tien Chu, Director, Military Medical Department, People’s Army of Vietnam, and Maj. Gen. Gale Pollock, USARPAC Surgeon, second from left, shakes hands with the Melia Hotel General Manager Frederick Arul.*

