

'Last mile' humanitarian logistics on a goodwill shoestring

By Walter Glass

As category five Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu on 13 March 2015, with sustained wind gusts of 250 kph, I watched the weather reports from the distant safety of our New Zealand living room, firstly in awe of the power of Mother Nature, and then in astonishment at the sheer scale of devastation across this small neighbouring country.

In the wake of Pam, 75,000 people of Vanuatu were left homeless, 95% of crops were destroyed, and the country was effectively flattened. Worst hit were the remote outer islands that were totally cut off and left with inadequate life support – no water, no food, no shelter, no shade – for the poorest people in one of the world's poorest nations.

When a humanitarian disaster of this magnitude and devastation occurs, natural or otherwise, there is an unusual determination to assist, no matter how small or large our individual contributions might be. This resolve is reinforced when the disaster is close to one's own backyard, as was the case for Vanuatu, hence the significant initial New Zealand and Australian aid and military uplift preparations and responses. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) of the Vanuatu government was also well aware of the impending disaster, and other parties such as Red Cross, the UN and Aus-Aid also worked on their respective planned responses, mainly via Port Vila.



Photo by frankandpeggyphotography.com

'Last mile' humanitarian logistics – if goods cannot be moved by helicopter, access for the last mile is most likely to be on foot

Disaster relief via superyachts

Amongst these parties was a private donor consortium under Samaritan's Purse, a reasonably large US faith-based non-government organisation (NGO) that was given the demanding role of servicing the outer Vanuatu islands with water, shelter and medical services. This group of parties included LIFT Non-Profit Logistics, a disaster relief NGO logistics provider founded by Michael Rettig and based in Atlanta, USA; YachtAid Global (YAG), another US-based NGO founded by Captain Mark Drewelow, which coordinates the delivery of donated educational, medical and clothing supplies to remote communities via a mega-

yacht fleet it manages; and Kalera Yachting Services (KYS), a local Vanuatu firm owned by ex-pat Kiwis Sam and Jess Bell.

YAG found New Zealand to be an excellent logistics centre of gravity for its requirements, and called upon two of its fleet to respond: *M/Y Dragonfly* and *M/Y Umbra*. The 73.3 m *Dragonfly* was the first to respond to a general request for assistance put out by YAG. *Dragonfly's* owner had generously authorised his captain and crew to load medical supplies and other aid items onboard in New Zealand following Cyclone Pam. *Dragonfly* further welcomed aboard medical personnel and search-and-rescue teams, whose tasks included heading to the outer islands of

Vanuatu to assess the situation. The 50.6 m *M/Y Umbra* was called upon to act as a support vessel, and one of its first tasks was to organise much-needed supplies of water. While berthed in Auckland, a factory produced several thousand 10-litre water containers that were loaded aboard the *Umbra* prior to her departure from New Zealand.

En route to the islands, *Umbra* made freshwater while underway, filling the containers, and upon arrival in Aneityum, Vanuatu, immediately delivered the water to the remote villages on multiple islands via helicopter. The *Umbra* was invaluable with its support vessel configuration and capabilities.

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Not long after the Vanuatu aid response began, I was contacted by Steve Keats of Kestrel Liner Agencies in Florida. My company, Corporate Logistics, had worked with Kestrel back in 2007 and 2008 when I was asked to fix some significant logistics problems with the delivery of stadium seating to all the venues for the ICC (International Cricket Council) World Cup across six West Indian countries. Major changes in strategy saved the day and the ICC was exceedingly happy.

Steve Keats explained that he now gives time to assist his colleague, Michael Rettig of LIFT, and was working with the well-respected

Dragonfly – Vanuatu Disaster Relief 2015



M/Y Dragonfly was dispatched to Vanuatu to provide disaster relief after Cyclone Pam struck the remote islands on 13 March 2015. A video, which shows the work that the vessel and her crew performed and highlights the possible use of resources onboard yachts in such disaster zones, can be watched at www.youtube.com/watch?v=os5gfk315Qo&feature=youtu.be

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