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Backgrounder

Canadian Forces Disaster Assistance Response Team

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Background

The Canadian government has consistently demonstrated strong support for humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief operations throughout the world. Nationally and internationally, the Canadian Forces (CF) has deployed to disaster-stricken regions to conduct humanitarian relief operations. International missions since 1990 include relief operations in Rwanda, Haiti, Honduras and Turkey.

In 1994, the CF deployed 2 Field Ambulance to Rwanda to provide medical relief to the refugees suffering from the many ill effects of the conflict in that country. Despite the best efforts of all concerned, the relief effort arrived after the peak of a cholera epidemic that brought great suffering. This experience convinced the Canadian government of the need to create a rapid-response capability to provide effective humanitarian aid. The concept of the CF Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) was born.

Operational criteria

The DART is a military organization designed to deploy rapidly anywhere in the world to crises ranging from natural disasters to complex humanitarian emergencies. The DART:

- responds rapidly, in conjunction with national and regional governments and non-governmental agencies, to stabilize the primary effects of an emergency or disaster;
- provides purified drinking water and medical aid to help prevent the rapid onset of secondary effects of a disaster; and
- gains time for the deployment of national and international humanitarian aid to facilitate long-term recovery in a disaster-stricken community.

Mission capabilities

Comprising about 200 CF personnel ready to deploy quickly to conduct emergency relief operations for up to 40 days, the DART can either enhance emergency relief efforts or bridge the gap until members of the international community arrive to provide long-term help. The DART is designed to deploy only to permissive environments — that is, locations where it will not encounter any organized resistance or threat.

For international missions, the DART can be activated by a request from either an individual country or from the United Nations (UN). Regardless of the source of the request, the final decision to deploy the DART rests with the Canadian government, based on advice from Foreign Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence, and the Canadian International Development Agency.

In a UN operation, the DART is required to co-ordinate its work with the UN-appointed humanitarian

co-ordinator. The DART also co-operates with international agencies on site to achieve the maximum positive impact.

The DART serves four critical needs in emergencies, namely:

- primary medical care;
- production of safe drinking water;
- a limited specialist engineer capability; and
- a command and control structure that allows for effective communications between the DART, the host nation, and the other agencies involved in the relief effort, including international organizations, non-governmental organizations and UN aid agencies.

Many domestic and international organizations are committed full-time to the relief of pain and suffering. The DART complements these organizations; it does not compete with them.

DART composition

The DART is composed of highly trained military personnel drawn mostly from Land Force units. It comprises the following main elements:

- **DART Headquarters**, consisting of about 45 personnel drawn mainly from the Canadian Forces Joint Headquarters and the Canadian Forces Joint Signal Regiment, both based in Kingston, Ontario. DART Headquarters is responsible for command and control in theatre, and for the strategic-level liaison required to determine and co-ordinate the DART's humanitarian response with the governments of Canada and the host nation, and officials of international organizations and non-government organizations operating in theatre.
- A **logistics platoon** of about 20 personnel, responsible for the logistical support services essential to the sustainment of the DART, such as maintenance, transport and movements control, supply, procurement and contracting, and food services.
- The **headquarters of the various DART sub-units** deployed on the mission, each comprising about nine personnel, to co-ordinate on-site tasking priorities and provide a command capability for split operations when required. These headquarters provide the day-to-day command and control of the following DART sub-units:
 - An **engineer troop** of about 37 personnel, including both field and construction engineers. The field engineer element consists of a water supply section, a field engineer section and a heavy equipment section. The construction engineer element provides limited construction and utility services. The engineer troop produces bulk and bagged water from its Canadian-built Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit (ROWPU), which can produce purified drinking water for use by medical services and for distribution to disaster victims. Once it has completed the DART camp — an austere facility — the engineer troop can take on other tasks in support of the host nation and humanitarian aid agencies.
 - A **medical platoon** of approximately 40 personnel is able to provide support to area hospitals or to operate a small medical aid station, a tented facility capable of providing care for 200 to 250 out-patients and 10 in-patients per day, depending on the requirements of the mission. The medical aid station currently includes a laboratory, a pharmacy, limited obstetrics services, and re-hydration and preventive medicine sections; it has no surgical or trauma-care capabilities. The medical platoon provides treatment of minor injuries, disease control and routine health care services to relieve the host nation's

medical facilities of these responsibilities.

- A **defence and security platoon** of about 45 personnel to provide camp security and general support for DART operations.

OPERATION STRUCTURE:

CANADIAN FORCES DISASTER ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM IN SRI LANKA

Following the earthquake-generated tsunamis that devastated coastal regions of Southeast Asia on December 26, 2004, Canada sent an inter-departmental reconnaissance team to assess the requirement for assistance to the region. Using commercial aircraft, the team left Ottawa for Colombo, Sri Lanka, on December 30. The team was comprised of an 11-member Canadian Forces (CF) advance party - mostly from the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) - three representatives from Foreign Affairs Canada, two from the Canadian International Development Agency, and one from the Public Health Agency.

The aim of the CF members on the reconnaissance team was to assess the potential requirement for military assistance to the humanitarian effort while staying within the Government of Canada guidelines on civil-military coordination and humanitarian action.

On January 2, 2005, the Prime Minister announced the imminent deployment of the DART, pending receipt of the final recommendation from the deployed reconnaissance team. The recommendation was delivered that same day. The following day, the Minister of National Defence announced the DART would begin deploying to the Ampara region of Sri Lanka.

Ampara, a district of approximately 600,000 people, was one of the districts worst affected by the tsunamis, with an estimated 10,400 people killed. Approximately 180,000 people have been displaced, and damage to hospital infrastructure and water supplies is significant.

A 21-member advance party deployed to Sri Lanka via commercial aircraft on January 4 and 5. Five chartered Antonov-124 flights are being used to carry the DART's equipment. DART personnel deployed on two CF CC-150 Polaris flights. The first group of 137 personnel left on January 6, and the second group of 33 personnel departed on January 9.

The DART moved into the Ampara region on January 10 with tents, food and four water purification systems capable of producing 150,000 to 200,000 litres of water per day . The water purification units and medical platoon will support local hospitals until normal services can be restored. The DART is setting up its main camp at a former sugar factory located about six kilometres south of Ampara, which will allow the DART to bring assistance to several nearby communities simultaneously. They will begin operating from that location by January 11.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Voith commands the DART and was in Sri Lanka as part of the reconnaissance team.

Conclusion

Canada is an important provider of international humanitarian assistance and emergency relief. The creation of the DART enhanced the federal government's ability to meet both domestic and international requests for aid, and it demonstrates Canada's resolve to support disaster victims anywhere in the world.

For more information, please visit: http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Operations/Plateau/index_e.asp

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