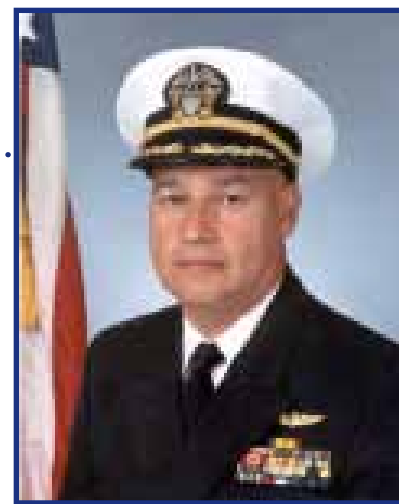


SAFETY FIRST

DR DEBRIEF

By Felix R. Tormes, MD, FACS
CAPT, (FS), MC, USN
Department of Orthopaedic Surgery
Naval Hospital, Pensacola, Florida
President-elect of Flying Physicians Association



Feedback from the post-Winter Board Tour to the Dominican Republic on 8-12 February 2010 by the FPA has been positive and encouraging from the standpoint of making this an annual event.

This year, the trip was overshadowed by the events in Haiti, and soon after the temblor, consideration was given to scuttling the tour altogether. However, as the overwhelming response by the US, UN and NGOs took hold; it became apparent that rather than canceling the trip, a corresponding response from the FPA was in order. The fortuitously planned medical conference into Santo Domingo 3 weeks after the earthquake presented an opportunity for the FPA to marshal its resources of physicians, pilots and aircraft and funnel them into a humanitarian assistance project.

Individual members of the FPA volunteered their aircraft and piloting skills to ferry supplies and personnel into Haiti from Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata. Particular kudos go to Dr. Kevin Ware who made multiple trips into unimproved runways in Haiti with essentially no ATC assistance. The total tally of aircraft in our group was 22 airplanes, most of which were loaded with requested medical supplies. Care was taken to

ensure that these supplies were earmarked for Dr. Hillary Cranmer, who was operating a hospital at the Haitian border.

Our relief efforts and arrival at Higuero Airport were documented in the 9 February issue of EL CARIBE, the local Santo Domingo newspaper, complete with photos of our pilots and aircraft on the tarmac at MDJB. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our participating pilots for their diligence and generosity.

Personally, I had a crash course in improving my Spanish. Describing our group to locals, I used the term "medicos que vuelan" (doctors who fly), but after a sly smile from Dominican friends, I switched to "medicos que son pilotos" (doctors who are pilots). Turns out that "doctors that fly" loosely translates as "gay doctors".

The trip from South Florida to Santo Domingo was about 750 NM, but several of our pilots from the Midwest had already flown more than halfway from home by the time they departed Ochechobee. Thus, we had in our group a number of physicians who are skilled and confident enough to undertake long distance flights with more than adequate safety margins. We suffered the usual spate of mechanical glitches,

which delayed some, but the tour was conducted safely and without major incidents. Our governmental hosts in the Dominican Republic were most welcoming, and the assistance of Jim Parker in addressing the logistics of the tour was much appreciated.

This was a learning experience, and should there be enough interest from the FPA membership, there exists a potential for an ongoing relationship between the FPA and Dominican physicians. One immediate gain to our association was the membership of Dr. Douglas Bournigal, sponsored by Dr. Jim Gainer.

There is tremendous potential for the FPA in the Dominican Republic, which offers a stimulating flight into a country which is opening up to GA with well kept, safe airports. We only scratched the surface on this trip. Additionally, there is great opportunity to engage the Dominican medical community with educational and humanitarian exchanges. Thanks to all for making this initial outreach such a successful beginning.

Nil illigitimae carborundum