

## News

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# Military exercise assists thousands

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Msata, Tanzania— Amidst the sound of beating drums, clinging bells and blowing whistles, Msata villagers sang verses of praise and danced, heralding the opening of their new town clinic.

"The elderly people never expected to see such a thing before they passed," said Mama Maloungoo, Msata executive division secretary.

Friday marked the completion of the Msata clinic renovation and building effort by elements of the 6th Marine Engineer Support Battalion, based in Battle Creek, Mich.

The singing and dancing also signified the end of exercise "Natural Fire," a CJTF HOA initiative designed to simulate natural disaster response among East African community members and the United States. The exercise focused on military-to-military training among Kenyan, Tanzanian, Ugandan and American forces in Kenya.

In Uganda and Tanzania, the focus of the exercise was on Medical Civil Assistance Projects and Engineering Civil Assistance Projects undertaken by Marine engineers and assorted U.S. military medics and doctors.

"We're seeing diseases we only read about," said U.S. Navy Lieutenant Alicia Mingo, MEDCAP mission commander in Tanzania. "Things in the states that would be treated immediately go untreated here and people learn to live with it."

In Tanzania, working between four different locations, U.S. military medical personnel, with the assistance of their counterparts in the Tanzanian military, treated more than 3,000 local villagers in the Bagamoyo District over eight days. They distributed nearly \$40,000 in medication to villagers and their clinics. Each villager who was treated for illness was provided with a 30-day supply of multivitamins, antiseptic soap and de-worming medication.

Overall, almost 12,000 people were diagnosed and treated for symptoms ranging from headaches to malaria to venereal diseases during "Natural Fire."

According to the U.S. ambassador to Tanzania, Michael Retzer, the MEDCAPS who performed during "Natural Fire" are part of a larger initiative.



(Times photo/Anton Menning) Villagers wait in line for treatment at a MEDCAP near Kiwange, Tanzania.

"We are spending \$130 million dollars this year in Tanzania to help overcome AIDS," Ambassador Retzer said. "Malaria is a terrible problem in East Africa. We are spending \$11.5 million this year and \$28 million next year to help with malaria."

Additionally, the Center for Disease Control will help fund a program designed to prevent the spread of mother-to-child HIV at the Msata clinic.

The financial backing for battling malaria and HIV in Tanzania represents a significant commitment to the region.

"In the medium term, we will be here for a good number of years," said U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Hunt, CJTF HOA commander.

By working through local governments in East Africa to provide humanitarian aid, the United States strengthens the existing governments and supports good governance, said Admiral Hunt.

When asked if CJTF HOA experienced any anti-American sentiment in the region, Admiral Hunt replied negatively, saying that U.S. forces had been welcomed wherever they went.

"This means a lot to us," said Tanzanian Brigadier General Salim Salim. "The relationships formed are very important and we hope it continues in the future."



(Times photo/Anton Menning) U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania, Michael Retzer addresses Msata villagers during clinic dedication ceremony.