

LT Tom Foolery
PHS Award

Background:

On the morning of December 26, 2004, a 9.0 earthquake was recorded about 100 miles west of the Island of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean. Over the next two hours, a series of tsunamis struck Indonesia, Thailand, India, and the eastern coast of Africa. The resulting catastrophe was perhaps unlike anything experienced in the last century. To date, over 300,000 people are either dead or still missing, with majority of the victims being residents of Aceh Province, Indonesia. Over 1 million people are still living in temporary housing. The public health ramifications of the disaster completely overwhelmed the ability of Indonesian authorities to effectively respond. Many nations contributed personnel, supplies, and equipment. In addition to the United States pledge of \$350 million, U.S. Navy ships and aircraft were deployed to support the relief efforts. The Commissioned Corps was asked to support the medical and public health mission of the USNS Mercy.

LT Foolery, a nurse with the Indian Health Service in Arizona, was deployed to the U.S.N.S. Mercy to provide necessary tsunami relief; however, upon arrival his mission was incredibly unclear. He was given no instructions on his departure from Florida and when he arrived aboard the Mercy the mission order from the Navy was to “go west and do good thing.”

Achievements:

- Upon arrival on station in the waters near Banda Aceh, and as the first patients began to arrive on board, LT Foolery assumed the role of Charge Nurse for the Mercy’s intensive care unit. The first patient in the unit was a small boy who had been found floating on a log after being washed out to sea by the tsunami. The boy had been in various local hospitals where his condition progressively worsened prior to being sent to the Mercy. While taking care of various ICU patients such as car wreck victims and other tsunami related conditions LT Foolery devoted particular attention to the condition of the little boy found at sea. On two separate occasions, he called a code blue on the boy. The medical staff acknowledged that LT Foolery attention and prompt action saved the boy’s life.
- During the first week the Mercy was on station near Banda Aceh the patient load increased quickly and the ICU was soon at capacity. LT Foolery conscientiously tended to his patients working nearly around clock for five days.
- Due to the patient, load aboard the Mercy the decision was made to establish a pediatric infectious disease ward at the University Hospital in Banda Aceh. LT Foolery was chosen to go ashore and create the unit. He worked with nurses’ from France and Indonesia to set up equipment and prepare the ward for its first patients. He was working on the newly established ward when he spotted one of the patients, a seven-year-old girl, who was having difficulty breathing. He determined that she was in respiratory failure and arranged for her immediate transfer to the Mercy where she was admitted to the ship’s ICU. The young girl had chest tubes inserted draining off pleural fluid, which allowed her lungs to properly function. LT Foolery actions in this case contributed significantly to the saving of this patient’s life also.
- In addition to his very long hours performing his clinical responsibilities, LT Foolery volunteered to write daily “journal entries” that based on his activities on the USNS Mercy and in Aceh for publication on the Surgeon General’s website. He was asked to do this by an HHS public information officer., and had the activity further approved by the USNS Mercy PIO prior to sending the articles to HHS for publication. Through this venue, LT Foolery was able to tell the

