

U.S. help arrives in flooded Mozambique

MAPUTO, Mozambique (AP) — U.S. airplanes flew over flood-stricken areas of Mozambique on Tuesday, beaming back live video images of marooned people and demolished terrain.

The information gathered by a specially equipped Hercules C-130 will be passed on to aid agencies in the Mozambican capital of Maputo, Air Force Col. Gary Sadler said.

"The information will be made available immediately to the people trying to provide relief. This is very beneficial when looking for people in trouble," he said at Hoedspruit air base in South Africa.

While the C-130 flew its first missions, five other cargo planes ferried supplies from Hoedspruit to Maputo and the central Mozambican city of Beira.

The aid supplies will be stockpiled there until helicopters can transport them to some of the southeast African nation's most isolated regions.

The first two U.S. helicopters arrived Tuesday at Hoedspruit.

The floodwaters that swept across Mozambique one month ago and surged again two weeks ago have ebbed, leaving hundreds confirmed dead and 1

million people either homeless or in desperate need of help.

Aid agency officials expect the death toll to rise into the thousands as the waters recede.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Joseph Werhle, the commander of the U.S. military's relief mission, arrived in Maputo on Tuesday and immediately brushed aside suggestions that the United States had been tardy in launching its aid effort.

The Clinton administration authorized U.S. military involvement in the relief operation last week after U.S. lawmakers were consulted.

"We moved out as quick as we got the word," Werhle said.

President Clinton recommended the military's deployment last Wednesday, three days after a wall of water unexpectedly surged through the Limpopo River valley, according to Dean Curran, the U.S. ambassador to Mozambique.

Some 350 U.S. troops were deployed in the region by Tuesday afternoon. Up to 600 U.S. soldiers were expected to participate in the mission.

Aid workers welcomed the U.S. forces, saying they were needed to help transport tons of food aid arriving daily at the Maputo airport.

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