

Local S6 member Steve Cassidy

# Machinist on a Mission



HAITI  
Port-au-Prince

When Bath, Maine Local S6 member Steve Cassidy joined the U.S. Army Reserve at age 37, he was told he would have to be the equal of men and women half his age.

"I knew I'd have to prove myself," said Cassidy, who said he joined the Army for the same reasons he volunteered to become an IAM representative years earlier. "I know the good things I have in my life come with an obligation to give some-

thing back. I also wanted to set a good example for my eight-year-old son, Garrett."

A marine electrician by trade, Cassidy used his age and experience to excel in basic training before moving on to specialized training and an assignment as a Preventive Medicine Specialist with the Massachusetts-based 399th Combat Support Hospital (CSH) Unit.

A direct descendant of the storied Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) of the Korean War, the 399th was previously deployed to Kosovo in 2001 and to Iraq during the height of the surge in 2006-2007.

The unit's latest assignment to Haiti, which was hit by a massive earthquake that killed more than 200,000 people, was part of ongoing efforts to foster relationships with South America and the Caribbean Islands.

## Tough Conditions

"The living conditions for many of the people in Haiti are beyond grim," said Cassidy. "There's no work, no infrastructure and no social services at all since the earthquake hit. People spend their days scavenging just to survive."

After landing in Port-au-

*Hundreds of Haitians lined up each day to receive medical treatment provided by members of the Massachusetts-based U.S. Army Reserve 399th Combat Support Hospital.*



Prince, the 399th quickly moved inland to an established Forward Operations Base near L'Estere, about 80 miles northwest of the capital.

Working up to 14-hour shifts nearly every day, Cassidy and his fellow soldiers provided medical treatment and counseling to over 8,600 men, women and children.

"Untreated infections were the single largest acute issue we faced," said Cassidy. "The lack of vitamins, clean water and a proper diet is especially hard on children and the elderly, who walked for miles and waited in line for hours to get treatment."

Cassidy and approximately two-dozen medical soldiers in his unit had to adapt quickly to working in sustained triple-digit temperatures and at a pace that equalled any big-city emergency room.

The lack of local law enforcement, combined with the large number of people surrounding the treatment area, meant that security was a constant concern.

"Even though we were on a humanitarian mission, our base was protected 24/7 by fully-equipped members of the National Guard and active regular Army," said Cassidy. "We weren't there to address Haiti's lawlessness, but it couldn't be ignored either."

## Needed Care

A typical day at the treatment center would begin before dawn, with patients lining up by the hundreds.

Before being examined and treated, the Haitians were given classroom-style instructions on preventive medicine measures.

"Part of our mission was to help the Haitians help themselves and that included educating them about personal hygiene, sanitation, communicable diseases and basic first aid for injuries and illness," said Cassidy, who saw a relationship evolve between his



*U.S. Army Reserve Specialist Steven Cassidy, right, takes part in the recent U.S. mission to deliver medical aid to Haitian earthquake victims. As a civilian, Cassidy works as an IAM representative on behalf of fellow members at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine.*

unit and the hard-hit Creole-speaking population.

"It was remarkable to see their fear and suspicion become trust and gratitude," said Cassidy. "I have no doubt that we completed every aspect of our mission, which was first and foremost to provide desperately-needed medical treatment, but

also to demonstrate the compassion and generosity of the United States."

The IAM was also quick to respond to the crisis in Haiti, donating \$50,000 that was matched dollar for dollar by a program sponsored by the Canadian government.

The U.S. Army and the Machinists Union each have well-deserved reputations, on the battlefield and at the bargaining table, but the mission

to bring aid to a devastated Haiti demonstrates a side of both organizations that is no less compelling.

"Providing relief to people trying to survive in the wake of a disaster sends a powerful message about who we are as a people and a nation," said Cassidy. "It was a real honor to be part of the U.S. mission to Haiti."