HURREX/Citadel Gale 2018
Underway through May 11
By Donna Cipolloni
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The 2017 Atlantic hurricane season spawned seven tropical storms and 10 hurricanes, six of those falling into Category 3 or stronger which, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, result in devastating or catastrophic damage occurring. One need only remember when Hurricane Maria — a Category 4 storm — slammed into Puerto Rico in September 2017, leaving 90 percent of the population without power, disrupting cell phone and water service, and destroying most of the island’s roadways.

With the onset of the Atlantic Hurricane season approaching in June, the Navy is currently conducting HURREX/Citadel Gale 2018, its annual hurricane exercise designed to prepare the Navy to respond to weather threats in coastal regions and maintain the ability to deploy forces, even under the most adverse weather conditions.

“"This year's exercise will involve one simulated storm system developing and intensifying to Category 3 hurricane strength before threatening the Caribbean Islands and the U.S. East Coast regions," said Senior Chief Rafael Custodio, installation training officer. "That, of course, would include NAS Patuxent River.”

Custodio explained that all Navy commands with personnel in Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, Naval District Washington and Navy Region Southeast — ashore, at sea, in port and underway — will participate.

The exercise takes place over a two-week period and will also evaluate Pax River's capability to prepare, mitigate, plan, respond and recover from a hurricane or similar incident causing life/safety concerns and disruption to infrastructure.

"Week one incorporates information sharing and preparation for a hurricane potentially impacting the station," Custodio said.

"Week two incorporates response and recovery from the hurricane making landfall.”

The simulated storm will make landfall, causing massive damage in the region that includes power outages, hazardous materials spills, structural damage to buildings, road blockages and

GEM, Airfield Services play behind-the-scenes roles at Air Expo

Pax River Air Expo
June 2 and 3, featuring the Blue Angels
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Ground Electronics Maintenance (GEM) is responsible for maintaining airfield navigational aids, communications, Land Mobile Radio, and other ancillary electronic equipment such as the public address system. In short, the NAS Patuxent River 2018 Air Expo couldn’t get off the ground without GEM personnel to support it.

“The way I explain it to people is that the performers and controllers are the rock stars, and [GEM personnel] are the roadies,” said Mike Agamaite, Ground Electronics Maintenance officer. “Nobody knows anything about us, but we’re behind the scenes making it happen.”

Communications — including land mobile radio communications, ground-to-ground (VHF), marine radios, and ground-to-air (UHF) — is a vital element in coordinating the multiple moving parts of an air show and GEM technicians are ready and waiting to jump in on a moment’s notice if there’s a break in the link.

“We provide a one-stop shop for electronics support,” Agamaite explained. “If anyone has radio issues, we’re customer service. If you can’t talk on your radio, our techs are standing by to either fix it, walk you through the problem, or replace it for you. We’ve also got another group of techs dedicated to supporting air traffic control if problems should arise with air surveillance radar systems. They’re a rapid response team and they’ll be right there; we’re required to respond within 10 minutes.”

GEM will also support the Local Dispatch Center, a central communications command hub that will be controlling network connection and monitoring everyone’s chatter and movements.

“There will be radios in there, IT power lines, emergency generators, security personnel, an assistant air show director — it’s the brain center,” Agamaite noted. “If they lose power, there’ll be a tech sitting in there to get things up and going again.”

The GEM team has run a few communications drills, emergency scenarios and what if situations so that everyone is prepared.

“You try to think of every contingency so you can plug the holes in the dike; that’s what we do,” Agamaite said. “I’ve been doing air shows since the early 90s and nothing’s happened yet; we don’t anticipate issues, but we have to be prepared.”

Airfield Services Division

While many of the planes at Air Expo will be in the skies above Pax River, there will be about 30 aircraft on display on the ground for visitors to check out up close and personal, and it is Airfield Services (AFS) personnel who are responsible for getting them there.

“We’re getting all of the static displays together, coordinating with different squadrons as to what statics they’re providing and where we’ll set them up,” explained Lt.

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