

The Buckeye Response



Ohio National Guard
Soldiers and Airmen
Answer the Call

Ohio Guardmembers Respond

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On the Cover

Front: Spc. Errol S. Griebel from Heath, Ohio, a light wheel mechanic with the 237th Personnel Services Battalion, hands out bananas at a food, water and ice distribution point, Sept. 5 in Pica-yune, Miss. *Photo by Sgt. Kimberly Snow, 196th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

Back: A 5-ton truck rolls through the flooded streets of New Orleans as seen from the air. *Photo by Staff Sgt. Bob Barko, Jr., 196th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

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OHARNG RESPONDS TO HURRICANE KATRINA

By Sgt. Kimberly Snow

CAMP SHELBY, Miss. — Sixty miles north of the Mississippi coastline, Soldiers from the Ohio Army National Guard prepare to move south to join the relief effort following Hurricane Katrina — one of the deadliest and most destructive natural disasters in U.S. history.

The troops moved into Hancock County, which sits on the Mississippi-Louisiana border in one of the hardest-hit coastal communities, said Brig. Gen. Jack Lee, commander of 73rd Troop Command and Joint Task Force Buckeye, the Ohio contingent of the relief effort.

Even 60 miles inland, the devastation was sobering. A 15-minute bus ride to the staging area at Camp Shelby presented the arriving Soldiers with a bleak landscape. Trees lay on the ground, snapped in half, scattered like toothpicks. The scene resembled the aftermath of an artillery barrage.

Although some troops voiced concerns following news reports of hostilities coming out of stricken areas, particularly in New Orleans, many of the Soldiers volunteered for this mission and were anxious to begin operations.

Spc. Heather S. Clemmons of Springfield, Ohio, is a health care specialist with C Company, 118th Area Support Medical Battalion, Westerville. As she watched televised coverage of the disaster unfolding Aug. 29, she called her unit to volunteer in the event they were tasked to provide assistance. Three days later, at 12:30 p.m., she got the call. By 3 p.m. she was at her armory preparing to leave.

"I wanted to help the civilians," she said. "I wanted to provide medi-

cal treatment for those civilians who now have nothing."

Like many others, Clemmons voiced concerns over the rising tensions due to the austere conditions caused by the hurricane. She compared the situation to her experience being deployed in Iraq in 2004.

"It's kind of the same thing," she said. "It's like a war out there. In New Orleans, people were desperate, hungry. But I really just wanted to help."

Soldiers awaiting the order to move south had no television coverage — electricity was only recently restored — and relied on information from those who had seen the damage firsthand.

Lee addressed a formation of troops preparing to depart and described the austere conditions they would soon face: no running water, no electricity, no phone service and a population in need. He also reminded the troops of the emotional toll on the Mississippi Guard troops already on the ground.

"There's probably not a guardsman that you're going to deal with that hasn't been touched by the hurricane," he said. "And they're tired. And that's why we're here. They've done a hell of a job until now and it's time for us to improve on it."

Lee said about 1,500 Ohio troops initially aided the Mississippi National Guard in restoring the infrastructure by providing security for the relief effort, as well as passing out water, ice and food.

The Ohio National Guard joined the relief effort after Mississippi National Guard officials requested help from the National Guard Bureau, who quickly spread the word. Ohio was one of about 20 states to send troops in the first week after Katrina.

It was unclear just how long Ohio troops would be involved in the relief effort, Lee said. But the troops were anxious to begin.

"It took us a little time to start flowing our forces down (there), it's a three-day convoy," he said. "But Soldiers' morale (was) high and they (were) ready to hit the ground running."



Soldiers from the Ohio Army National Guard take a bus from Hattiesburg, Miss. to Camp Shelby, Miss.

Joint Task Force Green leads Buckeye effort in Louisiana

By Spc. Chad Menegay

WRIGHT-PATTERSON, AFB — On Sunday, Sept. 25 a second wave of Ohio National Guard Soldiers left home and family to provide relief and security assistance to flooded areas of the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

About 300 people flew 950 miles Sept. 25 to England Air Force Base in Alexandria, La., on Ohio Air National Guard KC-135 and C-130 aircraft to begin to prepare the conditions for the additional 900 Buckeye Soldiers who arrived in the following days.

Soldiers from the 2nd Squadron, 107th Cavalry Regiment (Kettering), 237th Forward Support Battalion (Springfield), 112th Engineer Battalion (Brook Park), 1486th Transportation Company (Mansfield, Ashland), and Airmen from the 123rd Air Control Squadron (Blue Ash) made

up Joint Task Force Green.

England Air Force Base, in central Louisiana, acted as an initial staging area for the Department of Defense's military support of civilian authorities.

Upon arrival, reconnaissance teams prepared for travel toward the coast, such as the Lake Charles area, to assess Rita's damage, thought to be less severe than feared, and identify where the task force would best serve to assist. Most Soldiers were given a 36-hour heads up on their 30-days or less activation.

Pfc. Suzanne Johnson, a food service specialist for the 237th FSB out of Austintown, Ohio, said she received her phone call at 12:30 a.m. on the 25th, giving her six hours to organize her things and leave.

"What we as Soldiers were going through there was only temporary,

but people down there's lives are gone," Johnson said. "I would sweat a few weeks for them.

"When I saw the destruction that happened to people down here, I felt so horrible for them. I wanted to help; it makes me feel good to serve my country," she said.

"This is what being a National Guardsman is all about, when called we go and help our neighbors," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Billy Woodall, the property book officer for the 37th Brigade Combat Team. "My God, if it happened to me, I'd appreciate someone coming to help keep looters off my property or secure my neighborhood."

The 37th Brigade Combat Team, headquartered in Columbus and commanded by Col. Jim Green, spearheaded the Hurricane Rita Relief efforts. •

Call in the Cavalry!

By Sgt. Ismail Turay

WRIGHT-PATTERSON, AFB — The State of Ohio continued to aid residents on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast as the state, on Sept. 25, deployed some 1,200 Guardsmen to assist in the aftermath of Hurricane Rita.

About 350 of the troops from the Kettering-based 2nd Squadron, 107th Cavalry, flew out of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base with vehicles and other equipment. They were based in Alexandria, La.

Although they returned home in February from a six-month peace-keeping mission in Kosovo, the Soldiers said they were enthusiastic about their latest mission. That is because for some, this was the first time in their military careers that they were assisting fellow Americans at home.

"I'm excited because this is something different," said Sgt. Don Badillo, a Kettering resident who works at a local hospital. "To be able to help Americans is a great feeling."

Added Lt. Col. Todd Mayer, the squadron commander: "It seemed that most Soldiers were ready to go because our fellow citizens need us. This is the reason we put on the uniform."

The Soldiers were alerted two days prior to their deployment, said Mayer, a Cincinnati resident. Details of their mission were sketchy prior to the deployment, but the unit's tasks could have included anything from setting up checkpoints, manning intersections, protecting neighborhoods and businesses and the like, Mayer said.

Regardless what the mission

would be, the squadron was well trained and prepared, Mayer said, adding that his soldiers performed those same tasks in Kosovo.

"We are ready. We are confident and we are proud to do it," he said.

As the troops prepared to board the four C-130 cargo aircraft that transported them to Alexandria, La., Brig. Gen. Matthew L. Kambic, the state's assistant adjutant general for Army, shook each of their hands and ensured that the squadron had everything it needed for the mission.

"I'm very proud of them and what they will do," he said. "The Cav has unique capabilities and proven leadership that will help them excel. We will bring stability and peace of mind to the people." •

179th AW Heads South

By Tech. Sgt. Robert Jones

MANSFIELD, Ohio — As September drew to a close and the remnants of Hurricane Rita dampened the area, Airmen of the 179th Airlift Wing began the journey south to aid ongoing recovery operations in the storm-torn Gulf Coast region.

Twenty-one Airmen from the 179th AW Civil Engineering Squadron, along with 19 members of similar Toledo-, Springfield-, and Columbus-based squadrons, boarded a C-130 cargo aircraft at Mansfield-Lahm Airport destined for New Orleans.

Landing at Naval Air Station New Orleans (NAS-NO) three hours later, the Airmen, headed by Maj. Mark Johnson, spent a day setting up the tents they would live in during the next 30 to 40 days.

The Naval Air Station, located immediately south of New Orleans, is a hub for the federal relief to New Orleans. During the height of rescue operations, nearly 200 helicopters worked out of the station.



Members of civil engineering squadrons from Mansfield, Springfield, Toledo and Columbus board a C-130 aircraft in Mansfield headed for New Orleans. The 40 members of this CE team worked at the New Orleans Naval Air Station.

As Johnson explained, when Rita forced evacuations of the area, that included personnel stationed at NAS-NO.

“Because of the hurricane, only four or five civil engineering people were left on base to keep it running,” Johnson said.

Since then, National Guard units from around the country flocked to the region to aid in recovery efforts with Airmen of the 179th AW being one of the first units to take up residence at NAS-NO.

“There have been 20,000 troops stationed there, so a lot needs to be done to help the base get on its feet so that they can be of the most help in the relief effort,” Johnson said.

Ohio civil engineers, with expertise in electrical, carpentry, plumbing, power production drafting and surveying, made certain NAS-NO can handle the demands

of the relief effort.

In addition to civil engineering, the Air National Guard set up a medical unit on the base with personnel from states including Ohio and the 179th AW. During the period immediately following Hurricane Rita, this medical unit handled 911 emergencies in the city of New Orleans.

Part of any deployment is saying goodbye to family and loved ones. When asked about leaving his family, Senior Master Sgt. Mark Robertson said, “They know it’s part of the military and the Guard and they have the family support group here at the base so everything will be fine.”

For Senior Master Sgt. James McCoy, this last deployment was a fitting end to an exciting career.

“I had planned on retiring in October,” McCoy said. “I called the base on Friday and they told me to get my hip waders on. I’ve been to UAE (United Arab Emirates), Israel, Saudi Arabia, Norway and England, so this is a nice way to end things. I know I’ll miss being here this time next year. It’s been a good career.”•



Equipment is off-loaded from a C-130 of the 179th Airlift Wing at the New Orleans Naval Air Station. Following Hurricane Rita, the air station was being repopulated after a forced evacuation.

Four Soldiers

By Spc. Benjamin Cossel

NEW ORLEANS — Four Soldiers. Each from different backgrounds, with different experiences and lives who found themselves in New Orleans with the Ohio Army National Guard's Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment.

This mission is not the only experience they have in common. All four of these Citizen-Soldiers have spent time deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism and each sees parallels between there and here.

The Truck Driver

The soft-spoken Spc. Anderson Gardner calls Chardon, Ohio, home. He and his father own Gardner's Competition Machinist, a specialty shop for custom-made bearings, joints and other automotive parts.

"Right now, Dad's running the shop on his own while I'm here helping the victims of Katrina," Gardner said.

He deployed to Iraq with the 762nd Transportation Company, 88th Reserve Support Command. As an 88M (truck driver), stationed just on the friendly side of the Kuwait-Iraq border, Gardner and his fellow Soldiers convoyed supplies

and other materials to forward operating bases all over Iraq, going as far north as Mosul.

"I got to see a lot of varied regions when we would drive our supply routes," he said. "There are definitely some areas of the Iraqi countryside that look a lot like where we are now."

Where Gardner sees the starkest parallel is the trash on the streets.

"The roads in Iraq were just completely littered with trash," Gardner said.

When winds estimated at more than 140 mph hit New Orleans, trash from everywhere whipped around in the storm to settle wherever Mother Nature deemed appropriate.

"The trash all over the place is the same," he said. "I know it's a different situation, but you can't help but look at it and see the similarity."

In April of this year, Gardner decided it was time for a change. He felt he could make more of a difference in the National Guard serving as 11B (infantryman).

"You know," Gardner said, "being a truck driver is an important job but I felt I could offer more as an infantry Soldier."

While serving with the 1st Battalion,

148th Infantry in New Orleans, his prior skills working in the motor pool and civilian world have proven worthwhile. Already he has helped his squad-mates fix several boat motors. to aid in their search and rescue operations.

"It feels really good to get out more," Gardner said. "It confirms you're actually contributing."

The Water Purification Specialist

While Gardner drove trucks up and down military supply routes, Spc. Patrick Fairhurst worked as a 92W (water purification specialist) who did not spend much time working in his military occupational specialty (MOS).

"I spent a lot of time doing the job of an infantryman, going out on patrols, things like that," he said.

Like Gardner, Fairhurst started in the Army Reserve, with the 79th Quartermaster Company, when he deployed to Iraq. And like Gardner, when Fairhurst joined the National Guard, he traded his water purification skills for the hard life and adventure of the infantry.

"The houses here look the same," Fairhurst said. "In some of the slums of Iraq and the places we've been going through here, where the water and wind has destroyed this place, they look the same."

Fairhurst also went on to note that many of the smells are the same; the burning trash, the putrid water, the general stench lingering in the air.

But with all the similarities, Fairhurst says he is definitely glad for one huge difference.

"I'm sure glad no one here is shooting at us, that there no are IEDs (improvised explosives devices), and no mortars," Fairhurst chuckled. "And obviously, we weren't going out on too many boat missions in Iraq."

Back home, Fairhurst is working to become a police officer. He had just joined his local police force part-time when the call came for him to pack his gear and get to his unit.

"It's all right, though," Fairhurst said. "It's fulfilling to be helping people who really need it down here."

The Medic

"Iraq was a man-made disaster, this here, this is a natural disaster, and from my perspective that's one of the few differences between the two," Spc. Ralph



Spc. Ralph Isabella, of Sheffield Lake, treats a survivor of Hurricane Katrina. "It's all about helping people," he said. "That's what we were doing in Iraq, that's what we're doing here."



Spc. Anderson Gardner, of Chardon, was a truck driver, 88M, with the 762nd Transportation Company, 88th Reserve Support Command, when he deployed to Iraq with the initial push to take Baghdad. The reserved Gardner decided to join the Ohio Army National Guard as an infantryman because he felt he could make more of a difference.

“Doc” Isabella said.

The Sheffield Lake resident and 91W (medic), took a long road to get with Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry.

Isabella deployed to Iraq with the North Carolina National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry. Worn with great pride, the big, red numeral “1,” known around the Army as the “Big Red One,” patch sewn on his right shoulder indicates the major command under which the “Doc” served.

“Basically, I met a woman while we were in Iraq....She was from Ohio,” explained Isabella. “When we came home, I moved back to Ohio, see...I’m originally from Cleveland, so....”

Isabella said many of the concerns he had serving as a medic on the battlefields of Samara and Baquba are the same concerns he has treating his Soldiers in the “Big Easy.”

“Sanitation is key,” he said. “Just like Iraq, no cut here is too small. Everything must be treated with antibiotics immediately.”

High levels of contamination in the water make it dangerous to many of the Soldiers who routinely waded through the water during their search and rescue operations.

“Nothing, absolutely nothing is a small cut!” Isabella says with the zeal of a doctor trying to convince a patient to quit

smoking cigarettes.

“The other similarity I see is the heat conditions and the possibility for heat casualties.”

Soldiers routinely run their missions for eight to 10 hours a day, during the tail end of the dog days of a Southern Louisiana summer.

“I can’t tell these guys enough to drink plenty of water. It’s a different type of heat than what we’re used to in Ohio. The humidity here is unreal.”

Even with all the warnings, Isabella still has the occasional Soldier who comes to see him needing an IV.

Isabella currently works as a manager at a car dealership. The smooth-talking skills so handy in selling cars come through as Isabella quickly develops an easy banter with his patients, calming them down, determining what needs to be treated. Whether Soldier or civilian, Isabella treats them all.

“It’s all about helping people,” he said. “That what we were doing in Iraq, that’s what we’re doing here. But, you just sort of get that extra sense of satisfaction helping your own countrymen.”

The Infantryman

While the other three Soldiers all spent time serving in Iraq, the through-and-through “grunt,” Spc. Frank Ranalli, served with the Marines in Afghanistan.

“Just like Afghanistan, everyone here looks run down,” Ranalli said.

Ranalli was with the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, in Afghanistan. A torn ligament in his shoulder prevented him from doing pull-ups, a mandatory part of the Marines’ physical fitness test.

“I can do push-ups all day long,” Ranalli said. “And I still wanted to serve in the infantry so I joined the Guard.”

Ranalli went on to note that the look in the eyes of many a New Orleans resident is the same as many of the people he encountered in Afghanistan.

“It’s weird,” he says. “I mean, you can sort of understand that in a third-world country, but I never thought you would see that look in the eyes of Americans.”

Going house-to-house, clearing the building, making sure everyone is out also drew comparisons from Ranalli.

“Obviously the outcome is different... we were looking for Taliban there. Here we’re looking for survivors, but the basic mechanics of it all are the same.”

Like everyone else, Ranalli feels an extra sense of satisfaction knowing the help he provides is helping his fellow citizens.

“It’s definitely more rewarding to be out here, doing all that we can, to help other Americans.” •



Canton resident Spc. Frank Ranalli, Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment, Ohio Army National Guard, looks through the ceiling of a recently cleared house.

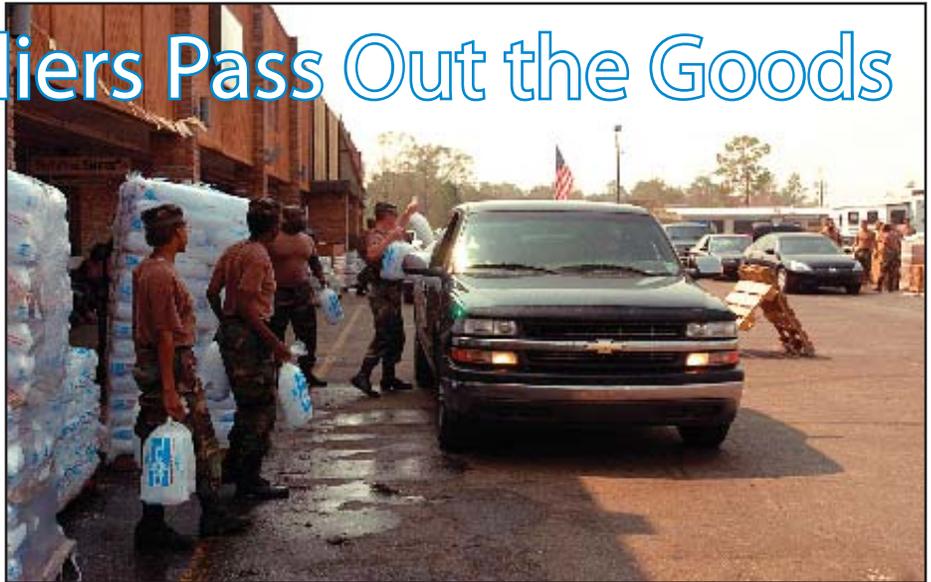
Buckeye Soldiers Pass Out the Goods

By Sgt. Kimberly Snow

PICAYUNE, Miss. — Even having her foot run over couldn't wipe the smile off of Pfc. Carolyn J. Martin's face.

"Um... could you back up a little bit?" Martin calmly asked one driver as she loaded ice into the back seat of his car. "I'm pretty sure you just ran over my foot."

Martin, an administrative specialist with the Kettering-based 371st Corps Support Group, spent Sept. 5 with about 20 other Ohio Soldiers from the 371st, the 73rd Troop Command and the 237th Personnel Services Battalion, as well as about a dozen



Ohio and Mississippi National Guardmembers work at a distribution point in Picayune, Miss., to provide supplies to hurricane victims.

Soldiers from the Mississippi National Guard. The troops distributed food, water and ice to Hurricane Katrina victims in Picayune, Miss. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of her life, she said.

She and the other Soldiers and volunteers remained enthusiastic despite temperatures in the mid 90s and a seemingly endless line of cars and trucks, as well as the occasional motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle.

Maj. Mark Lofton, 371st signal officer, visited the distribution point the day before to assess staffing needs and make arrangements for the Joint Task Force Buckeye Soldiers.

"This is the best mission I've ever had in the Guard, bar none," Lofton said. "This is where they really need help. This is as good as it gets."

Lofton coordinated efforts with 2nd Lt. Lamar Lee Richardson, with C Battery, 1-204th Air Defense Artillery Battalion out of Morton, Miss. Richardson coordinated with local businesses, city officials and police to establish the Picayune distribution point, which was supplied

by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Several other volunteers joined the Soldiers, including Gaynell Archer, a carpenter from nearby Ozona, Miss. Archer and her husband, also a carpenter, had come through the line themselves only the day before. Both had been working in Gulfport prior to the hurricane, which left them jobless.

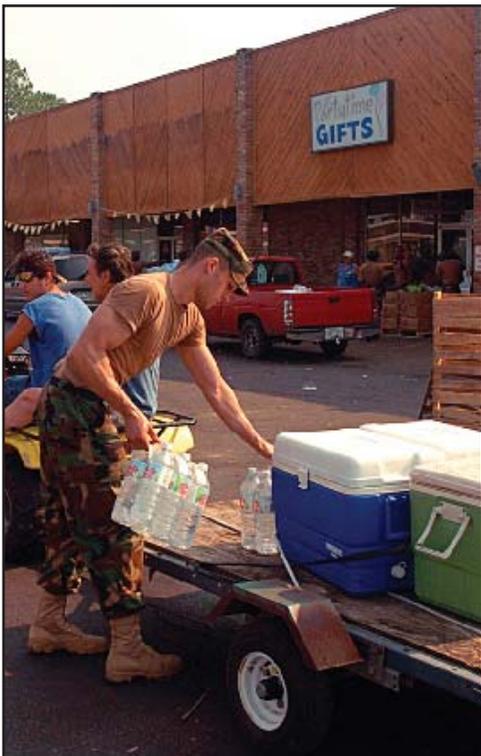
Because she was out of work and wanted to give back to the community that embraced them, Archer decided to volunteer at the distribution point when her husband found work.

Also joining the Soldiers was Airman 1st Class Vu Nguyen from the 78th Communications Squadron at Robbins Air Force Base.

Nguyen, who grew up in southern Mississippi, headed down from his base in central Georgia to locate his parents after being granted leave from active duty.

"When the hurricane hit, I couldn't find my parents for six days," he said. "I had no type of communications."

When Nguyen finally found his family alive and well, they told him that National Guard troops



Staff Sgt. Sean E. Reiter, of Fostoria, an ammunition specialist with the 371st Corps Support Group, loads water onto the trailer of a Hurricane Katrina victim at a food and water distribution point in Picayune, Miss.



Pvt. Allen L. McCrone (from left) of West Chester, Pfc. Carolyn J. Martin of Cincinnati, and Spc. Julie A. Gallagher of Dayton, all with the 371st Corps Support Group, load ice into the vehicle of a Hurricane Katrina evacuee Sept. 5 at a distribution point in Picayune, Miss.

had arrived and were working to distribute essential items in several locations.

“Since I was here, I decided to come down and help,” he said. “I grew up around this area. I felt guilty watching it on TV and I had 18 days of leave, so I figured I should help.”

The troops and volunteers distributed roughly 20,000 bags of ice, more than 20,000 gallons of water and several hundred pounds of bananas. They also got to know a little bit about some of the people they were helping.

“Everybody’s got a story,” Lof-ton said. “It’s amazing. They all want to tell you what’s happened to them, what their concerns are. There are so many concerns they have that we can’t even address.”

Ben Hanslick from Chalmette,

La., located east of New Orleans, is one of the evacuees who came through the Picayune distribution line Sept. 5.

After deciding to ride out the then-Category 1 hurricane and at his home Sunday, Hanslick received a call from his brother-in-law who informed him of the increasing intensity of the storm. He decided to leave and as he did, take care of one more thing.

“I had just bought a new boat. I tossed the keys to my neighbor and said ‘Here’s the keys, you might need this,’” Hanslick said. “And I think maybe it’s a good thing I did.”

Hanslick and his wife linked up with other family members in Hattiesburg, Miss., and drove 17½ hours north to Blytheville, Ark., before they could find a room to rent.

The couple returned to the Gulf Coast following the hurricane. Fortunately for the Hanslicks, they had a home to which they could return. Although their home in Chalmette was destroyed, Hanslick purchased a trailer six months ago for the couple’s 25th wedding anniversary. They found the trailer, which they kept on family land in Picayune, intact and essentially undamaged.

Although his return home was bittersweet, he feels lucky to have a home still, and was grateful for the help of military and civilian aid workers, he said.

“Everything I own, every picture of the family, everything is gone,” he said choking back tears. “But seeing this relief effort... it’s overwhelming. It’s a great effort. I don’t know what people would do without it.” •

Search and Rescue in the "Big Easy"

By Spc. Benjamin Cossel

NEW ORLEANS — They're tough as nails on the outside. But, they hurt just like everyone else on the inside when they see something that tugs at the heartstrings.

"It's really sad," said Sgt 1st Class James Scally, from Delaware, as his flat-bottom boat trolled through a flooded residential neighborhood here. "I'm looking in these peoples' houses and I see pictures on the wall. It breaks my heart."

With large portions of the city still underwater, Soldiers of Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment, went house-to-house looking for the living as well as for those who were claimed by Katrina.

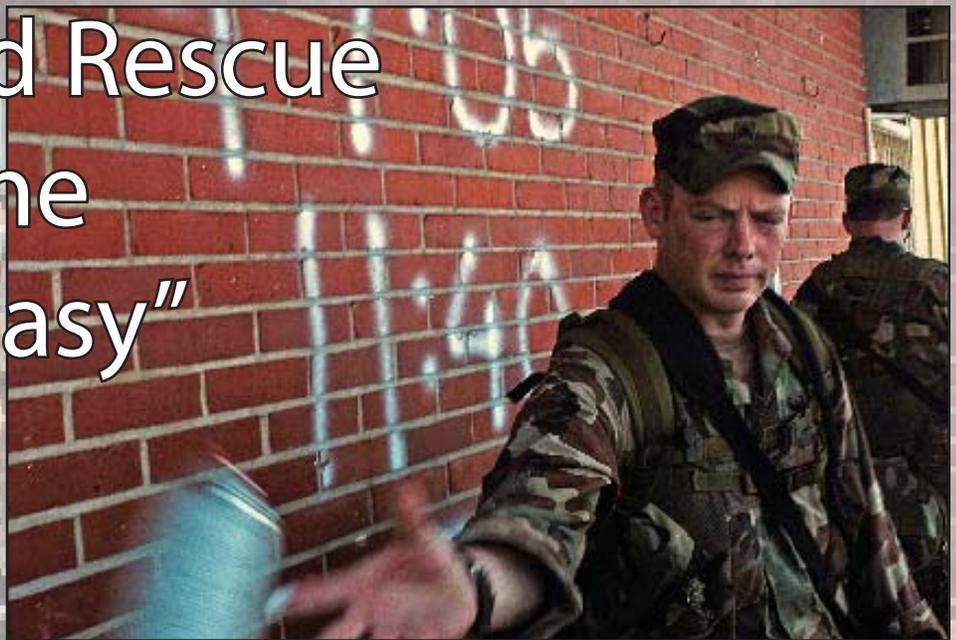
"We had to clear a child day-care," Scally said. "We had to break a window — there were toys in there and we knew that there were kids playing in there just a couple of weeks ago and now it's complete devastation."

Before these troops did house-to-house searches and rescues, they completed a mission at the New Orleans Superdome.

"When we first got here, we were tasked with helping to evacuate the Superdome," said Wadsworth resident Sgt. Michael White. "We've done so much in the little bit of time we've been here."

Their tough side presents itself.

"The situation inside the dome was really bad," White said. "We saw all sorts of horrible things but we got all those people out of there,



Sgt. Michael White, of Wadsworth, a squad leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment, tosses a can of spray paint to another Soldier after marking the building indicating it was clear.

onto buses, and off to wherever it was they were going."

After evacuating the Superdome, Company C, Company E, Headquarters and Headquarters Company as well as Company D were then

looking for anyone left. Once we've gone through a house, we'll mark it with the date we searched it, so other agencies working in the area will know not to waste their time and move on to areas not yet cleared."

"Finding the dead is almost as important as finding the living."

**Sgt. Michael White
Company D, 1-148th Infantry**

tasked to help out with the search-and-rescue operations under way.

They begin their task every morning, loading into the back of 5-tons and humvees, heading out to their area of responsibility. The convoy of six vehicles rumbled down the Chef Menteur Highway, coming to a stop at what used to be a dry cleaning service.

The building's parking lot serves as the command and control center as the Soldiers jump out of the back of their vehicles and reassemble into squads.

"Basically," White explained, "we're going house to house and

The squads use spray paint on one of the outside walls to indicate the day the house was cleared. A "0" painted next to the date indicates no one was in the house, a "29" is the mark noting a body was found inside.

"Finding the dead is almost as important as finding the living," White said. "It gives the families a sense of relief to know one way or another what has happened to their loved ones."

White added that the mark also allows properly equipped agencies to go in and retrieve the bodies so burial arrangements can be made.

"Luckily, most of the areas we've gone through look like people were evacuated in time. Most of the belongings are either packed up or it looks like a lot of families took their

stuff with them when they left.”

Along with the rest of his company, the squad leader with Company D was on the ground just three days after Katrina wreaked devastation across this fabled city.

They prefer to go on foot, which makes it easier for a complete search of each house. In areas where water levels remain too high, they load up on boats, striking out across the putrid water.

While the mechanics of accomplishing their mission might differ from those on foot, for D Company Soldiers that find themselves taking to boats, the final outcome is the same — search each house, mark it, move to the next.

The boats are picked up from where Katrina deposited them.



Sgt. Scott Crawford, a squad leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment, breaks through the window of a house during search and rescue operations as part of Operation Katrina.



Sgt. Christian Walsh, of Tallmadge, with Company D, 1st Battalion 148th Infantry Regiment, guides his boat down the washed-out streets of a northeastern New Orleans residential area.

Some are in better shape than others, but each is capable.

Sgt. Christian Walsh, of Tallmadge, captains one of the few boats with a motor. As they slowly work their way down flooded streets, tops of sport utility vehicles poke up out of the water.

“It’s slow maneuvering through these parts,” Walsh said. “You’re not quite sure where the low spots are or when you’re going to run into someone’s fence.”

Downed trees and power lines with their wires crisscrossing the road further slowed the platoon.

Mooring alongside a house, Sgt. Scott Crawford, a squad leader from Orrville, takes his oar in hand and smashes out the window. The stench of wa-

ter combined with the molding interior of the house smack into him as he reels back for a second before calling in.

“NATIONAL GUARD! Is anyone in here? We’re here to help...is there anyone in here?”

Crawford looks back at Walsh, shakes his head in the negative. Walsh marks the house: “9-8-05 — 0.”

Even with such a somber task, the morale of the Soldiers remains high. They feel a sense of purpose in what they do and the interaction with residents, so happy to see them, makes the long days and “hot as hell” conditions bearable.

“No one here is complaining,” White said. “Soldiers really came through. Our guys came from all over the state, dropped what they had going on and got here. We all know that we’re doing a good thing. When you give someone a bottle of water or help get them out of their house to an evacuation point...it really does make you feel like you’re doing something with a purpose.”•





Called, Respond dy Units



Saving Andre

By Sgt. Kimberly Snow



Deputy Sheriff Nick Taylor, a motorcycle patrol officer from Polk County, Fla., keeps watch over Andre, Sept. 9, while waiting for workers from the Marine Life Oceanarium to arrive.

LAKESHORE, Miss. — Ten days after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, relief workers from three states descended on a swamp in southern Mississippi to rescue an unusual victim.

Deputy Sheriff Nick Taylor, a motorcycle patrol officer from Polk City, Fla., arrived Aug. 31 to the area with his team, one day after the storm. Taylor was patrolling an area near the coast Sept. 9 when he saw “something large” swimming in the swamp.

That “something” turned out to be Andre, a 500-pound California sea lion, normally housed 15 miles east at the Marine Life Oceanarium in Gulfport. The Oceanarium was destroyed during the storm and many of the animals lost.

Although most of Taylor’s team members had returned home the previous day, the self-proclaimed animal lover

had stayed behind to tend to animals displaced by the hurricane.

“I volunteered to stay on my own time, start feeding the animals,” Taylor said. “I was doing that normally while we were out on patrol, feeding stray dogs, goats, horses, ducks, you name it. They’re all looking for a home that’s not there anymore.”

After spotting the animal, Taylor alerted local authorities and waved down a patrol from the Middletown-based 324th Military Police Company, who reported the incident to their battalion headquarters.

“I definitely never expected to see that,” Taylor said. “Who would have thought you’d come out here in the middle of a Mississippi swamp and find a sea lion?”

An official from the 437th Military Police Battalion dispatched 324th MP Company 1st Sgt. Manny Perez and

three other Soldiers to the scene to gather more information.

As word of the rescue effort spread, other relief workers in the area responded to offer help.

“When we got there we saw a bunch of sheriffs,” Perez said. “The first responders had already contacted animal control, so I just sent two of my Soldiers out to get some pictures and we headed back.”

Six civilian agencies from three states aided in the rescue, including the Hancock County (Miss.) Sheriff’s Office, the Florida Highway Patrol, the Tallahassee (Fla.) Relief Aid Response Team and the Rowan County (N.C.) Sheriff’s Office, Rowan County Rescue Squad and Salisbury (N.C.) Fire Department.

Oceanarium personnel arrived and identified the sea lion as Andre, one of two sea lions still unaccounted for

following the hurricane that destroyed the facility. Andre is the cub of one of several sea lions used in the making of the 1994 movie after which he is named. One harbor seal also was missing.

In preparation for the hurricane, eight of the facility's seals and sea lions were moved into a trailer in front of the home of Tim Hoffland, the Oceanarium's director of training, to ride out the storm. Unfortunately, there was no room for the others, said Connie Chevis, a veterinarian for the Oceanarium.

"I have no idea how he got here," Chevis said. "I am concerned. The longer he's out there, the more critical it becomes because he's in fresh water and he's a salt-water animal. He needs the salt and it's been 12 days (at the time of the rescue) since he's eaten."

Oceanarium and relief workers quickly put together a rescue plan. First, they would use a small chainsaw to cut a section from a small rowboat to fit the animal's crate. Then, they would tow the boat out to Andre with the "Argo" amphibious all-terrain vehicle brought by the Rowan County Rescue Squad.

Andre's primary trainer, Marci Romagnoli, would lead the retrieval effort.

"We're hoping that he'll go voluntarily into the

crate," Chevis said. "If he does not, we'll have to see how we can herd him in."

Andre responded almost immediately to Romagnoli, who waded through the waist-high water to reach him. After calling his name several times and tossing him some fish, Andre followed his trainer to the crate and slid in.

Rescuers and spectators let out a loud cheer, raised their hands triumphantly in the air and exchanged "high-fives."

Since the storm, the Oceanarium team has recovered all but two of the facility's 27 seals and sea lions—the farthest was 30 miles east of the facility. They were still holding out hope to find the two remaining animals—Bart, a California sea lion, and Cody, a harbor seal.

"We lost five," Romagnoli said in a

hushed voice. "It's devastating. It's like they're your children. I can't even think about them without getting upset. I keep remembering their faces."

Andre was given a police escort to Hoffland's home on the first leg of his journey to a new home in Memphis, Tenn. He was given a full check-up and is expected to fully recover, said an Oceanarium spokesperson.

Spectators applauded as the seven-vehicle convoy pulled away.

One relief worker from the Salisbury Fire Department explained that his team had been doing body recovery that morning, then responded to a house fire. He said he welcomed the opportunity to aid in the rescue effort.

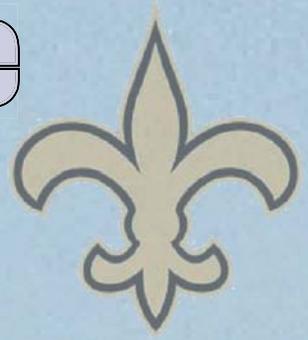
"This is the first time I've seen people smiling in over a week," he said with a laugh. "I guess you can call us SEAL Team One now."•



Rescue workers pull Andre the sea lion out of a fresh-water marsh after Hurricane Katrina blew the sea lion out of the ocean.



Evacuating The SUPERDOME



By Spc. Benjamin Cossel

NEW ORLEANS — When Hurricane Katrina laid waste to the city of New Orleans, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people took refuge in the Superdome.

As conditions in the city went from bad to worse, moving the displaced citizens in the Superdome to a safer location became a priority for city officials.

The call for help went out the evening of Aug 31. Within 24 hours, Citizen-Soldiers of the Ohio Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 148th Infantry, were assisting in the evacuation of the Louisiana Superdome.

"We deployed so rapidly, that at first we didn't even know what our mission was," said Sgt. 1st Class Jim Scally of D Company.

Initially, the Soldiers flew into Belle Chasse Naval Air Station. Upon hitting the ground, commanders choppered to the Superdome to get an initial assessment of what their Soldiers would face.

"The scene on the ground was absolute chaos," said Toledo resident 2nd Lt. Patrick McHugh.

"I was completely overwhelmed with the breadth of destruction I witnessed."

After figuring out where

to locate their platoons, the teams deployed and began the huge task of evacuating the Superdome.

The first task was getting people through processing stations before boarding buses and being taken to a safe location where food and

shelter were available.

"We had to start controlling the flow of people," McHugh said. "It was like a gigantic rock concert with everyone trying to get out at the same time."

When the Soldiers arrived, they became the first military unit to back up Soldiers from the Louisiana National Guard.

"The Louisiana guys were doing everything in their power to manage the huge amount of people in the 'Dome," McHugh said. "But they were simply outnumbered. Just like almost everyone in the 'Dome, those guys lost almost everything."

McHugh went on to explain that given the circumstances, members of the Louisiana National Guard did a tremendous job!

"If it hadn't been for the Soldiers of the Louisiana National Guard, we wouldn't have been able to quickly accomplish our mission. They did a tremendous job giving us information about the Superdome, the situation on hand and pointing us to the places that needed our attention."

Getting everyone out of the Superdome



When Hurricane Katrina tore through New Orleans, between 8,000 and 10,000 people took refuge in the Superdome. (Photo by Pfc. Jesse Morgan)



Once the evacuation was complete, city workers began massive clean-up operations at the Superdome.

took three days. With the majority of refugees out of the facility, the mission changed to the awesome task of clearing every room within the Superdome.

"When we first walked into the place, the first thing that almost knocked you down was the stench," Scally said.

For nearly a week, the several thousand people, and in some cases, their pets, crammed into the Superdome, which was without work-

ing plumbing and electricity. When Katrina tore off sections of the 'Dome's roof, water spilled in, flooding much of the area.

The Ohio Soldiers made their way through several huge piles of trash and other debris, at a very slow pace.

"Inside the 'Dome was the worst squalor I've ever seen," Scally said. "Moving through was extremely slow at first, as we had to make our way through all the trash and excrement and everything that was left behind. I mean, the whole thing reminded me of something you would expect to see in a third-world country."

During their search, Soldiers discovered 10 people who'd decided they didn't want to leave the 'Dome's confines.

"Once we found them, most cleared out and got into the processing lines," Scally said. "But we had a couple that we had to take to the processing lines and put them on the buses."

With the Superdome completely secure, the 1-148th Soldiers moved on to their new mission of search and rescue operations. But for both Scally and McHugh, the memories of what they saw will stay with them forever.

"Even if they get this place completely cleaned up and running again, I don't think I will be able to come in here," McHugh said. "I think the memories of the smells and sights would be just too much and too vivid."

Scally agreed.

"I know I'll never be able to forget what I saw inside there," Scally said. "But you know what? It's missions like that...where I feel like a very small part of this very large effort... I feel like I was able to make a difference...and I'll never forget that either."•



Soldiers of the Ohio Army National Guard's 1-148th Infantry Battalion were the first out-of-state Soldiers to assist in the evacuation of the Louisiana Superdome.

(Photo by Pfc. Jesse Morgan)

Hitting Close to Home

By Sgt. Kimberly Snow

POPLARVILLE, Miss. — For one Ohio National Guardsman, helping others overcome adversity in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina became a way to help himself.

One of the deadliest and most costly natural disasters in recent U.S. history, Katrina decimated a more than 100-mile swath of the Gulf Coast and with it, a piece of Cpl. Otto J. Maurer Jr.'s childhood.

A 22-year-old theater major at Kent State University, the Franklin, La., native joined the Louisiana National Guard in November 2001 as a chemical

specialist. After being accepted to the Kent State theater program, he moved to Ohio in May 2003, and transferred to the Alliance-based B Battery, 1-134th Field Artillery Battalion. Although eager to begin his education, Maurer felt compelled to serve his country following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

"At first, I was looking into going to Syracuse University or New York University," he said. "I made auditions, but my (Initial Entry Training) ship-out date was interfering with the semesters, so it kind of took a back seat."

Having always been interested in acting, Maurer began to take the craft more seriously after auditioning for his first role — a high-school production of *A Soldier's Story*. Although he was not cast, he worked the production backstage and said he knew it was what he wanted to do ever since.

Maurer worked to hone his craft and was rewarded after his second audition, landing the role of the smooth-talking radio announcer

Vince Fontaine in his high-school production of *Grease*. He was subsequently cast as Action in another high-school production, *West Side Story*.

After graduating high school and completing his military training, Maurer returned home and resumed his construction job in New Orleans.

"When I got out of AIT, I was trying to get back in the groove of things," he said. "I got a call from my high

"It lifts my spirits every time I see somebody smile or thank us."

Cpl. Otto J. Maurer
1-134th Field Artillery Battalion

school theater teacher saying he was taking a student for an audition at Kent State and wanted to know if I wanted to come. I got there and it just seemed to be a great place."

Maurer was getting ready to begin his junior year at Kent State when Hurricane Katrina escalated from a tropical storm to a hurricane and began threatening the Gulf Coast. He followed the developing storm closely, checking in on his family often.

On Sept. 2, two days after Katrina tore through the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts, he received one of two calls that he had been waiting for — the first was that his family was OK.

Then, he received the second call he had been waiting for — his unit was deploying in support of relief efforts. He reported to his armory the following day.

"It's had more of an effect on me than most, I think. Because every so many years, I was going through this," Maurer said. "I was on the other side of the fence. I was one of the

people that needed food and water. Now the roles are reversed."

Shortly after arriving and beginning relief operations in Poplarville, Maurer received more bad news. Although his family weathered the storm relatively well, sustaining only minor property damage, word of family friends began trickling in.

"The first couple of days (of the deployment) were really rough, just trying to deal with everything all at once," he said. "Then slowly it would get better, but then it kept dropping back because every day somebody would call with more bad news. I'd wind up back in the same state."

In all, he lost seven close friends.

Then came news of his nephew.

During a 10-month deployment to Italy last year, Maurer learned that his nephew, Billy P. Novak, had been diagnosed with leukemia.

"I went to see my first sergeant (Dale Steele) and I broke down," he said. "Because, I mean, the boy's only 14 years old."

Novak needed a bone marrow donor, and found one in his sister, then 8-year-old Sarah Novak. After treatment, the cancer went into remission and the family felt they had dodged a bullet.

"They told us there was a small chance it would come back. But if it did, there would be a slim chance they could do anything about it," he said. "A couple of days ago I called my mom. She happened to be on the phone with my sister. The tests came back and it had returned. It was one of those points when I was just getting back to being OK with everything. It was like a slap in the face."

Although dealing with the loss of his friends and worrying about his family, Maurer carried on, picking up extra work to keep busy. One day, while waiting for his platoon to



Cpl. Otto J. Maurer Jr., a chemical specialist with B Battery, 1-134th Field Artillery, deployed with his unit to Poplarville, Miss., with Joint Task Force Buckeye and the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. Maurer is a native of Franklin, La., and lives in Kent, where he is a theater major at Kent State University.

pick up a mission, he volunteered to work with another platoon, distributing food, water and ice to hurricane victims.

"It lifts my spirits every time I see somebody smile or thank us," he said. "When you're young, especially from a guy's standpoint, you're always playing games and trying to be the hero. And then something like this happens. And somebody you've never met in your life, and probably will never see again, walks up to you and says that you're their hero just for coming down and helping them out. It's just a wonderful feeling."

Eventually, Maurer asked for and was granted a three-day pass to check on family and friends.

"He was hesitant because he didn't want to take away from our mission," said Sgt. 1st Class Steve J. Netzband, Maurer's platoon sergeant. "It was hard for him to come forward and request something for himself. He'll bend over backward for anybody. He's just one heck of a troop, one heck of a person."

Driving home to Franklin, memo-

ries flooded him as he passed by the familiar silhouette of the Superdome in the New Orleans skyline.

"I thought, 'my childhood's gone,'" he said.

But he was quick to correct himself.

"No, only a part of it," he said. "I try my best to look forward. I know (my friends) are in a better place now. But it's never going to be the same. So many friends... we shared a lot of good times, bad times together. Anytime you lose somebody it's like a damper on the spirit."

Although unable to attend memorial services, he and some friends had their own "liquor-pouring" ceremony in honor of the friends they lost.

Maurer said he was thankful for the time with family and friends, especially for the day he spent with his nephews and nieces. But then it was time to get back to work.

Although his pass didn't end until midnight Sept. 11, he returned around 2:45 p.m. As he was driving toward the Mississippi National Guard Armory where his unit had

temporarily taken up residence, he saw his squad working to clear up debris and fallen trees in a schoolyard. He had his mom drop him there so he could "get a few hours of work in," he said.

Maurer said his fellow Soldiers, especially his squad and leadership, have helped him through the tough times.

"My first sergeant shot me an e-mail the day that (the hurricane) happened, before I really even knew what exactly was going on," he said. "It was just nice to know that people care. They're a great group of people to be involved with. I'd take six in the head for them... well, four for sure."

Through everything, Maurer remained focused on his mission, Steele said.

"Cpl. Maurer is a really motivated troop. He always gives 110 percent in everything he does," he said. "Everybody likes Cpl. Maurer, I don't know of anybody who's ever said a bad thing about him. The guy's just got a big heart. He's a great person."

As for the future, Maurer is anxious to start school. He returned to Ohio Sept. 15 along with many of the Ohio National Guard college students deployed to the region. He wants to become an actor, preferably on the big screen, but will go wherever his craft takes him, Maurer said.

His dream role would be to play the part of Dr. Chris Nielson, a character played by Robin Williams in the 1998 movie *What Dreams May Come*, Maurer said.

"That is my favorite movie of all time," he said. "The role he played was so dynamic. It's about a guy who's had to deal with constant drawbacks, but rather than keep his feelings forward, he always sets them aside..."

Sounds familiar. •

Preventing illness, saving lives

By Spc. Chad Menegay

CAMERON, La. — Some areas of southwestern Louisiana more resemble waste dumps than residential communities. Some parishes, like Cameron, have lost two-thirds of their livestock.

Millions of dollars worth of sugarcane has been wiped out. Saltwater has replaced freshwater. There are reports of cemeteries turned inside-out. The estimated cost of recovery is in the billions of dollars and the estimated time to rebuild is several years.

However, since the Category 3 Hurricane Rita made landfall Sept. 24 on the far southwest coast of Louisiana with 120 mph winds, the main focus of aid was on saving lives and preventing illness.

Thousands of National Guardmembers deployed with only a few hours notice to do just that.

Enter the combat medic.

The combat medic is specially trained to take care of people, usually Soldiers.

However, combat medics of the 2-107th Cavalry Squadron in Kettering, the 2-104th Cavalry Squadron in Reading, Pa., and the 111th Area Medical Support Battalion in Pheonix, Ariz., responded to a two-vehicle traffic accident Oct. 2 in Jennings, La., to treat several severely injured civilians.

“In the midst of getting our area established, one of our ambulance teams responded to a civilian trauma,” said 1st Lt. Karin Parrett, a physician’s assistant

for the Area Support Medical Battalion “That’s part of our mission too.”

The unusual operation of medics working hand in hand with civilian emergency personnel appeared to work seamlessly, while medical supplies transferred hands and the injured were secured to spinal boards for transport. One young woman was transported via a local medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) helicopter.

The manner in which this one traffic accident was handled could be viewed as a microcosm of the way the National Guard had been working with other agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Red Cross, in the Gulf Coast as a whole, responding to-

gether, as needed.

“I’m amazed at how the National Guard has come together with all other assets,” said Parrett, “and it’s interesting to see this many troops in one area.”

With so many Soldiers working long hours in a potentially hazardous environment, medics were prepared to work long hours too, mostly on sick call.

“My job’s to keep those Soldiers handing out food and water up and running,” said Sgt. Johnathan Miniard, a combat medic for



Sgt. Bob Klinger (left), a combat medic and platoon sergeant for Headquarters Troop, 2-104th Cavalry Squadron in Reading, Pa., opens a velcro strap to secure an injured civilian’s head and neck to a spinal board after a two-vehicle accident.

2-107th Cavalry Squadron. "I'm also keeping a running records chart, so if they catch something contagious or anything, we've got it on record."

"Mostly, I'm doing patient evaluations, taking vitals, checking temperatures and blood pressure," said Army Guard Spc. Sara Gordo, a combat medic for Arizona Medical Command in Phoenix. "I'll get a medical history and find out what the pain's like to make an initial assessment. Then I'll get them fluids, bed rest, or whatever else might be required."

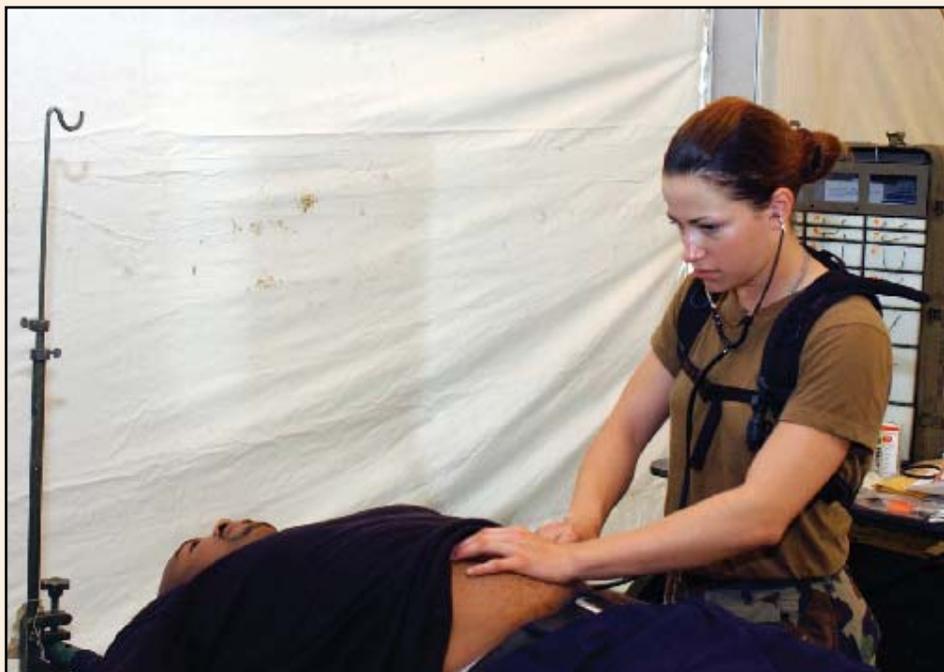
The health conditions of southwestern Louisiana were still somewhat unknown, as the Environmental Protection Agency and others test the waters, air and soil. The EPA and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality found that receding flood waters deposited residual fuel oil and bacteria, such as E. coli, in the New Orleans soil, but results of most other areas of Louisiana have yet to be concluded.

Areas of concern are potentially contaminated soil, air, food or standing water, stray wildlife, mosquitoes and other insects, mold, drinking water and the heat index.

The most immediate threats are ants and mosquitos, Parrett said. "Louisiana has more cases of West Nile virus than any other state," he said. "One mission is to get the standing water filled in."

There hadn't been a case of a Soldier in southwestern Louisiana contracting West Nile virus, but medical personnel were still aware of the danger.

"The mosquitos are huge and relentless," Miniard said. "The



Spc. Sara Gordo, a combat medic of the 111th Area Support Medical Battalion in Phoenix, Ariz., listens for bowel sounds in a FEMA supply truck driver's intestines at a mobile emergency room in Jennings, La. The patient complained of stomach pain.

best thing to do is stay clean and use bug spray."

"There's a lot of standing water here (Jennings, La.), and we've also found water moccasins," Miniard said. "The flooding is pushing them up. That's why we put a walkway up for our guards."

Parrett recommended to Soldiers that they shake their bags out in the morning before digging into them.

Medical personnel also stressed showering and sanitizing one's hands on a regular basis.

Of course, in the heat, common sense advice, like drinking plenty of bottled water, was stressed over and over again.

"Hydrate!" Parrett said.

Yet, sickness is often out of one's control, in which case, Soldiers can rely on sick call, because combat medics say they're prepared to adapt and

react to whatever illness they might encounter. They had practice at adapting and reacting during the deployment. For example, elements of C Company, 111th ASMB moved three times in five days.

"We can attach to any brigade or battalion within our area of support, and within our company break into treatment teams with a doctor, a physician assistant, medics and support personnel," Parret said. "We have the flexibility to move wherever they need us too."

"I love it when you're in a situation that's not the friendliest, but you make things work anyway," Gordo said. "I want to wake up and not know what's going to happen, but know I'm going to make a difference. Even though we have changes 24-7, morale has been good. We're actually where we're needed: in the field helping Soldiers."•

Some Called Them 'Team Ice'

By Spc. Chad Menegay

LAKE CHARLES, La. — If a vehicle rolled up and asked for three bags of ice, they'd say, "33 bags of ice coming up!"

"They overwhelmed the populace with the amount of ice they gave out," said 1st Sgt. William Nelson, of Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 37th Brigade Combat Team (Columbus).

It wasn't just ice, though, that members of the 37th BCT bestowed upon the Lake Charles, La.

(Moss Bluff), community Oct. 7 in a Wal-Mart parking lot next to the Calcasieu River. They also handed out about \$100,000 in water and food (tuna, potato chips, beef jerky, crackers with peanut butter and jelly, and cookies).

"What do you want, Famous Amos or Lorna Doone?" asked Pfc. Mark Jones, an M-1 Abrams main battle tank mechanic for Alpha Company, 1-107th Armor Battalion (Newton Falls). "You want some Pringles, some tuna? Alright, I'm gonna mix it up for you."

The mission was to distribute the items they had sorted through and packed.

"We took a lot of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) resources and put together a helping hand for the folks here in Lake Charles," Nelson said. "It was a little extra thing that we were able to accomplish, to provide folks with some of the things that they needed."

"We set this up to handle some of the overflow," Nelson added. "We were all very conscious of the fact that we didn't want any of this food, water or ice to go to waste."

The HHC, 37th BCT coordinated with the 112th Engineer Battalion (Brook Park) in handling the majority of the distribution points in the the Lake Charles area. In addition, the BCT synchronized efforts with local FEMA representatives, the

Green at the Chennault International Airport in Lake Charles, La.

"This is a real good event for all of my Soldiers in HHC as we pretty much are specialized in staff operations," Nelson said. It gives them an opportunity to get out and feel like

they're more of a valuable piece of the entire relief mission. It gives them a feel for what everybody is seeing and witnessing with the civilian population coming back into their homes."

"I pray that everyone has consistent motivation for this and remembers who they're doing it for."

~Pfc. Mark Jones ~
~Troop A, 1st Squadron, 107th Cavalry

Wal-Mart store owner and the Salvation Army.

"Our concern was not to take away from what they were doing," Nelson said.

The Salvation Army served hot meals in the WalMart parking lot, which complimented the dry goods, water and ice Soldiers handed out. Wal-Mart donated 10 pallets of ice to the cause.

The store opened Oct. 4 to the general public and was working to stock up on every item that was provided prior to Hurricane Rita.

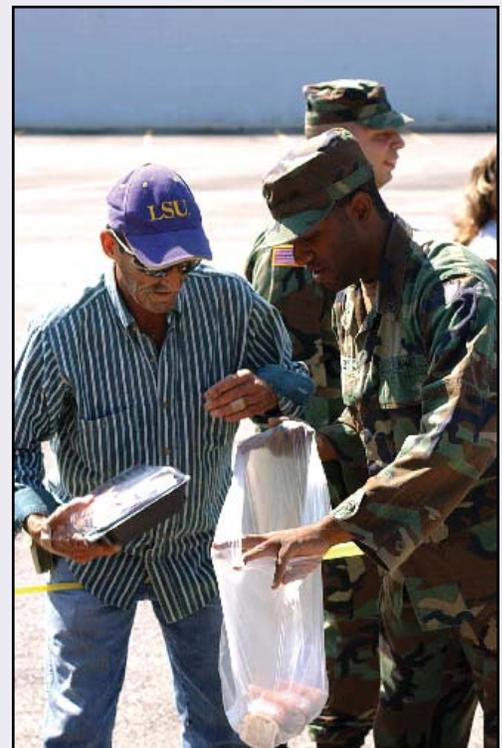
The state of emergency was lifted in Lake Charles on Oct. 7, when the electricity for several commercial and residential areas was restored.

Many stores and homes were still without power, however, and many more were in need of major repair.

"I pray that everyone has consistent motivation for this, and remembers who they're doing it for," Jones said.

Jones worked in food, supply, administrative and maintenance roles as part of Joint Task Force

"It makes me feel good; I'm excited, because we didn't fall short of the goal," Jones said"•



Pfc. Mark Jones, an M-1 Abrams tank-mechanic for Company, A, 1-107th Armor Battalion, assists a local civilian in putting together a package of food.

OPERATION SANDBAG

By Staff Sgt. Bob Barko, Jr

WAVELAND, Miss – When a forecast of nasty weather threatened to flood a civilian field hospital set up in the Kmart parking lot, Soldiers from Ohio, Florida and Georgia Army National Guard units answered the desperate call for help.

Unwittingly, the North Carolina State Medical Assistance Team erected its mobile hospital in a water runoff area. Rather than take it down and move it, some reinforcement was in order.

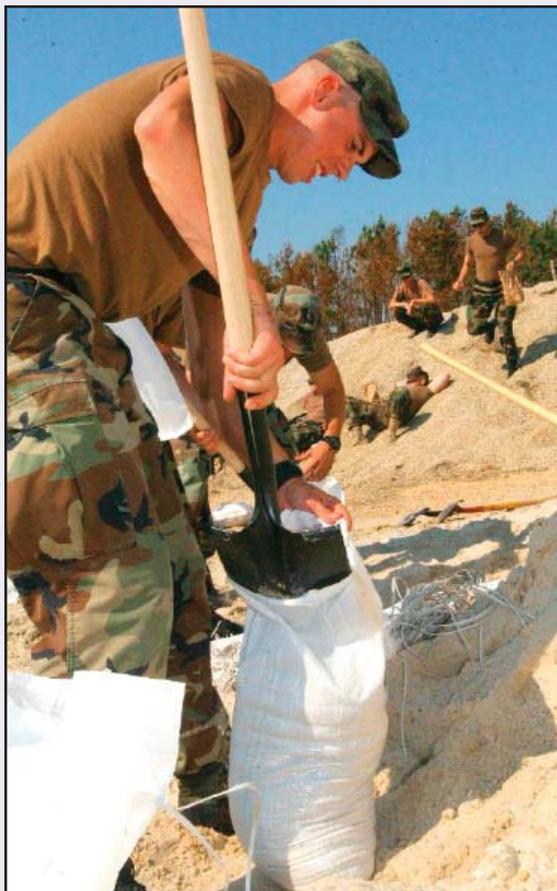
Dr. Tom Blackwell, SMAT medical director and head of medical operations, decided solving this problem was top priority for the field hospital workers.

While the SMAT hospital was designed to assist existing medical facilities with overflow in an area affected by a natural disaster, sealing the field hospital from potential high waters was not something they could handle.

“To get it done, we knew who we needed to call and that was the National Guard,” Blackwell said. “Using National Guard assets to help us sandbag this facility is an incredibly important logistical piece that we need.”

Although the job of filling, transporting and stacking the more than 1,000 sandbags needed to waterproof the hospital seemed daunting to SMAT, it was nothing out of the ordinary for the National Guard.

After receiving the hospital’s urgent plea, the Hancock County Public Works Department and the National Guard worked to-



A Florida National Guard Soldier fills one of more than 1,000 sandbags at the Hancock County Public Works site in Waveland, Miss. The bags were transported by a 5-ton truck to the parking lot of the Kmart in Waveland, where they were used to waterproof a makeshift field hospital.

gether to jumpstart the emergency project.

The call for help rapidly reached Sgt. Maj. William Dillon, 73rd Troop Command, Ohio Army National Guard. He was the operations sergeant major for Joint Task Force Buckeye, Ohio’s military contingency that helped with relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

After JTF Buckeye received the order to complete the sandbag operation, Dillon contacted Task Force Florida, another element of JTF Buckeye, to send more than 25 Soldiers to fill, load and stack the sandbags. He also called in trans-

portation from the 110th Combat Support Battalion from Georgia. Dillon and a Soldier from the JTF Buckeye Joint Operations Center coordinated the effort of all the different elements of the vital operation.

“Everybody wanted to pitch in and do something to help the people because they’ve lost everything,” Dillon said. “The Soldiers here, whether they’re filling sandbags or they’re going house-to-house to check on people, know it’s all part of the mission to help the people recover from the hurricane. It’s all a huge teamwork effort by Florida, Georgia and Ohio to make this happen.”

As Dillon ensured the operation ran smoothly, one of the Soldiers filling sandbags at the nearby Hancock County Public Works site shared his thoughts on the National Guard’s relief efforts.

Spc. Charles Cabana is a Soldier with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3-124th Infantry Battalion, Florida Army National Guard, based in Panama City, Fla.

“I think it’s great. Every little bit can help. Right now, these guys are filling sandbags and helping out the local field hospital here.”

The 12-hour operation provided a little more assurance that the SMAT unit would be in Waveland for the long haul.

“We will be assisting this community and supporting Hancock Medical Center until they tell us, ‘thanks, but we’re ready to take over,’” Blackwell said. He estimated at the time it would take six to eight weeks for the county hospital to be back in business. •

PARTICIPATING UNITS

JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS-OHIO

OHIO ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

37TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

73RD TROOP COMMAND

16TH ENGINEER BRIGADE

416TH ENGINEER GROUP

145TH REGIMENT, REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

196TH MOBILE PUBLIC AFFAIRS DETACHMENT

112TH ENGINEER BATTALION

216TH ENGINEER BATTALION

731ST TRANSPORTATION BATTALION

OHIO AIR NATIONAL GUARD

179TH AIRLIFT WING

121ST AIR REFUELING WING

180TH FIGHTER WING

178TH FIGHTER WING

200TH RED HORSE SQUADRON

251ST COMBAT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

269TH COMBAT COMMUNICATIONS SQUADRON

123RD AIR CONTROL SQUADRON