

Maxwell serves as staging area for hurricane relief operations

**By Master Sgt.
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More than 1,000 hurricane victims from flooded coastal regions have made their way here to escape what President Bush described as the worst natural disaster in America's history.

Among those evacuated were 416 Armed Forces Retirement Home residents from Gulfport, Miss., whose average age was 77. Of those, 58 with medical problems endured a 12-hour bus ride from Mississippi before staying overnight in a fitness center with medics. An Air Force Reserve 908th Airlift Wing C-130 Hercules aircrew then flew the elderly patients to Andrews Air Force Base, Md., on Sept. 2.

The 42nd Air Base Wing prepared for the hurricane by meeting with Federal Emergency Management Agency and other state

and local agencies the day before the storm's landfall.

"We're providing support wherever we can," said Col. Timothy Cashdollar, 42nd Mission Support Group commander. "After we hunkered down for the storm, we started providing support for (FEMA), ramp space for aircraft and reception services."

And so far, that support has not gone unnoticed.

Standing in the sun alongside about 100 semi-trucks that carried ice, packaged meals, FEMA's deputy staging officer for Alabama, Michael Post, said he is impressed with Maxwell's support.

"We want for nothing," Mr. Post said. "I can't say enough good words about Maxwell. I'm working in the best staging area I've ever been to in my life."

Contract big-rig truck drivers transport supplies from a major FEMA mobilization center in Selma, Ala., to three staging areas

— Louisiana, Mississippi and here. From here, more than 700 trucks took their precious cargo south, where it was needed most.

The different agencies involved include the state of Alabama, FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Forest Service and the Airmen here.

While in billeting, where the evacuation reception center is located, it is difficult to distinguish the people who are homeless from those lucky enough to have a residence to return to later. Their faces resemble those of players in a world poker tour.

Wearing a light blue shirt, dark blue pants and sandals, Amy Szatanek looked like everybody else in the reception area. Except, appeared she had more questions than most when she talked to family support center employee. That is because Hurricane Katrina destroyed her home.

'Relief,' from Page 1A

Her husband, Maj. Jeff Sztanek, is still at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., where they need him there as the civil engineer squadron chief of operations. She fled with her three children and now has no idea what their future holds. "We'd like to (permanently change stations) back to Montgomery, if we can, but we don't know where the Air Force will send us," she said.

More fortunate was Alameda and Bobby Hampton, a retired Air Force master sergeant. After serving 20 years, Mr. Hampton bought a home in D'Iberville, close to Biloxi, Miss., and lived there for 24 years. On Aug. 28, he and his family grudgingly left it behind and drove 237 miles in seven hours, ending up here. Now, they learned the hurricane only blew out a few windows and caused the ceiling to leak. They plan to move back in a week.

It takes a lot to penetrate Dawn Hilliard's tough exterior. As a senior airman who works in the 42nd Mission Support Squadron retirements and separation section, she felt she has seen and heard it all.

Since Aug. 28, as she tapped in the names of evacuees into a laptop computer, she has seen them walk through the door, and she has heard many of their stories — all to no affect.

That is, until a man walked into their makeshift reception area with no shoes on. In his arms he carried a 2-year-old child wearing only Pampers and a shirt. Airman Hilliard nearly lost it. That was when Hurricane Katrina became real.

"It hit my heart," she said, as telephone technicians installed more phones around her. The operation is steadily growing larger, and she needs more equipment and assistance. "I have children of my own and seeing that family made me feel very fortunate for what I have."

Like Airman Hilliard, the rest of the Airmen here will continue to assist evacuees, and the rescuers who help the homeless and destitute people in the coastal regions, for as long as it takes.

Maxwell hosts elderly veterans

By Carl Bergquist

Dispatch Staff Writer

Nearly 60 elderly veterans evacuated to Maxwell Air Force Base Tuesday after Hurricane

Katrina damaged their retirement home in Gulfport, Miss.

The veterans from the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Gulfport branch, spent the night at the Maxwell Fitness and Well-

ness Center before leaving for Andrews AFB, Md., Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, airlifted by the 908th Airlift Wing here.

"When the lights don't light and the toilet doesn't flush, you leave," said Edie Jackman, a retired Navy pharmacist's mate first class. "The hurricane made us leave but I have actually enjoyed all this. I love to travel."

Walter Voelker, a retired Army captain, recalls what was left at the home.

"The water had gotten high on the first floor and the weather had blown out some large windows that were allowing more flooding," he said. "We had to get out of the facility because it just wasn't livable anymore. We had no power and no water."

Herbert Mapp, who served in three different branches of the U.S. armed forces, said he was very appreciative of the people who were handling the evacuee shelter at Maxwell.

"They have been so helpful to us and this is a great base," he said. "I wish I could have been stationed here."

Mr. Mapp, who retired from the Air Force in 1969 after 20 years of military service, said he first joined the Navy and spent 45 days in that service until they found out he was only 15 years old and discharged him. He then joined the Army and stayed there for three years before switching to the Air Force for the last 17 years of his mili-



Photo by Carl Bergquist

Clementine Reynolds-Daniel, 42nd Air Base Wing plans and programs, helps a displaced person here take medication at the Maxwell Wellness and Fitness Center Aug. 31. More than 60 evacuees were brought to Maxwell from Gulfport, Miss., en route to Andrews Air Force Base, Md.



Photo by Carl Bergquist

tary career.

Col. Timothy Cashdollar, 42nd Mission Support Group commander, said he was proud of the job the base had done to accommodate the group of evacuees.

"They arrived late at night, unannounced, and the team pulled together and had the operation up and running in less than an hour," he said. "MSG was ready to go and ready to receive those in need of help and today was a good example of that."

Col. Jeff Bryant, 42nd Medical Group deputy commander, said the operation involved about 60 medics from the clinic on base and 15 people from the 42nd MSG and Maxwell Support Division. He said two evacuees had significant illnesses and had to be transported to a downtown hospital and the more seriously ill were flown to Andrews Wednesday evening.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Matthews

Airmen with the 908th Airlift Wing here, the 375th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Scott AFB, Ill., and the 89th Medical Group help transport veterans from the Armed Forces Home in Gulfport, Miss., Aug. 31, after Hurricane Katrina decimated the area. The veterans were flown by a C-130 Hercules from Maxwell to the Armed Forces Home in Washington, D.C.