

# Gulf Wing

403rd Wing, Keesler AFB, Miss., Air Force Reserve Command

Home of the Flying Jennies & the Hurricane Hunters

Volume 26, Issue 8, September-October 2005

*Understanding is an understatement  
In times when life leaves no answers, we must be patient,  
In times when hardships strip us bare  
We must be thankful of memories still left to share,  
They will forever guide us into the beauty of our past  
When crashing waves leave us walking weathered paths,  
In this time when we feel lost in darkness and alone  
We must remember, the lighthouse remains  
And its light will bring us home*

## **Katrina**

### **Aug. 29, 2005**

**Your Stories  
in this  
Special Edition**

# SEP-OCT CONTENTS

## No Respect

Hurricane Katrina trashed the memorial to victims of Hurricane Camille. Just days before the devastating storm, the 53rd WRS was represented at the annual Camille Memorial where a message of caution and respect for mother nature was conveyed to the Coast.

## Hunkered Down

When the order to evacuate was issued many of the 403rd's 1,500 Reservists and civilians packed up and left town looking for a place to hunker down for the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Only three people were tasked to remain on base to ride out Katrina's furious winds and deadly tidal surge while serving as the eyes and ears of the wing.



## Hurricane Hunters Fly Into Record Season

Despite being displaced and working out of a temporary base, the Hurricane Hunters are still flying missions late into the 2005 hurricane season including Wilma, Alpha and Beta which was the 23rd named storm this year and the 13th hurricane.

## Jennies to the Rescue

The Flying Jennies of the 815th Airlift Squadron have been very busy flying relief supplies and equipment to areas hit by Katrina as well as other communities affected by severe weather.

### Volume 26, Issue 8

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#### Gulf Wing Awards

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1st Place, Best Command Publication, AFRC Media Contest, 2004  
1st Place, Best Magazine, AFRC Media Contest, 1989, 2003, 2004

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Photo By Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

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## Cover Story — Page 8

Katrina's survivors all had stories to tell, whether they could bear to tell them or not. We gathered e-mail messages and contacted everyone we could to put together this collection of *Disaster Diaries*.

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## Commander's Call

Brig. Gen. Moss will host Commander's Call at 8:30 a.m. Sunday Dec. 4 at the Welch Theater.

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## From the Editor's Desk

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to read the *Gulf Wing*. This is the first edition the 403rd Public Affairs staff has been able to publish since Katrina.

Our printer, Shaughnessy Printing, in Biloxi suffered serious damage and may not return to the printing business. We are currently working with the Government Printing Office in Dallas to bid a new contract that will allow us to bring you printed copies of the *Gulf Wing* beginning in the first quarter of 2006.

Though we haven't been printing the magazine, we have been gathering

stories and photos since immediately after the storm. There are more than 5,000 photos archived to date showing the devastation, rescue efforts and cleanup. We will continue to collect images as rebuilding gets underway.

Of course, we need your help to identify good photo opportunities, provide us with your photos and to tell us your stories. This issue is packed with stories about 403rd Wing people and what their experiences have been since Aug. 29.

All of the information and images we collect will be posted on the wing shared drive in the Katrina folder. They

are currently under Staff Agencies/PA.

Everyone is welcomed to browse through the photos and copy those you like for personal use.

Our office has been displaced due to damage at the Headquarters building, however, if you have any PA needs or requests, please call us at the same number, 377-2056, for assistance.

Enjoy this electronic edition of the *Gulf Wing*. In the next edition, we will bring you some of the stories we were working on before the storm and provide continuing coverage of your efforts to recover, rebuild and renew our home on the Gulf Coast.

## Gulf Wing Salutes

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Dan L. Darbe, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
David S. Dufreche, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Douglas D. Fairtrace, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Lactancio D. Fernandes, 815th AS, Aug. 18, 2005  
Brian S. Freeman, 815th AS, Aug. 18, 2005  
John T. Gallagher, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Robert B. Harder, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Richard G. Henning, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
William R. Lane, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Craig A. Schwab, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Timothy L. Weiher, 53rd WRS, Oct. 1, 2005  
Andrew C. White, 815th AS, Dec. 1, 2005

#### To Captain

Nicole L. Mitchell, 53rd WRS, Feb. 22, 2006  
Dena L. Schulz, 53rd WRS, April 5, 2006  
Tina D. Young, 53rd WRS, April 26, 2006

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Next UTA

Dec. 3-4



Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce



Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

(Top) Landmark souvenir shop Sharkheads which featured a 30-foot fiberglass shark's mouth was pounded by the surf. (Above) Relief workers gather near Highway 90 in Biloxi a few days after the storm to begin delivering supplies to residents stranded in their homes.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chance Bohm, Special to the Gulf Wing

(Above) Residents of Pass Christian wanted to thank relief workers with this sign next to a destroyed 100+ year-old oak.



Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

The demolished Biloxi-Ocean Springs bridge attracts many sightseers. As one of the few entrances to the Biloxi peninsula from the east, the loss of the bridge has caused major traffic delays. Officials will open sealed bids for the rebuilding process in December and expect to begin using the bridge in 12 to 18 months.



Photo by Master Sgt. Nathan Wilds, 41st APS



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chance Bohm, Special to the Gulf Wing



Photo by Master Sgt. Nathan Wilds, 41st APS

## Around Town

(Top) Treasure Bay Casino's barge washed up onto the beach looking like it had survived an attack by pirates on the high sea.

(Above) Shrimpers were also greatly impacted. This bayou used by many fishermen to protect their boats when severe weather nears was no match for the Category 4 force winds and surge which marooned the trawlers on shore.

(Left) A row of apartments battered and gutted barely stood in Porteaux Bay in D'Iberville. The window in the foreground was once part of the first floor of one of the buildings.



# No Respect

By Tech. Sgt. James B. Pritchett  
Editor

**H**urricane Katrina showed no respect for the memory of her older sister, Camille, when she ripped through the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Katrina's winds smashed the Hurricane Camille Memorial located at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer on Highway 90. The memorial's mosaic hurricane in a pool of swirling water was surrounded by black granite panels bearing the names of those lost when Camille struck the Coast more than 30 years ago.

Residents of the Coast gathered at the church Aug. 17, just 12 days before Katrina arrived, to commemorate the day in 1969 when the most powerful storm in U.S. history made landfall and devastated the region.

Maj. Chad Gibson, aerial reconnaissance weather officer, 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, was invited to speak at the event.

He spoke of the resiliency of Coast residents and reminded those in attendance that the Hurricane Hunters have helped improve forecasts that save lives.

"The key to safety and success in weather reconnaissance is commitment. The Hurricane Hunters are com-

mitted to bringing the most accurate information to the public, an unparalleled product."

Gibson also noted that the public has a commitment to heed the warnings of NHC forecasters and evacuate when civic leaders make the call.

"It is only through constant vigilance, that we can ensure a safer future," he said.

The little church, which was also hit by Camille was once again destroyed by Katrina.

Cleanup is underway and reconstruction is planned for the near future.

mitted to bringing the most accurate information to the hurricane center's forecast table," he said. "We may not be able to stop the weather, but we are steadfast in our commitment to gather the most accurate data in the storm and enable the experts at the Hurricane Center to provide you,



Photo by Staff Sgt. Justin Pearce



Photo by Tech. Sgt. James B. Pritchett



Mrs. Julia Guice places roses along the top of the Hurricane Camille Memorial 12 days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The Guice name should be familiar: Julia and her husband, Wade, saved lives by convincing hundreds near the water to evacuate during Camille. She was Civil Defense director for Biloxi at the time, and he was director for Harrison County. (Facing Page, top and bottom) A before and after view of the memorial.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. James B. Pritchett



# Disaster Diaries

Beyond soundbites: Detailed first-hand accounts of 403rd Wing people on the Coast and elsewhere — what they did, what they saw, how they stayed alive.



Sean Hickey, a Reservist with the 403rd Command Post, stares in amazement at the destruction and the mangled mess that was once his Biloxi apartment. The staff sergeant, like many others in the wing, came in to work his Reserve job while maintaining his civilian employment during the height of the crisis.



Water rushed across Keesler engulfing many cars and lapping into numerous facilities. These views of the storm were captured by 81st CE personnel called to keep a critical generator running during the storm. This is a view near the steam plant while surge was still rising on base. (Right) The Back Bay was also pushed ashore, swamping part of the Bay Breeze Golf Course. (Inset) Winds were still high, even after the storm surge receded.

By Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce  
Staff Writer

In the first week after Hurricane Katrina, it was impossible to turn on the TV, pick up a paper, or cruise news sites on the web, if you had these services, without seeing pictures of storm survivors and destruction from across the Gulf Coast.

An e-mail asked anyone who wanted to tell their stories to send them in for this feature on our people. Almost all the stories we received were limited to a couple of sentences — about their most harrowing moment, or how angry they were to be left so long, or how relieved they were to get out.

The survivors all had stories to tell, whether they could bear to tell them or not. We took those messages and contacted everyone we could to put together this collection of *Disaster Diaries*. As more stories are unearthed, we will bring them to you in future editions of the *Gulf Wing*.

## Katrina is Coming

**Aug. 26 — GULF OF MEXICO** — As the sun rose through the cockpit window, Lt. Col. Douglas Niolet, a pilot for the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron and his crew of Hurricane Hunters, finished another routine mission into a burgeoning storm.

They had just probed what would soon become the most destructive force to strike the U.S., Hurricane Katrina. She had just crossed over the Florida Keys - her last obstacle to reaching the warm salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

As usual, Colonel Niolet had flown an X-shaped Alpha pattern through the storm. In each of five eye penetrations, his crew collected and calculated data such as wind direction and speed, humidity and pressure. As fast as they collected it, the data was relayed to the National Hurricane Center, improving forecaster's predictions of Katrina's path.

"The intensity wasn't anything out of the ordinary," said

Colonel Niolet. "It turned from a CAT(egory) 1 to a CAT 3 when I flew it."

At the end of an exhausting 12-hour mission, the crew recovered to Keesler. An evacuation of all aircraft, or HUR-REVAC, was already in progress - his aircraft was the last allowed to land.

"Typically, I HURREVAC with the unit, and my wife and mother evacuate," said Colonel Niolet, a resident of Bay St. Louis.

This time, however, he wasn't tasked to fly any of the evacuating aircraft, so he decided to stay home and ride out Katrina.

Hurricane Camille was the first storm he rode out as a teen in 1969. It was pitch black when Camille's waves crumpled his childhood home in Long Beach. To survive, he dodged washing machines, furniture and the rest of a city block's worth of debris without eyes. Somehow he snagged hold of an oak tree and hugged the life out of it until the storm subsided.

After Camille, his family rebuilt, and 12 years later he joined the Hurricane Hunters, boldly going season-after-season into the heart of the storm, while those on land pack up and leave.

After more than 20 years of battling hurricanes in the air, he decided to face another one on land - Katrina.

**Aug. 27 — BAY ST. LOUIS** — After Colonel Niolet said goodbye to his wife, Vicki, and mother-in-law, Ann Tidwell, who had evacuated, he prepared for his evacuation. He packed a bag for the night and drove a couple of blocks southeast to stay with some friends at a historic bed and breakfast. It was slightly further south than his home, but it stood on higher ground, and had withstood Camille.

"I knew the innkeeper, and he asked if I could stay and help an elderly couple," he said.

The colonel and six others, along with two dogs, checked into the inn, a 100-year-old historic landmark. They would become its final guests.

**Aug. 27 — SAUCIER** — When Senior Master Sgt. Richard Lewis, a Reservist from the 403rd Fabrication Shop, heard the news that Katrina was headed for the Coast, he immediately contacted his family. Like Colonel



Niolet, he gained first-hand hurricane experience during Camille.

"I called them to make sure I knew where they were," said Sergeant Lewis. "Because I rode out Camille when I was 15 years old and spent a week without knowing if my mom, dad, five brothers and two sisters were alive."

He called his parents who lived in Long Beach to make sure they were leaving. They said the majority of the family would shelter in north Gulfport. He then called his sister, but her response wasn't as satisfying. Despite living closer to the Gulf than anyone else in the family, she, her husband and their 10-year-old daughter weren't budging.

"She was going to stay with me, but her husband insisted they stay," said Sergeant Lewis, who lived furthest north in Saucier, a town north of Gulfport. The only body of water nearby was a small lake posing no threat to his home.

Although he was upset at his sister's decision, he was happy that he could at least communicate with everyone by cell phone. If bad luck was lightning, it was about to strike Sergeant Lewis for a second time.

**Aug. 27 — KEESLER AFB** — Lt. Col. Mark Carter was hard at work. With all of the 403rd Wing's aircraft

flying to Dyess AFB, Texas and Ellington Field, Texas, the chief of 403rd Current Operations had to make sure everything went as planned and practiced. Having lived in Biloxi since 1980 and working for the wing since 1978, he did not evacuate with the aircraft and crews he sent to safety based on his previous experiences with weather along the Gulf Coast.

"I made a decision based on stays through Frederic, Elena, and Georges, and through talking to neighbors who had gone through Camille," he said. "We didn't expect the worst."

**Aug. 28 — KEESLER AFB** — Staff Sgt. Jessica McKinney, a Reservist with the 403rd Wing, packed up a few clothes, diapers, formula and toys for her daughter, Danyel, 10, and sons, Caleb, 8, and Ashton, 5 months.

It was slow going for her as her husband, Senior Airman Bryce McKinney, 81st Transportation Squadron, had left the day before for training in Texas. On top of that, she is expecting her fourth child.

As she only planned to be away from their base housing for a few days, Sergeant McKinney kept the belongings she packed to a minimum.

"I fully expected that we would be evacuating for a short time," she said. "I thought we would come home and

everything would get back to normal." Sergeant McKinney is a native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and like many who have lived their lives here, thought Katrina would spare their homes.

With the bags in the car and everyone strapped in, she pulled out of the driveway and started on a 12-hour journey to stay with family in Arkansas.

**Aug. 28 — GULFPORT** — A block from the beach, Staff Sgt. Sean Hickey contemplated evacuation.

"I was just going to ride it out," said Sergeant Hickey, a Command Post controller with the 403rd Wing who resided at the Beach Side apartment complex in Gulfport. "But a buddy warned me about the storm surge, so I figured I'd part ways."

That decision would save his life. Before he left, he moved his valuables to the second floor hoping the water wouldn't reach that high.

He packed lightly, only taking a few outfits and stuffing them in the saddlebag of his Suzuki motorcycle. He put his laptop in the case, wrapped the strap around his neck, and rode off to higher ground at his buddy's house in Woolmarket, about five miles north of I-10.

**Aug. 28 — D'IBERVILLE** — As Master Sgt. Carl Schaefer, a Reservist



(Left) Tech. Rafael Gonzalez, 403rd Communications Flight, client support administrator, removes a water soaked computer from the 403rd Wing headquarters building during cleanup. Sergeant Gonzalez, like many other wing members lost everything in the storm. (Below) An overhead view of Katrina's wrath in Gulfport. (Bottom) Firefighters at Keesler remove a Pine from the street immediately following the main thrust of the storm.

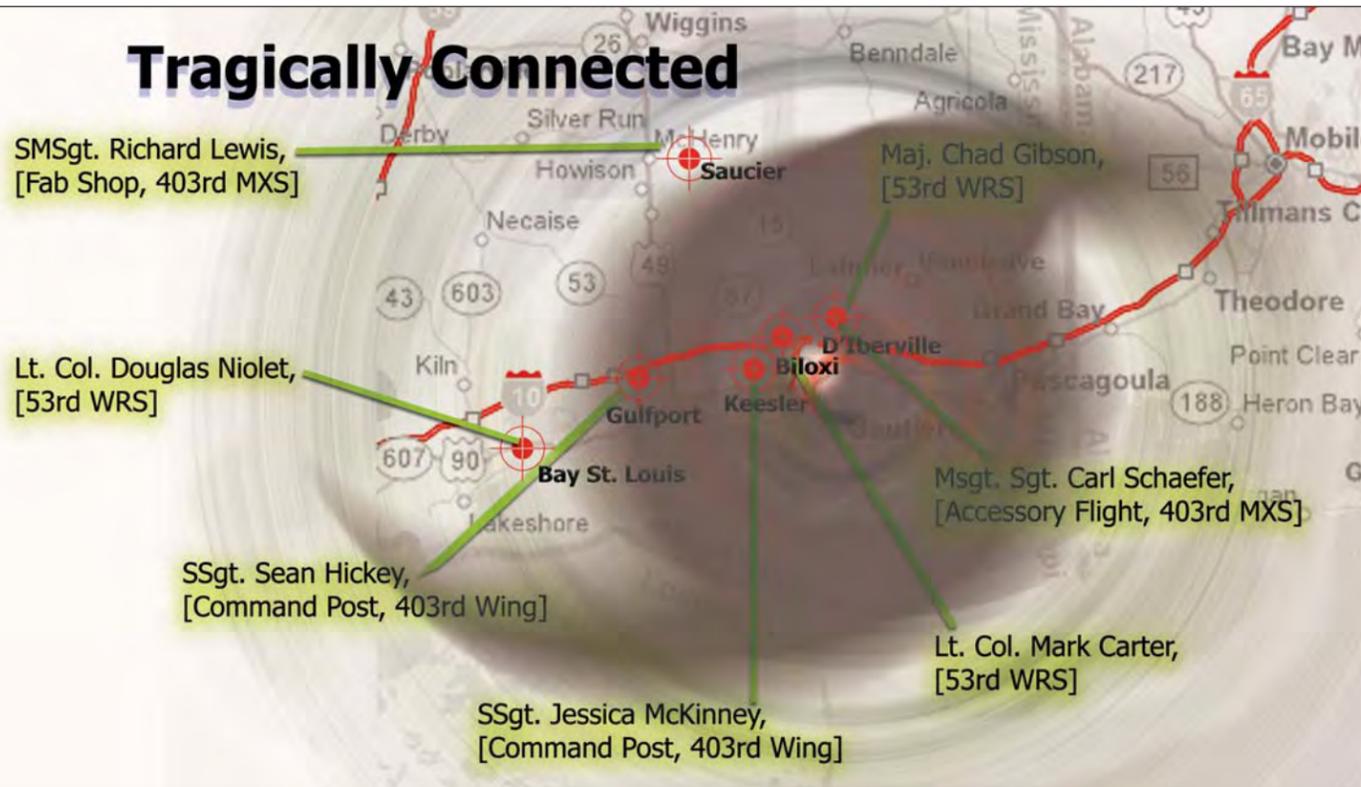


Courtesy Photo by Staff Sgt. Myron Stanley, 403rd CES



Courtesy Photo

## Tragically Connected



Graphic by Staff Sgt. Justin Pearce

# Gulf Wing Features

with the 403rd Maintenance Squadron, backed out of his home in D'Iberville, he took a last look at his house. He hoped to see it again. Then he glanced at his boat, a 17-foot ski craft he always parked proudly on the lawn, wondering if it too would weather the storm. He had high hopes of its survival because it was fastened to a sturdy trailer and was unplugged, as always, so water could pass through it.

Sergeant Schaefer had watched the storm narrow in past his comfort zone. Realizing he was only 200 yards from Back Bay, the body of water that turns

Biloxi into a peninsula, Sergeant Schaefer didn't hesitate to leave town with his wife, Cindy, his son, Brandon, and stepdaughter, Skylar Broadhead.

"Everyone took one small bag, about two days worth of clothes, and I took some important papers and a check-book... that's about it," he said.

After parting with his house and boat, he began his journey to safety, leaving behind neighbors who had decided to ride out the storm - only a miracle could save them now.

**Aug. 28 — COLUMBUS, Ga. —** As residents scattered from the Gulf

Coast, jamming interstates, highways and gas-station bathrooms for hundreds of miles, Maj. Chad Gibson, an aerial reconnaissance weather officer for the Hurricane Hunters, was already out of harm's way, but on an entirely different mission than usual.

He had taken a vacation from hurricane hunting with his girlfriend, Melissa Riley, in Columbus, Ga.

There, he took her to a park where they had shared their first kiss together, and on that bright and shiny day, he proposed. For a few hours, life was bliss.

# Gulf Wing Features

## Ready or Not

**Aug. 29 — GULFPORT —** With the morning, Katrina came roaring into town.

The worst natural disaster to ever strike America was in progress, ravaging the southern areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, showing no mercy to hundreds of years of progress and prosperity.

As Sergeant Lewis' house echoed from Katrina's continuous blows, his phone rang. It was his sister.

"She was crying hysterically," he

said, recalling the fear in her voice. "She told me they were in their attic, and the water was coming in, and they were going to drown. There was nothing I could do but cry."

He wanted nothing more than to save his sister, but he was helpless. The harmless little lake in his neighborhood flooded his only way out.

Tears streamed down his face as he shared goodbyes with his sister, knowing it could be the last time they ever spoke. Seconds after the phone disconnected, he called his mother with the news.

"I told her there was nothing we could do," said Sergeant Lewis. Soon after, he lost all contact with the outside world.

**Aug. 29 — BILOXI —** When Colonel Carter and his wife, Col. Sharon Hick, went to bed the evening before they still weren't expecting the worst. As they awoke the morning of Aug. 29, they knew Katrina was like nothing they had ever seen before.

"We woke up and saw water much higher than Georges was, and the storm was still pretty far offshore," he said.

Carl Schaefer, a Reservist with the 403rd Fabrication Shop, and his wife Cindy evacuated with their children. Although they were more than a hundred miles away from Katrina's wrath, a simple forgetful act led to the rescue of a drowning family.



Colonel Carter and his wife rushed to wake up their children, Gavin and Tricia, and collect their two dogs as Katrina pushed a wall of water toward their home. It soon became a matter of life and death for all of them to move quickly.

He sent his children to a neighbor's two-story home. By the time he was able to get the dogs together the water was waist high in the house and he and his wife were trapped.

**Aug. 29 — D'IBERVILLE —** At the height of the storm, Sergeant Schaefer's neighborhood was flooding rapidly. He was lucky he didn't stay to watch his house crumble down on top of him and his family. Four houses down from his, a husband, wife and their infant child weren't as fortunate.

They watched the water fill up their house while kamikaze winds tore through its structure. The family had no choice but to open the front door and face Katrina head on. The husband led the way while the mother followed behind with her baby squeezed to her chest.

They dredged through the water knowing their lives could be stolen at any moment. They clung to a carport beam to keep from being swept away by the flood, but the water slowly swallowed them. Soon

Jessica McKinney, a Reservist, Command Post controller with the 403rd Wing, visits her storm-ravaged home weeks after Katrina. Staff Sgt. McKinney is a native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. (Left) - Before the storm, Sergeant McKinney, packed up a few clothes, diapers, formula and toys for Ashton. It was slow going for her as her husband, Bryce McKinney, a senior airman with the 81st Transportation Squadron, had left the day before for training in Texas.



Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

enough, they were neck deep, holding the baby in the air. To survive, they needed a miracle.

Their miracle came floating by courtesy of Sergeant Schaefer, who had forgotten to remove the plug from his boat the last time he used it. When the floodwaters rose, the boat remained afloat, breaking loose from its trailer and eventually sailing down the street to the lucky family clinging to a carport beam.

The husband was able to grab it and get his family into the boat. They put the baby in the cubby hole and weathered the remaining six hours of the storm inside the boat. It became their life raft.

**Aug. 29 — GULFPORT —** Sergeant Lewis' mother didn't take well to the news of her daughter, so she did what any mother would do, said Sergeant Lewis.

"She said sarcastically, 'Oh yea!' and turned to my brothers and said 'Go get your sister!' Moms just can't let one of their kids go," said Sergeant Lewis.

It was 9:15 a.m. when two of Sergeant Lewis' brothers, Jerry and Ronny Holliman, left in the storm to rescue their sister.

They drove seven miles south of Highway 49 until they hit a point where they could no longer see the road. Water was overlapping where the old Highway 67 intersected with Highway 49.

They stepped out of the truck and stood there at the end of the road, gazing at the enormous body of water that was holding their sister captive.

As the two brothers stood frozen in the howling wind, something caught their eyes — it was a kayak. With mom's orders fixed firmly in their heads, they decided to go for it. They waded through the water and hopped aboard the kayak, grabbing random debris they used to zigzag through the rough water.

There they were, in the height of Hurricane Katrina's rage, on a mission to save their sister, heading up the creek without a paddle.

"They didn't know which house was hers, so they started screaming 'Sis! Sis!'"

Then, amidst the howling winds and drowning waters, they heard a faint cry for help. They recognized her voice, but couldn't see her. So they kept calling for their sister and narrowed in on the cry, until they reached her rooftop.

"They kicked a hole in the roof and somehow managed to pull them out in

Military convoys began filtering into the Gulf Coast in the days immediately following Katrina. The military maintains a continuous presence along Highway 90 and other regions that suffered catastrophic damages.



Photo by Staff Sgt. J. Justin Pearce

hurricane force winds,” said Sergeant Lewis.

They put Sarah, his 10-year-old niece, inside the kayak, and the sister and husband clung to the sides.

Moments after they began paddling back, the group heard another call of distress. The cries came from a couple nearby who had been holding onto a tree for six hours. The two brothers and their family paddled to the couple who jumped out of the tree and clung onto the kayak with the rest of the group.

Six hours from the moment they first laid eyes on the kayak, the brothers returned to the truck with their sister and the rest of the group. They climbed aboard the truck and journeyed back to mom’s house.

**Aug. 29 — PASS CHRISTIAN** — Colonel Niolet’s eyes opened to a dark reality.

“It became apparent to me that this could be the end,” he said.

The bed and breakfast had literally crumpled on top of them, forcing them to survive on the front lines of nature’s war.

“I knew we had to get a hold of something,” said Colonel Niolet,

recalling his struggle through Camille’s debris-infested waters.

He took the lead, urging the group to swim with him to one of the large oak trees in the front of the property. Despite seemingly hour-long seconds, there was no time for second guesses. Four agreed to try and swim - the elderly couple didn’t. They said goodbye to the others and lay down on a section of roof as Colonel Niolet and the rest battled the current enroute to the tree. Moments later, the roof broke free from the crumbling house and sent the elderly couple floating away in Katrina’s hands.

Colonel Niolet and another man reached a tree, climbed up and began the struggle to pull a woman with the group up with them. Crashing waves made the task difficult. Meanwhile, the last member of the group, Steve, climbed into another tree.

Colonel Niolet and the others continued their struggle to pull the woman into the tree, but debris began slamming into her, making the task more and more impossible. As the debris began to crush her body, he was forced to make a painful decision.

*“She was passed out and had one arm hanging onto a floor section of debris – we were sure she was dead”*

*Lt. Col. Doug Niolet*

(Right) A tattered condominium in Long Beach shows the sheer force Katrina dealt to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, moving west toward the center of the storm. Communities from Moss Point to Waveland were severely impacted by the storm.

(Below) St. Michael’s Catholic church along Biloxi Beach, sustained severe damage, during Katrina. The church was battered but still remains standing, with its distinctive seashell roof intact.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chance Bohm, Special to the Gulf Wing

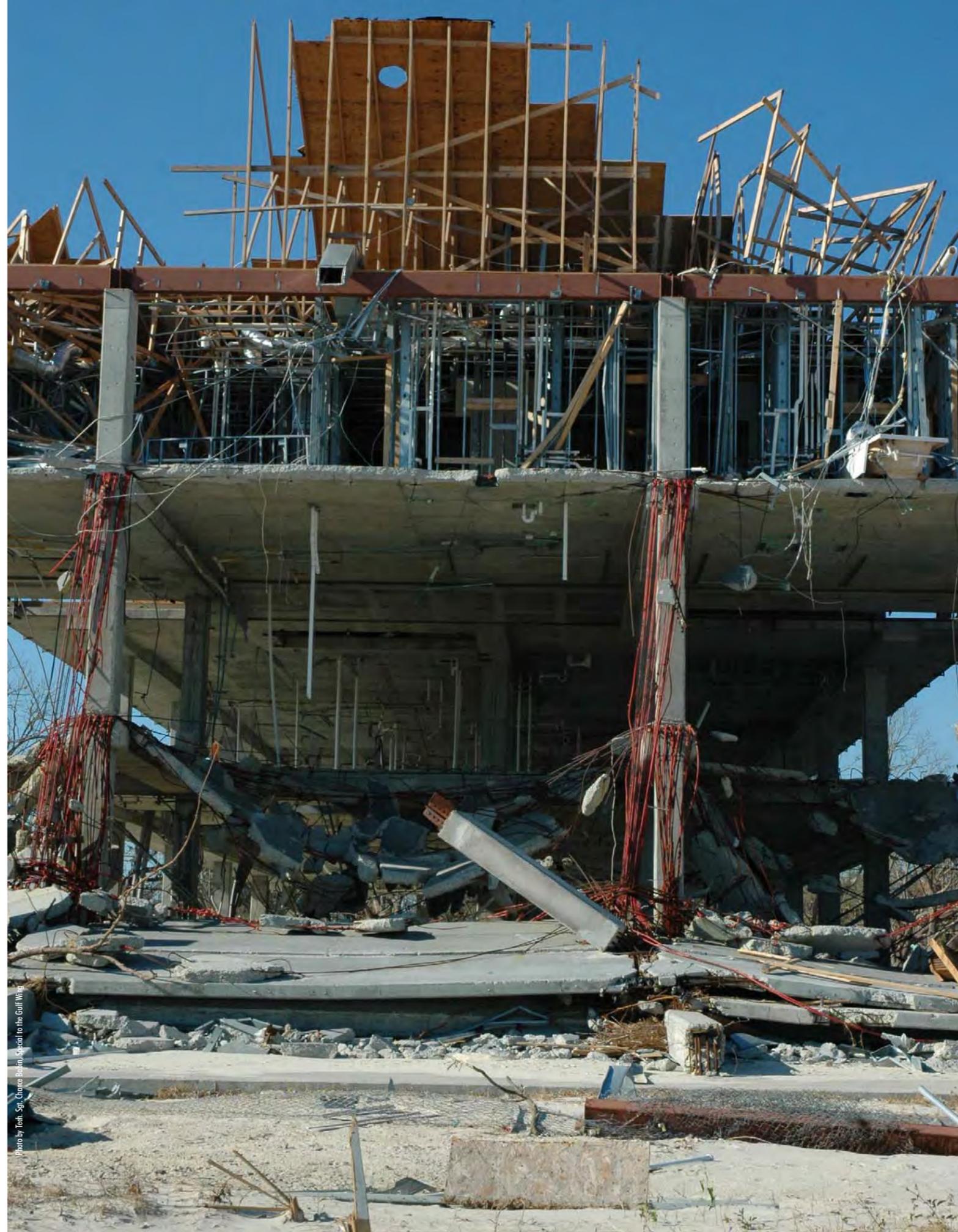


Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chance Bohm, Special to the Gulf Wing



One of the Biloxi Grand Casino barges, lies far from its usual home in the Mississippi Sound. This entertainment barge ripped loose from its moorings and swept down Highway 90, causing havoc in its path. It lies next to the historic Tivoli Hotel, which it sideswiped before coming to rest atop many other structures in the neighborhood. The Tivoli was built in 1924 and was one of the most lavish of Old Biloxi. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Photo by Tech Sgt. Channe Rabbin, Special to the Gulf Wing

“We pushed her away,” said Colonel Niolet. “She was passed out and had one arm hanging onto a floor section of debris – we were sure she was dead.”

Still, the waves continued crashing on; he realized this could be the end.

**Aug. 29 — BILOXI** — With the surge rising around Colonel Carter’s house, it was now impossible to get down the street. Their home had become a narrowing prison of water with only one opportunity for escape. Eventually he and his wife were able to swim out of the highest window in the house with their dogs paddling along behind. The Carters dogs are 9-year-old, Kessie, a Shetland sheepdog and Millie, a border collie mix.

When they made it outside they were swept away by the mounting surge.

“By instinct the dogs swam but needed our physical direction to stay with us,” he said. He swam with his wife over to their pontoon boat where she was able to shelter while he swam back to the home to try and secure the boat to a roof vent.

At this point he was unable to return to the boat and scrambled atop his SUV. He grabbed a section of privacy

fence and put one of the dogs on top.

“When the Suburban started skidding down into the street with the surge, the dog and I swam the fence over to a treetop and stayed there until the water receded,” he said. “I think my foremost thought was a determination not to die.”

After clinging to the tree for hours that seemed like days, Colonel Carter was finally able to climb back to earth. He found his wife and together they rejoined their children at their neighbor’s house.

“The kids were okay,” he said, “but they were afraid we were gone.”

**Aug. 29 — ACROSS THE GULF COAST** — As the storm subsided, residents who rode it out crawled down from trees and rooftops and roamed the deserted streets in shock. As reality settled in for those who stayed behind, they instinctively began rescuing others and scavenging for food and water in the silent night.

Those who had evacuated remained glued to their television sets, helplessly, hoping to get a glimpse of their corner of the world. With all commercial communications down, it was impossible to reach loved ones.

## Picking Up the Pieces

**Aug. 30 — GULFPORT** — As the sun rose, Sergeant Hickey made his first attempt to get home. When large chunks of debris forced him to stop short at the railroad tracks, a dark truth began to set in

“I knew everything was gone,” he said.

All he could see were buildings on the water’s edge that he shouldn’t have been able to see. All the houses and small apartment complexes had vanished, including the one he lived in.

He ditched his bike at the tracks, crossed into the south side of Gulfport and walked the remaining three blocks to his spot on the checkerboard.

A few locals joined him, climbing through debris and over collapsed rooftops. It was hard to find his street – the houses were all gone. But he finally found his slab with a little help.

“The only reason I found it was because of the oak,” said Sergeant Hickey, who was neighbors with a gigantic oak tree. The oak remained, but not his home – a little apartment, a speck on the globe that encapsulated the life of Sergeant Hickey. He stood



Unusual sights, like this computer monitor buried on Biloxi Beach were common for many days after Katrina ravaged the Coast.

Photo by Tech Sgt. James B. Pritchett

Maj. Chad Gibson and his new bride, Melissa, moments after they exchanged vows aboard a WC-130J Hurricane Hunter aircraft. Major Gibson, continued flying storms with the unit for several weeks from Dobbins ARB, Ga.



Photo Courtesy of Maj. Chad Gibson, USAF, 33rd HWS

there in awe.

"There wasn't even a place to start looking - I hoped to see something familiar, but I didn't see much, except a jacket," he said. After digging awhile through debris in oven-like temperatures, he found a bag of photos, a hammer and a shot glass he bought as a souvenir last year from Gulf Shores - now it is also filled with memories of life before Katrina.

**Aug. 30 - BILOXI** - With their home destroyed and family reunited, the Carters stayed with neighbors until safe haven opened up at Dobbins. In hindsight, staying in the area is a decision Colonel Carter said he will not make again.

"I prayed that my wife wouldn't be taken away from me," he said. "Once the water receded, though, I prayed she wouldn't kill me. Even though our home and things were lost or substantially damaged, I put this aside in my prayers for those who lost so much more."

**Aug. 31 - D'IBERVILLE** - Sergeant Schaeffer and his family returned home to find a concrete slab, their own piece of the checkerboard in an unforgiving world. Everything was gone.

That day, they walked down the street looking for their boat. A quarter-mile later, they found it around the street tied to a light post. When they were transferring gas from the boat into gas tanks, a woman approached asking if it was their boat.

"She told us it was a blessing our boat came floating by because they would have drowned for sure," said his wife, Cindy. "It's really unbelievable - Carl never leaves that plug in his boat;

he always puts it up in the garage, but for some reason it was in the boat - it's a miracle, you know."

Sergeant Schaeffer agreed, "I guess it just floated past them at the right time."

The Schaeffer's said the family must have moved, because they haven't seen them since that day. As for the boat, it's back in the front yard. Only God knows if the plug is in or not.

**Sept. 2 - D'IBERVILLE** - Major Gibson and Melissa returned home from their vacation. He was worried because he had only gotten one phone call through to a neighbor.

"He was staying just north of the Interstate, and he said trees were snapping like crazy," said Major Gibson. "The phone disconnected and we were like 'Gosh . . . what just happened.'"

At home, when Major Gibson drove into his neighborhood in Porteaux Bay, his hopes were as flat as many of his neighbor's homes.

"It looked like a bomb had gone off," he said.

Instead of ashes, however, there was mud. Among the land of leveled houses, his brick home stood.

don't know if that was fortunate or not," he said with characteristic wit.

Katrina bashed apart the inside of the house. At one point it had filled with 9 feet of water, leaving everything either washed away or ruined. He hoped this wouldn't be the case since he had no time to drive back from his vacation to pack irreplaceable items.

Luckily, his fiancée was able to salvage most of her things, although the majority of her apartment complex was destroyed.

As for Major Gibson, he put the loss into the back of his mind and sprang into action, relocating his neighbor's wife and baby who were stranded without milk and baby formula. He took them out of town with him while her husband stayed behind to look for lost family.

Before leaving, Major Gibson unloaded a truck full of supplies he

brought down to people in his neighborhood.

**Sept. 2 - GULFPORT** - The barrier of water that prevented Sergeant Lewis from getting out of his neighborhood finally subsided, and he and his wife set out to determine if his family survived.

When they pulled up to his family's safe haven in Gulfport, they were relieved to see it was still standing, but, no one was in it. Although he could see that the house had taken on some heavy damage, he could tell from the placement of things inside that people had survived.

Next, he drove to his parents' home in Long Beach.

"I pulled up and saw mom and dad on the porch, and mom had a harsh look on her face," he said.

Then came the moment he will never forget.

"My sister came running out screaming and crying - I dropped to my knees and we didn't have to say anything - that's it," he said, a bit choked up, he paused for a moment . . . "Those two brothers have a place in my heart," he said. "God spread his grace over our family."

There was only one thing saved from his sister's house - a Bible his niece carried with her.

"That Bible has a special place on the mantle," said Sergeant Lewis.

A week or so after the storm, his sister returned to the shell of her house and didn't find much worth salvaging, he said. One day, his sister called him crying.

"I asked her why, and she said they were tears of joy," he said. "She had found a hand-painted fruit bowl that I gave her for Christmas a few years ago. She was so excited because it was a piece of her past."

**Sept. 2 - DOBBINS ARB, Ga.** - Colonel Carter moved his family into temporary lodging near the Air Reserve Base along with many other Reserve families displaced by Katrina. He went back to work immediately, as Hurricane Rita and later Wilma, Alpha and Beta were soon to spin up in the Atlantic, while airlift missions brought a constant stream of relief to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans.

"After this experience, the value of our wing has never been more appar-

ent," he said. "The Hurricane Hunters provided critical data to help the NHC lock down the track of this terrible storm, and the Flying Jennies were at the front of the pack airlifting in critical teams and supplies to the extensive disaster area. Members of our wing set aside their own losses to help others in greater need. Never has 'Service before Self' shone through so clearly. Our people are awesome."

**Sept. 2 - BAY ST. LOUIS** - The

days following the storm were long and rough for Colonel Niolet. He tallied-up more tree time than a lumberjack, journeyed through the wreckage and chaos of his town on an unofficial search and rescue for lost friends, took control of friends' houses and raided refrigerators to feed hungry people, all while disconnected from his family and the rest of the world.

"It was about two or three days later before we made any contact," he said.



Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve troops assisted law enforcement agencies with door-to-door search and rescue in the critical days after Katrina. Staff Sgt. Myron Stanley, 403rd Fire Dept., who also works at the Gulfport CRTIC, was among those assisting on the scene.

Later he found out his family knew he was safe after they saw two people who stayed at the inn on television.

Although Colonel Niolet lost his home for the second time, he said he feels very blessed because he and all the final guests at the bed and breakfast survived.

The elderly couple floating on the section of roof drifted north until they bumped into a house. Then they crawled inside through the window and spent the night on a king size bed. Because they had miraculously held on to their medicine, they were able to stay alive until help arrived.

The woman left to float away, drifted north until she somehow became wedged in between a house and a tree. At some point, she became momentarily conscious and crawled with broken bones through a window before passing out again. Later, a jail guard found her and sheltered her at the local jail until she was flown out by helicopter to a hospital.

**Sept. 3 — BAY ST. LOUIS —** Colonel Niolet reunited with his family. He plans to rebuild his house and restart his life like his parents did after Camille. He will also continue flying storm missions as a Hurricane Hunter and maintain a positive outlook on life. "Like grandma told me, if you've got your health, you've got everything," he said.

**Sept. 12 — KEESLER AFB —** Sergeant McKinney arrived at Keesler, knowing from news reports and her husband that there was significant damage, but not prepared for the shock of what she would find at her home.

Everything in her family's base housing unit was soaked through, covered with mud or simply missing. Ruined and molding furniture was overturned in the living room, the kitchen was topsy-turvy.

"I was happy that a few things on the second floor were okay," she said. "We were glad to salvage even a little something when so many people lost everything they owned."

Sergeant McKinney drove through the area while visiting family who were also returning and a few who had remained behind.

"Just driving around is very upsetting," she said. "What I saw made it seem like my whole childhood was gone. It's nothing like it was before. The most important thing though is that everyone is okay."

Sergeant McKinney had a niece who remained on the Coast through the storm and whom she said was lucky to survive. She was also affected by the loss of her grandmother's home where she had many childhood memories.

**Sept. 21 — KEESLER —** Sergeant Hickey returned to the Command Post at the 403rd Wing, but it was his 19th straight day of work. He wasn't granted much time to recover physically and emotionally. At his full-time job at a local casino, he was told if he didn't report Sept. 2 for work he would be fired.

"They changed me from surveillance to security," he said.

While continuing to deal with challenges at his civilian job, he is enthusiastic about his job with the Reserve.

"They treat me good here."

Everyone's real passionate and sympathetic," he said. "You feel the team effort here."

Tech. Sgt. Jose Taitingfong, a Command Post controller with the 403rd Wing, said he respected Sergeant Hickey's ability to come to work despite his loss.

"He was gung ho, ready to start with the cleanup. When he found out that his civilian employer was reopening, he worked that night and pulled 12-hour shifts every day. He's got a motivated attitude."

Sergeant Fong was the buddy who talked him into sheltering at his house in Woolmarket.

A couple of weeks passed and Sergeant Hickey paid another visit to his former home. After some questioning, the police allowed him through the barricades and into his neighborhood.

He pulled up on his motorcycle as usual, only this time he had to climb over a pile of debris and around a demolished car to get to nothing.

Some scattered rubble caught his attention, and he quickly dropped to his knees and started filtering through it.

He came across some old photos. A smile pierced through the shock, but it was brief — it faded as he dropped the photos.

"They're ruined," he said.

The thing he missed most was a picture his parents gave him in November.

"It's been in my family longer than I've been alive," he said.

He soon finished rummaging, and walked away from the debris empty handed.

He hopped on his motorcycle and sped away with a new outlook on his life.

"I'm starting off clean."

**Sept. 22 — DOBBINS ARB, Ga. —** On a bright and sunny day more than 400 miles from the chaos and devastation, two people made a vow to each other — that no matter what troubles or disasters their future might bring, they would face them together.

Major Gibson married Melissa aboard a WC-130J aircraft on the flightline at Dobbins between taskings, while the Hurricane Hunters were temporarily based there and flying missions into several storms.

Major Gibson returned to work, diving right back into the sky facing hurricanes eye-to-eye, but this time, with a ring on his finger.

**Oct. 3 — KEESLER AFB —** "The children started back to school today," said Sergeant McKinney, who said the conditions left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina had been rough on her children, but they were bouncing back as things started to get closer to normal. "The older kids have been a big help. They helped their dad find and clean things from the old house."

Though she will always consider the Gulf Coast home, Sergeant McKinney said she and her husband have decided to seek reassignment.

"It's time to move on and start over somewhere new," she said.

Weeks after the storm, as cleanup continues and rebuilding begins, nature reminds us, for a few brief moments, of one reason many of us call the Mississippi Gulf Coast home.

*"My sister came running out screaming and crying — I dropped to my knees and we didn't have to say anything — that's it,"*

*Senior Master Sgt. Richard Lewis*



(Below) Pallets of relief supplies await loading and transport from Barksdale Air Force Base, La. to New Orleans Naval Air Station. The 815th Airlift Squadron, transported tons of supplies into the area after Katrina.

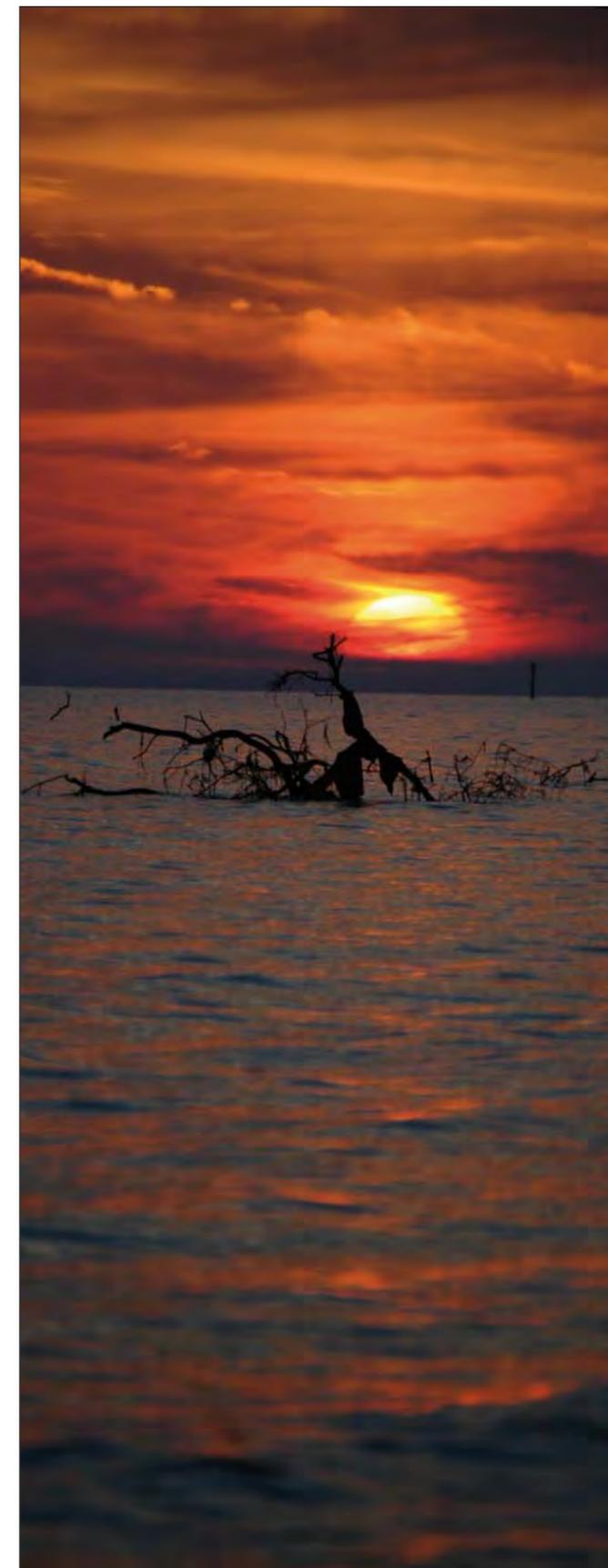




Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chance Babin, Special to the Gulf Wing

Master Sgt. Brian Harms (left) and Senior Master Sgt. William Parsons, spent eight days in the Command Post during and after Hurricane Katrina blasted the Gulf Coast. Once the storm ended, the phones began ringing. Command Post personnel were answering 750 to 1,000 calls a day.

## Hunkered Down

By Tech. Sgt. Chance Babin  
Special to the Gulf Wing

When the order to evacuate was issued many of the 403rd's 1,500 Reservists and civilians packed up and left town looking for a place to hunker down for the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Only three people were tasked to remain on base to ride out Katrina's furious winds and deadly tidal surge while serving as the eyes and ears of the wing.

While many folks along the coast chose to remain in their homes, for Senior Master Sgt. William Parsons and Master Sgt. Brian Harms, along with Brig. Gen. Richard Moss, manned the Command Post and Crisis Action Team as part of their jobs. During

Katrina, this crowded room tucked away inside the Combined Command Post became their full-time homes for more than a week.

"Our role is to be the eyes and ears for the commander, to handle all command and control issues, to monitor and execute the flying schedule. We are also the wing reporting agency to higher headquarters," said Sergeant Parsons, chief, 403rd Command Post.

As Katrina loomed in the Gulf of Mexico that's just what took place in the Command Post, more or less business as usual.

"Basically for the first half of the week (starting Aug. 22) we were flying storm missions and tracking and look-

ing at the potential of a Hurrevac," said Sergeant Parsons. "We were just following the storm, tracking and keeping the commander informed of what was going on."

By mid-week, the Crisis Action Team began to meet and on Thursday (Aug. 25) started Hurrevac, over the next few days the WC-130's set up shop at Ellington Field, Texas, where they flew missions for the remainder of the storm. Meanwhile the C-130s from the 815th Airlift Squadron evacuated to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

"Saturday the base evacuated and we finished up our aircraft evacuation and prepared the facility for the storm," Sergeant Parsons said. "We

began gearing up for sheltering and made final preparation of our homes. That's when the storm changed and we sheltered Sunday afternoon. From that point forward the three of us were the 403rd Wing for the next four or five days.

"We knew Saturday it was coming this way, not that we would take a head on hit, but that there would be hurricane force winds," said Sergeant Parsons. "Once the airplanes were gone our role was limited, then we were in hurricane mode. Sunday the storm began wobbling and it became clear that it would affect us more than previously thought."

Monday morning around 10 a.m. the base lost all power and the command post was then running on generators with no means of commercial communication.

"It was nerve wracking. It was like we were dead in the water," said Sergeant Parsons. "We didn't know if loved ones were alive or if we even had homes anymore."

The Command Post remained without commercial communication for more than a week, although they did maintain DSN and Internet capabilities throughout the event.

"I didn't know if my wife was alive or not," said Sergeant Harms, training manager, 403rd Command Post. "I was losing my hair. My wife works at Biloxi Regional. There were conflicting reports saying it was demolished and others saying it took a little damage. I didn't get to talk to her until I saw her Thursday."

Meanwhile back on base, there was significant wind damage and flooding, but the crew inside the Command Post remained somewhat oblivious to the amount of damage that took place outside of the fortress-like Wolfe Hall.

"Without looking at a camera outside, we didn't know what was going on," said Sergeant Parsons. "We couldn't feel it. Normally we have the best view, but with communication and cable down we were in the dark."

The three Reservists were bunking down with about 60 other people as they share the Command Post with the 81st Training Wing. They had one shower stall among them. Wolfe Hall was also used to shelter approximately 1,000 people.

Starting Monday, the Command Post's telephone started ringing non-stop; the office took between 750 - 1,000 calls a day.

*"I didn't know if my wife was alive or not. I was losing my hair. My wife works at Biloxi Regional. There was conflicting reports saying it was demolished and others saying it took a little damage. . . ."*

*--Master Sgt. Brian Harms*

"We were taking every kind of call you can imagine," said Sergeant Parsons. "People looking for people, complaints about not getting information out, what can we do to help, can you look for loved ones, just about every conceivable issue."

One call that stood out to Sergeant Parsons was a call from a concerned mother.

"I had to deal with a mother who hadn't heard from her son and she knew he sheltered at an apartment on the beach," he said. "We were later relieved to find out her son was fine, but it was those kinds of calls that made it tough."

After the storm passed, the Command Post had to do an initial accountability (recall) of the wing, but with no commercial telephone lines, they faxed all the wing's recall rosters to 22nd Air Force Command Post at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga.

"There was a concern about whether or not we lost people in the wing," said Sergeant Harms. "It took weeks before we got in touch with everybody."

Starting Wednesday, people began doing building checks and members of the wing began to show up on base.

"Lt. Col. Troy Anderson was the first person we saw from off base," Sergeant Parsons said. "We talked to him about how he got here and how he got on base. The base was locked down, but they let him on because he was in uniform."

Although the Command Post crew didn't get to go out and tour the base, they were able to see photos of the devastation.

"It was unbelievable seeing the Commissary and BX almost covered with water," said Sergeant Parsons.

Some of the efforts the Command Post helped out with include coordinating a 403rd aircraft to fly in a dozen 200-pound circuit breakers for the hospital's generators on base and helping coordinate transportation for a heart attack victim on a Medevac C-17 flight.

It wasn't until Thursday when the Command Post members were allowed to leave the base and check on personal belongings.

"When we first left the base it looked like a bomb went off. It was catastrophic," said Sergeant Parsons. "We had to weave through rubble and downed power lines and trees."

Both Sergeants Parsons and Harms heard that their homes were not damaged. "I was relieved to hear it, but to actually see it was more relieving," said Sergeant Parsons.

For Sergeant Harms, getting to Biloxi Regional to check on his wife was his main concern. His wife was fine, but the scene at the hospital was something both of them will never forget.

"When we got to Biloxi Regional it looked like they had been in a war," Sergeant Parsons said. "Everyone looked shell-shocked and pale. It was bad."

Now that things have calmed down, some of the lessons learned include:

"This was the storm of all storms," said Sergeant Parsons. "We were prepared, but we need to look at deploying Command Post personnel with our airplanes so they can help us from their location if needed."

Another change that has already taken place is an updated recall roster to include an emergency contact that lives 200 miles from the base.

Through it all, Sergeants Parsons and Harms and General Moss logged eight days or around 192 hours in the Command Post. The longest time spent sheltered in the command post by Sergeant Parsons prior to Katrina was three days for Hurricane Georges back in 1998.

"We've worked together for seven years," said Sergeant Parsons. "We're a good team. We take up for each other very well."



Missions into tropical storms and hurricanes are continuing late into the season with October becoming one of the busiest in history. Not only were several records broken for individual storms, the 6th named storm of the month, Hurricane Beta, tied the record for the most storms to form in the month of October. Aerial Reconnaissance Weather Officer, 1st Lt. Tina Young, flew on this mission into Hurricane Rita while the unit has been operating out of Dobbins ARB, Ga.

By Tech. Sgt. James B. Pritchett  
Editor

# Hurricane Hunters Fly Into Record Season

**D**espite being displaced and working out of a temporary base, the men and women of the Hurricane Hunters are still flying missions late into the 2005 hurricane season including Wilma, Alpha and Beta which is the 23rd named storm this year and the 13th hurricane.

In late October, the Hurricane Hunters, of the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, flew a WC-130J into the record-breaking Hurricane Wilma measuring top sustained winds of 175 mph and logging the storm's minimum barometric pressure at 882 millibars, the lowest ever observed in the Atlantic basin.

Wilma fueled up on the warm waters of the northwest Caribbean Sea and strengthened rapidly into a Category 5 hurricane, the most intense storms on the five-step scale. The Safir-Simpson scale reserves the Category 5 intensity rating for storms with winds in excess of 175 mph.

With data provided by the Hurricane Hunters, the National Hurricane Center in Miami was able to

Photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Enten

determine that Wilma was briefly stronger than any Atlantic storm on record, including Katrina, which devastated the "Hunter's" own home base and local communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August, and Rita another storm demonstrating an extremely low central pressure, which hit the Texas-Louisiana coast in September.

Wilma was the Atlantic hurricane season's 12th hurricane and its 21st named storm, tying the record set in 1933, and last equaled in 1969. It also exhausted the available list of storm name letters, since q, u, x, y and z are not used. The National Hurricane Center began using letters from the Greek alphabet beginning with Tropical Storm Alpha when it gained strength the last week in October. Doing so was the first since the naming of storms began in 1953.

Max Mayfield, director of the hurricane center, said in a statement, "The message is that the season is certainly not over. People on the Gulf Coast are going to have to watch Wilma. There's no scenario that takes it toward Louisiana or Mississippi, but that could change."

Wilma's top winds weakened to 155 mph late on Wednesday. It was still a powerful and dangerous Category 4 storm, and forecasters at the National Hurricane Center said it could strengthen again. Hurricane Hunters continue to fly the dangerous storm, rotating aircraft in and out of the storm environment about every six hours, providing fixes to the NHC around the clock.

Six storms—Stan, Tammy, Vince and Wilma—have formed this month and is triple the October average of two storms. Six ties the record, set in October 1950 and 1887. Hurricane records date back to 1851.

Four weeks remain in this year's hurricane season, and although activity in the Atlantic Basin decreases, tropical storms and hurricanes are still possible. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration records show that, on average, one storm forms in November, every three years. In the past, as many as two storms have formed in November, most recently in 2001.

With the Hurricane Hunters scheduled to return home to Keesler Air Force Base, in Biloxi Miss, Nov. 2, they are already planning to ensure a smooth transition and keep the mission going as they have throughout the season.



While working out of Dobbins ARB, Ga. the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron flew many missions in support of the National Hurricane Center, fixing storms and providing valuable intensity data to forecasters who provide input to those who decide to evacuate U.S. coastlines. Navigator, Lt. Col. John Shannon, keeps the Hurricane Hunters away from dangerous weather and helps pilots plot the safest way through the dangerous storms.





A crew from the 53rd WRS lands at Keesler after more than two months of working from deployed locations. All 403rd Wing aircraft, equipment and personnel were set to return here Nov. 2.

Photo by Tech Sgt. Chance Bahin, Special to the Gulf Wing

# Welcome Home OPs, Maintenance Support

A glance into the Biloxi sky Nov. 2 will reveal a steady flow of WC-130J and C-130J-30 aircraft bringing home the remainder of the 403rd Wing's operations which have continued out of Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga. since Hurricane Katrina plowed through the area in August.

"In the aftermath of Katrina, the 403rd Wing continued its dual missions of hurricane reconnaissance and tactical airlift without missing a single tasking," said Col. Michael Underkofler, commander, 403rd Operations Group. "It was necessary to deploy our aircraft to Georgia as well as aircrew, maintenance and support personnel who kept operations going. It wasn't possible for us to return home until damage assessments and relief efforts at Keesler slowed down."

Hurricane Hunters from the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron have continued to fly tropical storms and hurricanes during one of the busiest and costliest seasons on record and are currently flying missions into Hurricane Wilma. In addition, the wing's 815th Airlift Squadron, known as the Flying Jennies, continued providing airlift support and even flew relief missions back

to their home base. Maintenance teams kept the aircraft running and support personnel took care of all the needs of those deployed. About 150 Reservists and civilians were deployed at any time.

"The 403rd Wing is made up of Reservists and civilian employees, most of whom live in and are a part of this community. Despite the fact many of our people lost everything to Hurricane Katrina, they all returned to work quickly and pitched in to support their neighbors on the Gulf Coast and throughout the Atlantic basin by providing vital data to the National Hurricane Center that increased the accuracy of forecasts by 30 percent," said Colonel Underkofler. "Now that we have the infrastructure to support our mission and our people at Keesler, we're bringing the rest of our family home."

Lt. Col. Brian Freeman, who is the detachment commander at Dobbins, praised his troops for their ability to excel in these circumstances.

"It's been a monumental achievement continuing operations at Dobbins, but now that the infrastructure can support us, it's time to bring us back home so we can begin rebuilding our lives and continue our mission at Keesler," he said.



Retired Lt. Col. Charles "the A train" Dryden, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, with Maj. Chad "Hoot" Gibson, a weather officer for the "Hurricane Hunters." The colonel regaled the major with some stories of his exploits, as portrayed by Cuba Gooding Jr. in the movie, "The Tuskegee Airmen." In turn, Major Gibson told the colonel what it was like to fly into the eye of a hurricane. Colonel Dryden remarked that he was taught one thing about flying into that kind of weather, "I was always taught one way to fly through a thunderstorm - don't." The Major presented the colonel with his "Hurricane Hunter" patch that he wore to fly through the eye of Hurricane Rita on his missions.

# Thanks Tuskegee Airmen

Legendary flying aces  
donate to 403rd Wing  
personnel recovery fund



The Atlanta Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., visited Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga. and met with the 22nd Air Force commander, Maj. Gen. James Bankers; 94th Airlift Wing commander, Brig. Gen. Thomas Stogsdill; Lt. Col. Lloyd Hulsey, 815 Airlift Squadron, 403rd Wing, Family Support Services Chief, Angela Pedersen, and members of the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron's "Hurricane Hunters" to present a donation to Hurricane Katrina Relief. While visiting the base, the Tuskegee Airmen were treated to a tour of one of the WC-130J aircraft flown by the Hurricane Hunters.

Photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Esten



Master Sgt. Dave Cooper, loadmaster, 815th Airlift Squadron, directs Tech. Sgt. Michael T. Pawlik, vehicle maintenance mechanic, 917th Logistics Readiness Squadron, to load a C-130J-30 for a mission to Barksdale AFB, La. The 917th LRS assisted the 926th Fighter Wing in recovering equipment from the hurricane ravaged Naval Air Station, Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans Sept. 8.

## Jennies to the Rescue



(Above, left to right) Senior Master Sgt. Thomas N. Templin, Master Sgt. Dan L. Hubbard, 917th LRS from Barksdale, secured equipment for transportation with the assistance of Sergeant Cooper and Senior Master Sgt. Jack Bivens, 917th LRS superintendent. The Air Force, active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve flew 4,811 missions after Hurricane Katrina and 154 missions before and after Hurricane Rita. There were 51,568 civilians evacuated, 17,248 tons of cargo delivered, 2,584 patients air evacuated, and 6,964 rescues in response to Katrina. (Right) Sergeant Pawlik, directs a forklift driver as he loads equipment pods onto a pallet for the trip to Barksdale.



Courtesy Photos by Tech. Sgt. Jeff Watson, 917th Wing

# Only Time Can Heal Us Now

By Jasmine Haynes  
Special to the Gulf Wing

I recall waking up at four in the morning on Aug. 28. Upon learning that Hurricane Katrina was projected to become a Category 5 storm, I began to make preparations for my family to evacuate.

With a million things running through my mind, I tried to remember every little detail from the mortgage documents to baby pictures.

We packed up and headed out.

My children did not understand the magnitude of what was about to happen. As the car pulled out of the driveway, I took one last glance at my house because I knew that when I returned it would not be the same.

The journey to reach a safe haven was a long and tedious effort, especially with a three-year-old and seven-year-old in car.

Once we reached our destination, the Weather Channel, as well as CNN, were our main sources of information.

I tried to remain hopeful, as thoughts of the family members who were left behind lingered in my mind.

It was difficult to sleep that night. Tears flowed endlessly as pictures of what may lie ahead played repeatedly.

Once the storm hit and the news coverage began, I felt a certain indescribable emptiness. I did not know if many of our family members in Bay St. Louis and Waveland were okay, many of whom had decided to ride out the storm. I began to wonder if we even had a home to return to, and if so, how much damage it had sustained.

It was at that moment, I realized those material things did not matter much. I began to realize that regardless of what we may go home to, we still have our lives, our health, and we have each other. I began to comfort those who

sought safety and tried to reassure them that all was not lost. Finally, four days later, it was time to begin our journey home; I was overcome with numbness . . . an uncertainty about what we were returning to.

Throughout the eight-hour journey, numerous thoughts ran through my mind; "Do we have a home?" "Are our relatives okay?" "How do I explain this to the kids?" The path of Katrina could be seen in the once beautiful oak trees that were snapped like toothpicks. It could be seen as I passed by 18-wheelers piled on top of one another like toy trucks. It could be seen as the gas lines became longer and longer. It could be seen as we passed by a family walking along the side of the road with only a small bag of their belongings.

As we made it down Highway 49, I saw that some buildings had in fact endured the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. This gave me a bit of hope.

My seven-year old asked me if I thought our house was still standing. I honestly did not know. All I could tell her was that I hoped so. The closer we got to our home, the more hope I felt. Upon turning into our subdivision, I could see the roof of our house . . . still intact. Once we got to our home, we saw that we only had minor damage to our property. We were all overcome with a great joy, a joy that would be short-lived.

We still had family members who were unaccounted for.

My sister-in-law came by the house to let us know that she and her husband were okay despite their caved in roof.

We got word from my husband's aunt that she and her husband, as well as her daughter were okay, despite the loss of their home. She also informed us that my mother-in-law was safe and staying with a cousin.

Then we received devastating news, my husband had lost two family members to Hurricane Katrina in Bay St. Louis. I remember the look on his face as if he was in another place, in another time.

The next day, we waited to hear news of other family members and friends. Little by little, more word came that our family members and friends had survived.

Then once again, we received more heartbreaking news. My husband got word that two more of his family members who lived in Waveland had fallen victim to the most devastating natural disaster in history. We received this tragic news all over a period of two days.

It is difficult to fathom the severity of what has taken place here on the Coast. How do we cope? How will we heal? How will we get through this? The answer is, in time.

In time, we all will heal from this horrible tragedy. We will go on with our lives. However, we will never be the same. We will appreciate life more. We will love one another more. We will not take the simple things in life for granted. We will realize how important we are to each other. We will overcome this. With faith, we will survive.



Jasmine Haynes