

# CAP members aid flood-stricken North Dakota

By Capt. Steven Solomon

*The messages on the social media Web sites, Twitter and Facebook, were anything but matter-of-fact: “We really need volunteers again today to get the dikes buttoned up and fill the rest of the sandbags!” “Classes will be canceled until next Tuesday so students, staff and faculty can help with flood relief efforts.” “My thoughts and prayers go out to all those that are working, living and volunteering in the area.”*

**A**s the Red River and its tributaries slowly rose in March, a blizzard blew through most of the region, covering everything with thick, heavy snow. Power lines went down in western North Dakota and a massive ice jam blocked the Missouri River south of Bismarck. Residents were evacuated.

So, it came as no surprise that members of Civil Air Patrol would leave their homes and families to go where the river was flooding North Dakota’s Fargo area to fill sandbags and build dikes, fly airplanes and take photos.

CAP members were especially appreciated in several specific instances:

- CAP ground teams assisted local residents with sandbagging operations that helped protect radio station KFGO, a critical emergency communications point for the Fargo community.

“CAP assistance was a huge help in keeping the radio station running,” said Lt. Col. Erik Ludlow, CAP’s incident commander for the Fargo area, noting that he dispatched 100 CAP volunteers there for six hours, two days in a row. “CAP really came through on that one.”

- The Red Cross issued an appeal when its own building was in danger, so a CAP ground team responded and erected a dike to ensure the disaster relief organization could continue to support the town and local communities.

Arriving at the scene, the vanload of senior members and cadets learned officials had decided there was no way to effectively protect the building, so they were directed to help move the facility.

“About 14 CAP members emptied the building of important items — fuel, supplies, equipment — and loaded it on trucks to take to a safer location,” said Lt. Col. Troy Krabbenhoft, the North Dakota Wing’s public affairs officer.

- CAP planes made 134 flights out of Fargo, Bismarck, Grand Forks, Minot and Dickinson to provide up-to-date imagery for the state’s Emergency Operations Center. Nearly 325 hours were flown by five aircraft from the



Photo by Lt. Col. Troy Krabbenhoft, North Dakota Wing

Mission pilot Col. Walt Vollmers and mission photographer Cadet 2nd Lt. Eric Jacobson, both of the North Dakota Wing, prepare for takeoff to photograph the overflow at Cottonwood Creek Dam on Lake LaMoure near LaMoure, N.D.

North Dakota Wing, two from the Minnesota Wing and two from the South Dakota Wing, with 6,235 images provided to the state for use by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and state and county emergency managers.

“We’ve done an incredible number of sorties, so it gets to be kind of a blur,” said Lt. Col. Kevin Iverson, a mission pilot who flew eight missions himself — including one for the state’s deputy water commissioner, who took about 80 damage assessment photos used to determine locations to drop sand and salt to break up ice jams on the river.

- Four reconnaissance sorties were flown for FEMA, which coordinated 110 mission assignments to numerous federal and state agencies to protect property and lives statewide. According to CAP records, CAP Cessna 182 aircraft flew about 12 hours for FEMA.

“They were observation flights for FEMA representatives that allowed them to get a firsthand feel and evaluation of what we were experiencing,” said Maj. Sean Johnson, commander of CAP’s Bismarck Composite Squadron and director of the State Air and Marine Operations branch.

Assistance from members of the

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Background photo taken by the aircrew of CAPFlight 3383 shows the city of Halstad, Minn., looking north along U.S. 75, approximately 35 miles north of Fargo on the Red River.

other wings was crucial as North Dakota Wing members worked for days without relief. CAP members, including 122 Minnesota Wing and 20 South Dakota Wing volunteers, had to fight their way in to help after the Fargo-Moorhead area became an island with the closing of most roads because of flooding and snowdrifts.

“It’s the longest and most complicated mission I’ve ever done,” said Maj. William Kay, the North Dakota Wing’s director of operations, who served as the mission’s incident commander. “This is by far the most involved. I haven’t had a day off in weeks.”

To consolidate CAP’s efforts throughout North Dakota, Kay — acting as the state area commander — split the state among three man-

ageable incident commanders, one each in Bismarck, Fargo and Grand Forks. This allowed members to concentrate on their areas without worrying about what was going on in other parts of the state.

Kay was especially proud of the Roughrider Composite Squadron’s assistance. Cadets and seniors members worked hard to help residents in Beulah with sandbagging and relocation as the Knife River threatened their small central North Dakota community. Members helped with sandbagging in five neighborhoods, working 24-hour shifts. A night crew filled sandbags in the 115,000-square-foot FargoDome to support those working on the dikes.

“It has been incredible to see the hard work of the hundreds of CAP



Cadet Staff Sgt. Jarek Connolly of the Minnesota Wing’s Mankato Composite Squadron places sandbags in Moorhead, Minn.

Photo by Capt. Richard Gels, Minnesota Wing

volunteers all fighting to protect homes and critical infrastructure,” said Col. Karl Altenburg, commander of the North Dakota Wing. “There is no doubt we have shown the highest degree of selfless service during this crisis.”

The full impact on people in the affected communities won't be known until it's no longer cold enough for snow, the rain stops falling, the river recedes and the flooding ends once and for all.

When it's time to tally up the disaster relief efforts in dollars and cents, records will show CAP's low- and slow-flying airplanes cost an average of less than \$100 per hour to complete their missions. In contrast, a Predator drone based at Grand



Photo by Lt. Col. Troy Krabbenhoft, North Dakota Wing

Cass County, N.D., deputy sheriff Sgt. DuWayne Nitschke, FEMA Region 8 planning specialist A.D. Hill and CAP pilot Lt. Col. Gerald “Jay” Manley are shown before their flood damage assessment flight around Fargo, N.D.

Forks Air Force Base, normally used by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, was called into service to provide real-time video images of trouble spots. According to newspaper accounts, officials were unable to estimate the cost of using the unmanned aircraft, but Johnson, speaking in his capacity as the state's air and marine operations director, was unqualified

in his opinion: “Hands down, CAP provided the most efficient and effective imaging of any platform and has the premier disaster reconnaissance assets for emergencies in our state.” ▲

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