



# PREFLIGHT

## Chairman's Message

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As our sister states in the Southeast have been ravaged by hurricanes, the importance of assisting those in trouble weighs heavily on our minds. For those of you who do not know, our newsletter editor, Mark Stuckey, is active in Angel Flight. Mark donates his time and his aircraft in providing air transportation to people in need of medical attention. Recently, Angel Flight was instrumental in providing aid and supplies to victims of hurricanes in our sister states.

Jim Strawinski took a family into his home following Hurricane Katrina. Jim Dell, in response to a request for assistance from Luanne Clarke, provided assistance and sug-

gestions in relation to an ICLE seminar addressing legal issues confronted by victims and survivors of hurricanes. The Aviation Section made a contribution to the Red Cross. In times of trouble, members in our midst have worked to make a difference and alleviate human suffering.

Please mark your calendars for Friday, January 6, 2006, at 12:00 noon. The plan is for members of our Section to meet for lunch at the Downwind Restaurant. Following lunch, we will adjourn to the conference room of the DeKalb Peachtree Airport Administrator, only a few feet down the hall from the front door to the restaurant. There will be a short business meeting and a presentation by Robert Baron, who has done a considerable amount of work in relation to aviation safety

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**Few Houses Remained on the Beaches after Katrina Struck. Read Joel Sherlock's Article about our Military Aviators Providing Relief on Page 3.**

## *From the Editor:* *Aviation and* *Hurricane Relief*

Angel Flight, came to the call of their fellow citizens in their time of crisis.

Under the auspices of Angel Flight, Joel Sherlock and I flew supplies to a military family who had been living in Pass Christian and who had lost practically everything (and, adding to their difficulties, the husband was serving in Iraq). Joel and I took out the seats in my Sierra and packed it to the ceiling with a full-size crib, changing table, and boxes and bags of clothing and other necessities for the wife, baby and grandmother. We flew these supplies out to the 3100-foot strip in Magee, Mississippi, providing some relief to a family in a very difficult situation. I commend to you Joel's article about our military's service to those in need, and I look forward to seeing you at the Aviation Section luncheon at The Downwind in January.✘



Since our last issue, the world watched as my home state of Louisiana and the rest of the Gulf Coast was walloped by Katrina. Regardless of what one may think of the government's response to this natural disaster, the acts of repeated heroism by members of our armed forces were commendable. They stayed up night and day and flew sortie after sortie, rescuing trapped families and ferrying supplies when the roads, bridges and the New Orleans airports were inaccessible.

Additionally, many groups of volunteers, from specialized rescue units, churches and civic organizations, and volunteer organizations such as



**A Helicopter Hangar/ Planning Area at the Height of the Relief Efforts**

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Aviation Law Section  
State Bar of Georgia  
104 Marietta Street, N.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Mark Stuckey, Editor  
(478) 757-9531  
[marks@stuckeylaw.net](mailto:marks@stuckeylaw.net)

Alan Armstrong, Chairman  
(770) 451-0313  
[alan@alanarmstronglaw.com](mailto:alan@alanarmstronglaw.com)

Lisa McCrimmon, Vice-Chairman  
(770) 457-2011  
[mccrimmon1@earthlink.net](mailto:mccrimmon1@earthlink.net)

Keith Wood, Secretary  
(770) 471-4282  
[keilex@aol.com](mailto:keilex@aol.com)



## UNSUNG HEROES: THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE 185<sup>th</sup> AVIATION GROUP

By Joel V. Sherlock

By now all of us are very familiar with the sight of U.S. Coast Guard HH60 Jayhawks and HH65 Dolphins plucking Katrina victims from the rooftops of New Orleans. The aircrews of the Coast Guard were made famous night after night on the evening news. To be sure, those dedicated men and women deserve our respect, admiration, and thanks. However, what has gone largely unseen and unsung are the aviation heroes we don't see on television who spend many sleepless nights preparing for just as many long days flying crucial supplies into devastated areas of less glamorous locales such as Picayune, Poplarville, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi. So, when your home has been destroyed, the power is out, there is no running water, and the local grocery store has been relocated by 130+ mph winds, who do you call? You call the men and women of the 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group of the Mississippi National Guard.

The 185<sup>th</sup> was charged with the responsibility of conducting aerial re-supply (primarily food, ice, & water) for the six southern most counties of Harrison, Hancock, Jackson, Stone, Pearl River, and George, Mississippi. Their secondary mission was to transport FEMA disas-

ter teams, VIPs, and news media around the Gulf Coast region for damage assessments. Through it all, the flight crews transported news crews from various television stations, magazines, and newspapers and did it all in con-



**A Sea Stallion Providing Hurricane Relief in the Aftermath of Katrina**

junction with their re-supply missions. As an aircraft that was loaded with supplies went out on a mission, the air crews would take various damage assessment personnel on board in order to accommodate both missions.

In the three weeks following Katrina, the 185<sup>th</sup> moved over 2.5 million pounds of sup-



**A Blackhawk Delivers Supplies in Mississippi**

plies into their assigned six Mississippi counties. The 185<sup>th</sup> alone flew nearly 2,000 sorties into 171 LZs (landing zones), logged approximately 1,900 flight hours, transported over 600 people, and supplied over 900,000 pounds of water and nearly 800,000 pounds of food. Many of us who fly for fun and/or business find these kind of flight hours to be remarkable in the extreme. However, this was all accomplished at what can only be described as a very high OPTEMPO (Operation Tempo), while flying not into pristine airports or helipads but into LZs covered with debris and obstacles left over from the hurricane—and with zero accidents or injuries!

The work horses for the 185<sup>th</sup> were the MH-60 Blackhawks, CH-47 Chinooks, UH-1 Hueys, and OH-58A/C Kiowas (not to be confused with the OH58D Kiowa Warrior). The Blackhawks are based out of Hawkins Field in Jackson. The 185<sup>th</sup> has a total of 10 aircraft, however, they usually only keep an average of 7 Fully Mission Capable (FMC) at any one time. The two Chinooks, from Company G, are based out of Meridian, while the two National Guard Bureau (NGB) Hueys are from AVCRAD (Aviation Classification and Repair Depot) in Gulfport. The eight standard Kiowas are from Tupelo, and are part of the 1-104 Cavalry. Also supporting post Katrina operations were three OH58A/C RAID (Reconnaissance

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## Unsung Heroes (cont).

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And Interdiction Detachment) aircraft from Hawkins Field in Jackson. The RAID's primary mission was to support local law enforcement.

While the 185<sup>th</sup> carried a great deal of the load in southern Mississippi, they were assisted by a number of additional aviation groups. The other states sending aviation assets were: Florida with four Blackhawks and three OH58A/C RAID; Alabama with three Blackhawks and one Chinook; Georgia with two Huey Medevacs and one Chinook; Arkansas with two Blackhawk Medevacs; New York with six Huey Medevacs and eight Blackhawks; Ohio with one Chinook; Indiana with five Blackhawks and one OH58A/C; and Tennessee with three OH58A/C RAID aircraft. In addition to aircraft from other state national guards, the 185<sup>th</sup> was assisted by civilian aircraft; aircraft from the Mississippi Highway Patrol, Alabama Highway Patrol, the DEA and U.S. Customs; two Dutch Air Force helicopters; and numerous Navy, Air Force & Marine aircraft that flew into Gulfport to offer assistance. On the coast, the Navy used CH-53 Sea Stallions operating off of the *USS Iwo Jima* to bring in supplies to the 185<sup>th</sup> which in turn delivered the supplies out to the different LZ's established all across southern Mississippi. On many occasions Air Force, Navy and Marine helicopters would stop for fuel within the 185<sup>th</sup>'s AO (Area of Operation) enroute to their home base (having just come from missions in New Orleans), and the flight crews would offer to help as time allowed. The crew chiefs of the 185<sup>th</sup> would load them up with supplies and assign them a LZ. Not counting the Air Force, Navy, and Marine flights, the men and women of the 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group coordinated upwards of 80 aircraft in and out of their AO.

The majority of the Mississippi aircraft were staged out of the AVCRAD (National Guard Ramp) in Gulfport, with two Blackhawks held in reserve for support missions out of

Jackson. The AVCRAD is located at the Gulfport Regional Airport along with the Air National Guard CRTC (Combat Readiness Training Center). The other state's aircraft supporting the operation staged out of either Mobile, or Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

The aircraft of the 185<sup>th</sup> served multiple functions. The Blackhawks were used primarily for transport of supplies and pax (passengers), but could be used for reconnaissance when needed. Depending on the seat configuration, the Blackhawks were valuable assets because they could carry a lot of supplies along with 1-3 extra pax (whether they be news crews, FEMA personnel or medical personnel). The Chinooks were used primarily for transport of large amounts of supplies to LZ's in the



**C-17 Bringing in Supplies for Distribution by Helicopters**

lower six counties. A CH47 can carry 7-8 pallets depending on the load (that's over 10,000 pounds, not including external lifting capacity). The Chinooks were used to supply and sustain remote areas that were the farthest away from Gulfport. The Hueys were used like the Blackhawks for transport of supplies and pax, as well as conducting recons of the local AO. The non-RAID equipped Kiowas were primarily used for reconnaissance, however, they did carry some supplies with them.

According to Captain Andrew M. Ratcliffe, III (former Company Commander for Company A, 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation and current Forward EOC Aviation Liaison Officer), the

185<sup>th</sup> loaded up all available supplies on all available aircraft and sent them out in a shotgun pattern, covering Mississippi's six southernmost counties. They kept the Kiowa's relatively close (due to their limited fuel load) and sent the Blackhawks, Hueys, and Chinooks out further. Their initial mission was simple: find survivors and give them supplies. The pilots also served as the primary source of intelligence gathering during this time period. As the pilots found groups of people, they would try and establish a good point of contact on the ground and establish a LZ for that area. As the pilots came back for fuel and more supplies, they would be debriefed in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC). The 185<sup>th</sup> command took the information provided and marked the LZ's on the map in order to track where the flights had been and what further supplies were needed where. This went on for 3-4 days until they had established a list of approximately 171 LZ's in the lower 6 counties. From then on it was a matter of sustaining these LZs with supplies. As the pilots kept gathering more intelligence, the TOC was then able to update their lists as to what type of supplies (food, water, oxygen bottles, baby formula, diapers, etc.) were needed at each LZ. Once they confirmed that a particular LZ was being re-supplied by truck they could cease aerial re-supply to that point.

The 185<sup>th</sup> received their supplies by truck in the beginning, but eventually received supplies by Air Force C-5 and C-17 aircraft. The majority of supplies received consisted of MRE's (Meal Ready to Eat), heater meals, other types of food, bottled and canned water, ice, and baby supplies. Extensive medical supplies were provided by Air Force medical teams. During their re-

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## Unsung Heroes (cont).

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supply flights the 185<sup>th</sup> also provided transport for Air Force medical personnel in order for the medics to conduct medical assessments at the different LZs and assess individual needs.

Eventually, the 185<sup>th</sup> was able to turn over primary responsibility for the lower six counties to the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ID) and return most of their aircraft to their respective home bases. Currently, the 185<sup>th</sup>, as part of the Joint Task Force Magnolia, has taken back over operations from the 38<sup>th</sup> ID and has resumed what can be euphemistically described as "normal operations." As CPT Ratcliffe describes it, the emergency mission is over and they have now resumed normal operations; however, they continue to fly VIP and "waterbucket" fire support missions.

In one of his many emails with me in preparing this article CPT Ratcliffe wrote the following and it bears repeating here:

"In the aftermath of this horrendous natural disaster, the Guard received the call and responded! All of our personnel did an outstanding job in accomplishing our mission. Everyone gave 110% all the time, with no complaints. Our pilots and crew chiefs flew an average of 8-10 hours a day delivering supplies to those in need. The average duty day was 16-18 hours long. Our support personnel worked diligently to maintain our aircraft and keep them flying. Our ground personnel, the loaders, unloaders, and refuelers worked without rest every day, all day. It was a combined effort on everyone's part, working together as a team to provide assistance to those in need. My hat

goes off to the men and women of the National Guard, not only those from Mississippi, but those from the other states as well. Together we accomplished the impossible!"

My sincere thanks go out to all the men and women of the 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group for their exceptional service to the residents of Mississippi and to the citizens of this country. Also, for their help in making this article possible, my special thanks go to Lieutenant Colonel George R. Berry, Executive Officer, 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group and Captain Andrew M. Ratcliffe, III, 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation LNO OIC. ✖



**Body Recovery was an Unfortunate but Necessary Mission in the Aftermath of Katrina**

*Joel V. Sherlock is an attorney with the Macon firm of Sell & Melton, LLP, a student pilot, a Captain in the United States Army Reserve JAG Corps, and self proclaimed aviation junkie. He recently returned from a one year active duty tour at Camp Shelby, Mississippi in support of Operation Enduring Freedom where he served as the garrison Claims & Administrative Law Officer. Since his return to reserve status, he serves as Trial Counsel in the 213th Legal Support Organization out of Ft. Benning, Georgia. His current practice includes Eminent Domain Litigation; Business Litigation; General Civil Litigation; and Federal Criminal Defense. Joel can be reached via email at [jvs@sell-melton.com](mailto:jvs@sell-melton.com).*

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**CH47 Chinooks were Regularly Utilized in the Relief Effort**

*Officer. Since his return to reserve status, he serves as Trial Counsel in the 213th Legal Support Organization out of Ft. Benning, Georgia. His current practice includes Eminent Domain Litigation; Business Litigation; General Civil Litigation; and Federal Criminal Defense. Joel can be reached via email at [jvs@sell-melton.com](mailto:jvs@sell-melton.com).*

## Chairman's Message (cont.)

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issues. His abstracts may be viewed on the net at [www.tacgworldwide.com/research.htm](http://www.tacgworldwide.com/research.htm). Bob's presentation should be of interest to us all.

As the winter months approach, we have opportunities to brush up on our night flying skills, and those of us who fly IFR will have to pay particular attention to weather forecasts to avoid operation in known icing conditions.

May all of our members enjoy a happy and prosperous Thanksgiving.

Happy Landings,

Alan



**A Blackhawk Hangar Housing both Aircraft and Crews Working around the Clock After Katrina**



**Bottled Water and Ice were among the most Critical Supplies brought in by this MH60 during the Initial Days of the Relief Effort**

## SKYNOTES

Nov 9-11: NBAA Meeting in Orlando (ORL) [www.nbaa.org](http://www.nbaa.org)

Nov 11-12: Blue Angels Homecoming at Pensacola NAS [www.blueangels.navy.mil](http://www.blueangels.navy.mil)

Nov 10-12: Sebring Fall Aerobatic Championships (SEF) [www.iac23.org](http://www.iac23.org)

Nov. 13-14: Restored B-17 The Liberty Belle visiting Lowe Aviation at Macon (MCN); [www.libertyfoundation.org](http://www.libertyfoundation.org)

Nov 13: 3rd Annual Zinfandel Festival Benefiting Angel Flight of Georgia; Ravinia Club, Atlanta [www.angelflight-ga.org](http://www.angelflight-ga.org)

Nov. 30—Dec 3: ICAS Convention in Orlando (ORL), featuring the Dixie Wing of the CAF; [www.icashq.org](http://www.icashq.org)

**Jan 6: Aviation Section Luncheon at The Downwind (PDK); Speaker is Robert Baron of the Aviation Consulting Group**

Feb 22-26—LPBA Winter Meeting at Amelia Island (55J) [www.lpba.org](http://www.lpba.org)