



A TALE TO REMEMBER

THE 319TH AIRBORNE FIELD ARTILLEY

82D AIRBORNE DIVISION



XVIII Airborne Corps

Former AA6's -- As the inevitable beat of the Modular Transformation drum continues, I wanted to share with you the phenomenal performance of our Division Artillery under COL Vic Petrenko and CSM Roger Howard as it conducted one last DIVARTY operational mission to a standard befitting its reputation as the best DIVARTY in the history of our Army.

As you all know, the 319th AFAR is the most decorated Artillery Regiment in our Army. An organization that traces its roots from the muddy trenches and horse drawn artillery pieces of WWI to the storied actions of Normandy, Salerno, and Holland through the fire bases of Vietnam across the "line in the sand" to the Mountains of Afghanistan and the most dangerous streets of Baghdad. They are the most proficient artillerymen in the history of our Army and they continue to coordinate the most devastating lethal joint fires our enemies have ever experienced. Since the Global War On Terror (GWOT) began, we have asked these professionals to conduct every conceivable non-standard mission simultaneously with their primary task of delivering lethal fires. We have asked them to man 120mm mortars, conduct MSR security along the most dangerous routes in Baghdad and command and control maneuver units in Afghanistan. It is fitting that their last operational mission was perhaps their most rewarding, All Americans helping Americans. The following is a short synopsis of their actions here in support of Katrina relief operations.

New Orleans Louis Armstrong International Airport (NOIA) C2, Evacuation and Security: The DIVARTY TAC and 1-319 AFAR (-) were the first elements from the 82nd on the ground on the evening of 3 September, about seven hours after they were notified by watching President Bush make the announcement that he was sending the 82nd to New Orleans on CNN. COL Petrenko, CSM Howard and their Paratroopers immediately assessed the environment at the airport and went into action. LTC Di Ruzza and CSM Campbell organized the absolute chaos of thousands of desperate evacuees that were strewn through the filth ridden terminals of the airport and added efficiency and direction to the evacuation of 8,836 within their first 12 hours of being on the ground. It is hard to put into words the immediate effect that these DIVARTY Paratroopers had as they calmly and confidently filtered into the airport with their maroon berets, an instantaneous and infectious aura of hope reverberated throughout the chaotic scene. The DIVARTY TAC, recognizing a deficiency in the management of the evacuation effort, brought the over 25 different agencies together in an organized fashion. Over the next two days, this Joint Interagency Operations Cell (JIOC) established by DIVARTY formed the center of gravity at NOIA for all aspects of the evacuation effort and much of the relief activity in the area. Without the JIOC, NOIA also would have been unable to open its gates once again to civilian passenger flights only two weeks after the storm. As the Director of Flight Operations at NOIA told me, without the leadership provided by the DIVARTY TOC, it would have taken at least two additional weeks before he would have been able to open his doors to commercial traffic again. When all was said and done, our DIVARTY helped facilitate the evacuation of over 25,500 citizens of the New Orleans area and 200 pets from NOIA.

Presence Security and non-standard missions: While the DIVARTY TOC and 1-319 were handling the airport missions, the DIVARTY continued to flow the remainder of its HHB and 2-319 into NOIA by ground convoy from FBNC (a total of 150 pieces of rolling stock) and MILAIR. Upon arrival, the Falcon's Fury BN secured and repaired the perimeter of NOIA and took responsibility of the New Orleans suburbs of Bonnabel and Metairie. Simultaneous with this mission, the BN Headquarters

integrated into the FEMA Urban Search & Rescue Operations Cell and provided security teams for 55 Urban Search & Rescue Missions that operated by boat and LMTVs in the flooded area of New Orleans (as the airport evacuation slowed, 1-319 added to the rescue effort by also providing a battery). These teams were responsible for entering the most devastated and dangerous areas of the city, saving countless lives and evacuating citizens in the final days of the rescue effort. Upon entering one house in a flooded area, these fine artillerymen found an elderly American woman in a wheel chair up to her waste in the toxic water where she had been for 4 days, alone with limited food and drinking water. As they lifted her wheel chair out of the mucky water to place her in a small boat, she remained completely silent as she strained to kiss each of the Paratroopers on the cheek. This integration into the FEMA Search and Rescue Cell was so critical that LTC Shoffner and his staff were asked to develop the long range urban search and rescue plan for FEMA and New Orleans which is currently being executed as planned, a true testament to their adaptability and professionalism.

Remains Recovery Teams (RRT): Due to the phenomenal professionalism and genuine respect that the Fury BN displayed to their fellow American citizens, the Division CSM personally selected Fury to assist the FEMA sanctioned Remains Recovery Teams (RRTs) as they fanned out across this devastated city to conduct the most solemn of all missions here. The civilians executing this necessary, demanding and sensitive mission were in awe at the remarkable compassion and respect that our Paratroopers displayed day in and day out for over two weeks. Not a single day went by that they did not express their overwhelming gratitude to me and CSM Amacker for the actions of these compassionate and respectful Redlegs.

Assumption of the Algiers District: As the evacuation center at NOIA closed and terminals became open to public air traffic, we sent the DIVARTY to assume control of the Algiers District, an area devastated by the winds and rain of Katrina. The Falcon's Fury BN, with a battery from 1-319 AFAR took over the area from a BCT from 1CAV. They immediately assessed the infrastructure and services of the area and integrated with the local leadership and public service organizations to make an immediate and continuing positive impact within the community. At a local mission church led by Pastor Brown, a hero who rode out the storm in his house across from his church, the BN provided its cooks and other Paratroopers to assist in food distribution and meal preparations that served over 8,000 plus citizens of the community. Large posters of the 82nd Airborne Division Patch are now proudly displayed in every window of the Church. The DIVARTY's Physician Assistant was instrumental in setting up Medical Support Sites by gathering and synchronizing assistance and assets from various medical resources throughout the community. These Medical sites were responsible for conducting 380 plus immunizations and filling 700 prescription drugs to the neediest citizens of the community. The Fury BN aggressively evaluated local infrastructure and worked with the local councilwoman to prepare for the return of the population. The efforts of the DIVARTY were so successful that the Algiers district was among the first areas to open its doors back to local businesses and was the first area to open up to the return of citizens on 19 September.

Effects Based Operations: The Division Fire Support Element was the center of gravity of my Division Staff. No other element was so ideally suited for collating and sifting through the large amounts of information gathered by our subordinate elements and the DTAC in order to present it in a fashion that facilitated the Division Command Group making decisions and developing and communicating a vision. Daily, I would take the key nuggets of information presented by the FSE with me to better brief and inform the key civilian and military authorities and political figures. The highest leaders in FEMA, the JTF, and the New Orleans and LA government relied heavily on this information provided by MAJ Fullerton and MSG Serrano to make the best possible decisions for the people of New Orleans.

As all of you can see, a terrific performance by Vic and his crew! Not surprisingly, the DIVARTY continues to perform above and beyond expectations at all levels. I could not have picked a better team to transform into the Army's newest Airborne BCT next year.

ATW! Bill