

## Rapid City Flood



Extremely heavy rains in the late afternoon of June 9, 1972 caused the Sheriff of Lawrence County to notify the Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Corning, of a possible need for National Guard support if flooding in the Northern Hills continued. The call was received at approximately 6:45 PM. General Corning relayed the information to Col. Elroy (Stretch) Lemaster, Deputy Adjutant General who called for a briefing to be held immediately at the Camp Rapid Emergency Operating Center (EOC). Col. Lemaster had only begun his briefing when calls for assistance started coming into State Radio, which was located in the EOC. Some of the first calls were from the Highway Patrol and Pennington County Sheriff's Department to blockade Nemo Road, and assistance in rescue of a vehicle washed off the road west of Cleghorn Canyon.

Most Guardsmen on Camp Rapid were reporting for duty, however, more manpower was needed and the call went out over radio and television for all Guardsmen at Annual Training to report to Camp Rapid. Only 655 Guardsmen were in Annual Training at Camp Rapid. However, 1,015 artillerymen and support troops were in the Badlands some fifty miles east of Rapid City and 237 engineer troops were at Roubaix Lake west of Rapid City in the Black Hills. Units in the Badlands had just completed their first week of Annual Training and were given the weekend off to enjoy the Black Hills with their families. Family Day for the Artillery Group had just finished in the afternoon. To get the call to all Guardsmen on pass was nearly impossible. Incoming telephone calls for assistance were answered one after another. Guardsmen were reporting in a steady stream.

Rescue units were made up of engineers, artillerymen, transportation, maintenance, medics, aviators, and state headquarters personnel. Getting the job done was paramount. One of the first rescue teams to report was led by Capt. Bob Mallow who, with a crew of eight other soldiers from the 235th Supply Company, was dispatched to Nemo Road at about 9:20 PM on Friday at the request of the Pennington County Sheriff. They were flagged down by a woman saying her three children were trapped on the other side of the creek. About that time the driver of a pickup truck appeared and reported seeing a car going into the creek. The driver thought there were people in the car because the dome light had come on. The crew found the car and Pfc. Freeman Phillips, Lt. John Parke and PFC Gary Reinhold went into the creek. They found the car was empty. On their return the water rose and the current got stronger, forcing the three men into a tree. In the next 20 minutes the water climbed between 15 and 20 feet. It was during that mission that PFC Freeman Phillips lost his life in Box Elder Creek. Mallow and the remainder of the soldiers were isolated and could not get back to Camp Rapid until the next morning. Another mission on Box Elder Creek found 2nd Lt. Gary Englestad and five more soldiers from the 740th Transportation Company working rescue missions when Englestad lost his life. The third National Guardsman that died in the floodwaters on June 9th was 1st Sgt. Myron Corbin of Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, Webster, SD. Corbin was in downtown Rapid City when the floodwaters struck and Corbin drowned trying to help people.

Many other National Guard individuals and teams performed rescue mission throughout Rapid City and the Black Hills area. They did exhausting and dangerous work and the number of lives they saved can only be told by those whose lives they did save. MSgt. Mel Torres, 1st Lt. Michael Bowlby and SSgt. Maylon Schuh were awarded the Soldier's Medal for their part in the rescue effort. Rescue teams reporting back to Camp Rapid brought refugees and recovered bodies. Some estimates ran as high as 1,000 people saved that evening and early morning. Refugees were taken to the armory or local churches and given cots, blankets, and food. It was impossible to get to mortuaries to deliver bodies as the bridges over Rapid Creek were out. The lights in the entire city went out about 2347 hours. Fortunately, at the Camp Rapid EOC emergency power and water were available. Prior to this lights in the flooded area went out early in the evening which caused more danger to those attempting rescue operations. Downed wires were everywhere and fast moving debris of every description made it even more hazardous to operate. Trees, light poles, automobiles, trailer houses, and homes were moving in the flooded area at speeds up to 40 MPH. This was a night of horror for many in Rapid City.

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Duke Doering  
CW5 (ret.)  
Historian