DDAG feeds people affected by hurricanes

A truck backs in to the dock at Defense Distribution Depot Albany, Ga., where employees will load it with pallets of Meals Ready to Eat and be transported to a Federal Emergency Management Agency staging location in Florida.

By Jessica Walter, APR

Employees of Defense Distribution Depot Albany, Ga., answered the call to support those affected by hurricanes along the Gulf Coast by shipping more than 1.3 million Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs, to National Guard units and Federal Emergency Management Agency staging areas over the past few weeks.

DDAG was more than ready when the first call came in Aug. 28. Just seven hours from New Orleans and four hours from FEMA's staging site in Orlando, DDAG is in an ideal location to provide support. That's why DDAG is well-stocked with MREs and gets called on frequently during hurricane season.

And a more dedicated team of employees so eager to support would be hard to find.

DDAG Transportation Supervisor Mitch Potts directs the team that coordinates trucks picking up and dropping off shipments. He says he gets energized by the opportunity to help. "DDAG has a proud record for always stepping up to the plate in emergency situations. One of the most rewarding parts of our jobs is the fact that we are able to help people in their time of need," said Potts.

"Whether its flood victims, hurricane relief, or supporting our troops, we strive to help in any way we can," he added.

DDAG commanding officer Marine Corps Maj. Kent Wheeler says his team was excited to participate in the mission. "They have a typical Marine attitude," he said with a proud grin. "Whatever needs to be done, they'll do it."

For Wheeler and his team – composed mostly of civilian employees – a mission like this one is more than loading pallets

Whether it's providing disaster relief or supporting America's military, "Team DDAG" stands ready to help. Pictured are members of the team that supported hurricane relief efforts. Standing, from left to right, are Mitch Potts, Bruno Bazile, Willie Toomer, David Parks, Willie Williams (on lift), Jeff Philpot, Marvin McKenzie, and Henry Walden. Kneeling are R.B. Evans and Jason Stewart.

of boxes into trailers. He says "Team DDAG" realizes that when those boxes of MREs reach their destinations they will be feeding people who have lost their homes or troops providing security or assistance to evacuees.

"My employees get motivated by missions like this. They could have been working from early in the morning to 8 o'clock at night and they're still smiling, driving forklifts, loading trucks, and having a good time."

National Guard units hand out cases of Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs, to Louisiana residents affected by recent hurricanes. Defense Distribution Depot Albany, Ga., employees shipped more than 100,000 cases of MREs to the Gulf Coast region.

Jeff Philpot, a transportation team leader responsible for planning and coordinating carriers for DDAG, says being able to provide support for the areas affected by the recent hurricanes is an honor. "It doesn't take a lot to keep yourself motivated when you know that what you're doing is directly helping people in need."

On a recent Saturday, Team DDAG loaded 39 trucks full of MREs headed to a FEMA staging location in Florida.

And they did it in only eight hours.

Philpot says it was a team effort. "Everybody pitched in and did their part to get the job done."

"The time used to complete the loading of these trucks was incredible along with the organizing and the supervision. The mission was a success," added Bruno Bazile, warehousing operations work leader.

Wheeler says he's always happy to get the call to provide support. "I'm a Marine. I love having the opportunity to support and do the best job possible, and I'm very lucky to have employees who see it the same way," Wheeler explained.

In addition to support provided by DDAG, nearly 100 comfort kits were shipped out of Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Pa. Another DDC site in Norfolk, Va., also shipped more than 100 truckloads of MREs and provided supplies to load Navy vessels deploying on assistance missions to the disaster areas.

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