

## Flood Timeline



**Aug. 6, early morning** - Rain continued to pour in the area - up to 5.5 inches between midnight and 5 a.m. - causing major flooding within Pulaski County borders



**Aug. 6, 4:30 a.m.** - Missouri Red Cross volunteers move into the area to provide relief for victims displaced by flooding

FIRST RESPONDING HEROES

# A resilient rescue

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In the early morning hours of Aug. 6, cascading waters of Mitchell Creek had swept through the center of a mobile home park in the heart of Waynesville, uprooting homes into the ferocious flash flood. Screams for help echoed from all directions, and it was up to the two rescue teams of the Fort Leonard Wood Fire Department, along with many other emergency personnel, to come to the aid of those voices.

From the West Side Baptist Church parking lot two Fort Leonard firefighters took a deep breath and deployed a jet boat into the dangerous flood.

Capt. Levi Grempp steered the boat through the nearly submerged neighborhood as Lt. Bobby Liveoak helped navigate through the dark, debris-filled waters. All the while, rain relentlessly poured and bolts of lightning fractured the ebony Missouri sky.

"You could see the trailers rocking [from the water]," Grempp said.

After rescuing six individuals trapped inside their flood-enveloped homes, the firefighters found themselves at the home with a family of ten, waiting to be rescued.

Grempp and Liveoak made several trips to rescue five adults and five children who were trapped inside the home. After each trip to and from land, the firemen noticed that the water was rising increasingly higher on the side of the home.

As the waters rose, so did the pressure on

Grempp and Liveoak to rescue the family.

During the third and final trip, Grempp and Liveoak loaded two women, a man with a broken leg (that was broken prior to this incident), and a young girl, who was approximately 2 years old into the jet boat and placed lifejackets on each individual.

Apocalyptic rain incessantly surged from above as the rescue boat made its way through the troublesome waters with nothing but two small boat headlights slicing through the darkness.

Clotheslines, trash, garden hoses and various objects filled the water. This was

problematic for the rescue boat's jet engine, which swallowed any floating debris, cutting off the engine's power.

Because of this, Liveoak had to jump out of the boat and physically clear the visible debris in the pathway to prevent the engine from stopping.

Though the system was far from ideal, it had been working, with Liveoak monitor-

ing the engine's intake and Grempp steering through the water. They made their way down the steady torrent, which was the main road of the trailer park just a few hours prior.

Then the engine stopped.

Liveoak panicked as he could see several feet of carpet caught in the blades of the engine.

"We were dead in the water," he said.

A few short and terrifying seconds later,



Sgt. Justin L. McCullough

a floating shed hit the rescue boat, causing it to overturn.

All six passengers on the boat were then at the water's mercy.

The two women's helpless bodies were swallowed and carried by the stubborn waters downstream.

Liveoak reached to grab the male victim's life jacket, but his grip couldn't overpower the strength of the water. The man and the young girl slipped away.

"Your first thought is for the victims. You want to get the people you're with," Liveoak said. "It was pitch black, we were in a capsized boat, but when it's three in the morning and water is rushing, you just have a second to react. There isn't much you can do at that point."

The shed that had hit the boat washed down stream and wedged itself between a guide wire and electric pole.

The tenacious waters took the man with the broken leg, holding the child, and two firemen downstream, too.

The man with the broken leg was able to hold onto the guide wire that was next to



Cpl. Lance D. DeClue

the shed in order to gain stability, and the two firemen hopped on top of the shed, screaming for help.

"I don't know how long we were up there, but it felt like forever," Liveoak said.

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During a flash flood, water takes a person wherever it wants.

For the two women, the water pressure carried them to the main stream of Mitchell Creek, which had turned into white water rapids.

Capt. William Allis of Fort Leonard Wood Fire and Rescue, who was in command on land, could see the boat capsize. Allis couldn't see much, but he could hear the screams over the crashing thunder and rain. He saw one victim's helpless body rush downstream.

"Hold on!" he screamed.

Allis, who has been a firefighter for more than 10 years, instinctively jumped

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**Aug. 6, before daylight** - A young boy and his mother were swept by raging floodwaters from a road near Interstate 44 to Mitchell Creek



**Aug. 6, midmorning** - The body of Elyjah M. Lee was recovered in Mitchell Creek near Waynesville Middle School; Missouri State Highway Patrol and Pulaski Sheriff's Department continued searching for his mother, Jessica D. Lee.

## RESCUE

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in after the woman who was grasping onto a tree limb.

Allis grabbed a hold of the woman, who he learned her name was Harriet.

Allis held onto Harriet tightly, just as he learned to do at the University of Missouri training he took previously, and waded through the relentless water to find something sturdier to hold onto.

Allis said it took a trained individual to move through the water that was moving approximately 8-10 MPH.

"You aren't swimming, so it doesn't matter how good you are at swimming," Allis said. "You are just directing your body to the flow of the water. When you get in moving water like that, it'll take you where it wants to. You have that water push against you and direct you left or right."

Harriet's sister, Shantay, was clinching to a tree downstream. As soon as Allis spotted Shantay, he held on to Harriet and ferried toward her.

"I picked a 'target tree,' a place where I wanted to be," Allis said. "I knew we weren't getting out together in the flow, we were definitely going to be in the flow. So I picked a tree to hold onto."

On the way to the target tree, Allis grabbed onto Shantay, while holding Harriet, and ferried down to a tree that was out of the way of the main stream of debris and rapid flow of water. He placed Shantay alongside the tree for her to hold onto while he clung tight to both Harriet and the tree five feet away.

"Once we got pinned up to the trees, I knew we had a pretty good handle on the situation, unless something would go wrong like lightning striking us or a propane tank igniting around us," Allis said.

Allis became the physical and mental source of composure for the two women. With limited visibility, Harriet and Shantay had no idea what happened to their two relatives who they last saw in the boat.

Missouri State Highway Patrolmen Sgt. Justin McCullough and Corp. Lance De-

Clue didn't know much about what they were getting into when they got a 3 a.m. wake-up call to pack up their prop boat and head to Waynesville.

They had heard over the radio that a boat had capsized and three firemen and four civilians needed to be rescued.

From where they launched the boat, which was around the area of the West Side Baptist Church, they could see two firemen on top of the shed yelling for help.

McCullough and DeClue navigated their boat roughly for roughly 50 yards and came upon the two victims and two firefighters, clinching to the guide wire and balancing on top of the shed.

With no issues, McCullough and DeClue pulled the shaken man and little girl into their boat and took them back to safety.

But when McCullough and DeClue rushed back to the shed to rescue the firefighters on top of the shed, the scene changed entirely.

A propane tank spilled, spewing its contents and creating a thick cloud of gas on the top layer of the water.

"We had to be really careful to make sure we didn't ignite the propane," McCullough said.

After taking the two firemen to safety, the two patrolmen were then informed of Harriet, Shantay, and Captain Allis, still hanging to a tree downstream.

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For more than 30 minutes, Allis, Harriet and Shantay held on. Allis wrapped his arms around Harriet, ensuring her head was above the water.

"We were on the upstream side of a couple trees," Allis said. "By holding onto the trees, we were able to stabilize ourselves. We had life jackets on, but without holding onto something the water will still pull you down."

Harriet, Shantay and Allis did their best to stay calm while chaos increasingly surrounded them. Automobiles floated past them. A propane tank leaked its contents in front of them. A swimming pool net wrapped around the three of them.

From the land, St. Robert Police Officer



Missouri State Highway Patrolmen Sgt. Justin McCullough and Corp. Lance DeClue lost control of their boat several times that day. PHOTO SUBMITTED

Christian Butler spotted Allis and the two victims hanging to the trees and kept a light shining.

"I wouldn't call it a safety net, but we were grounded," Allis said. "Officer Butler helped us out a lot."

Harriet began to shake as the 50 degree water lowered her body temperature and said the Lord's Prayer out loud with Allis.

Minutes later, Allis could see the lights of a rescue boat headed toward them.

Allis let out a sigh of relief as McCullough and DeClue approached them.

At that point, Harriet wasn't doing well. Hypothermia was setting in and the thought of her younger family members was weighing heavy on her just as much as the rushing water pushing against her frail figure was.

Allis told the men to take Harriet to safety first.

The boat's engine lost power on the way back to rescue Allis and Shantay.

"We were at the mercy of the river, bouncing off propane tanks and poles," McCullough said. "We were finally able to get the side, tie the boat down, and get our jet boat."

With the jet boat, McCullough and DeClue were able to prop their boat next to Shantay and Allis, and brought each individually to safety.

"They weren't ideal conditions by any means, but you're in a situation where you have no choice but to act," McCullough said. "And you do whatever you can to help save people. There wasn't a whole lot of thinking that took place."

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Natural disasters are a true test of strength for first responders. For the six heroes who took part in this rescue mission, years of training were tested in less than a few hours.

"The adrenaline was there, but the training is too. The first time [Grempe and Liveoak] got to the victims, they put life-jackets on everyone. There were no guarantees. It's an unpredictable situation."

Despite the unfavorable conditions, the training of these first responders training combined with their heroic actions saved many lives that day.

"As a first-responder, you don't want to see something like this happen but you do want to see the community come together like they did, with all the police, medics, firemen, and local volunteers coming together," Allis said. "Everyone helped. I think we would have lost more lives if Waynesville wasn't the community it is."