



Guard Called to Clear School Roofs

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Vernon – Connecticut has been pummeled since the day after Christmas with one snow and ice storm after another. The storms have dumped more than 80 inches of snow in parts of Connecticut and roofs and buildings have collapsed under the weight of the snow and ice.

The Town of Vernon has seven schools that were in danger of having their roofs collapse and asked the governor of Connecticut for help after declaring a state of emergency. Gov. Dannel P. Malloy contacted the Connecticut National Guard and Soldiers and Airmen in elements of the 85th Troop Command and 143rd Area Support Group were called out.

At 10:30 p.m. Wednesday, the green light was given for the mission and the Joint Operations Center (JOC) was fully activated, according to 1st Sgt. Dominic Derasmo, JOC noncommissioned officer.

Soldiers and Airmen of the 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry, F Company, 186th Brigade Support Battalion, 192nd Military Police Battalion, 143rd Military Police Company, 143rd Military Police Company, the 928th Military Police Detachment (Military Working Dog Teams), and the 14th Civil Support Team were on the ground assisting the Town of Vernon by 12:30 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 3.

The mission for these Guardsmen was simple...clear the roofs of seven public schools of snow and ice. Simple? It may sound like it would be simple, but it wasn't. Nearly three feet of snow and ice made the mission anything but simple.

The Guardsmen gathered on the roof of the first school in Vernon armed with shovels and started clearing the snow. Snow blowers were brought in and the troops worked through the night under lights provided by the Vernon Volunteer Fire Department.

The director of Vernon's Office of Emergency Management, Michael Purcaro, said that a structural analysis of the schools had been conducted and they were all found to have an excessive snow load.

"The school roofs are rated for weights up to 30 pounds per square foot, and some were in the realm of 50 pounds per square foot," said Purcaro. "After consulting with the mayor, he declared a state of emergency and called in resources from every department in town. The volume of snow far exceeded our capabilities to remove."

Mayor Jason McCoy said he was extremely pleased with the response of the governor and the National Guard. He said the National Guard helped to keep the schools of 3800 students safe. Between the schools, he said, there is about 700,000 square feet of roofs which were buried under at least three feet of snow and ice. "The National Guard has done an excellent job," said the mayor. "\$300 million in schools have been saved. We really appreciate the work and effort and thank the general and governor for allowing us to have the assets we needed."

The Guardsmen were first assigned to the Skinner Road Elementary School. Each school had been given a priority in which to be cleared. By 8:30 a.m., Skinner was cleared and troops moved on to the Center Street Elementary School. Temperatures had dipped into the low to mid teens and winds were blowing making conditions on the roof tops harsh at times. Soldiers and Airmen armed with shovels, snow blowers and wheel barrows tackled their second roof.

According to PFC Geoff Miner of the 143rd Military Police, there were several layers of snow and ice to work through. "We had to break through about a quarter inch of ice and push the snow off the roof," said Miner. Under that layer of snow was more ice to be broken through and more snow to remove. There was so much even the snowblowers couldn't take it."

Miner said the Guardsmen rotated in and out of the work environment pretty well and were able to warm up periodically so that they worked for an hour at a time and got a 30 minute break, without the work stopping. He said he was also surprised at how well the community and the Guard worked together. "The fire department provided the lights, equipment and manned snow blowers on the first roof and used their bucket to lift supplies to the roof for us," he said. "We had plenty of equipment. Shovels...I was amazed at the number of shovels and snowblowers."

He said they had been working on the second roof for about four hours and were about half done. Miner joined the Guard in March 2009 and said he hadn't expected that snow removal would be something he would be doing. "Everybody expects to be sand bagging for floods, but not to be removing snow from school roofs," he said. "It's good though. That's why I joined the Guard rather than the Reserves or the Active Duty, to help in the community."

Lt. Col. Francis Evon, 102nd Infantry Battalion commander said the Guard had responded very quickly and that morale was high. He had 85 personnel from the Troop Command on the scene transitioning later in the day to 75 personnel from the Area Support Group.

Speaking about how the troops responded to the emergency assistance call as opposed to responding to a mobilization he said it was similar. "The foundation is the same," he said. "The infantry has just gotten back from Afghanistan and some of the Soldiers told me they had never been on State Active Duty before. The Soldiers are motivated. The Infantry is back in the fight."

And, according to Purcaro, it was those Soldiers of "the National Guard in partnership with the Town of Vernon that saved our schools. On behalf of the Town of Vernon, we are very grateful to the Governor, to the state Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and to the National Guard."