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**HURRICANE IRMA RELIEF/RECOVERY AFTER ACTION REPORT**

Just 2 weeks after Hurricane Harvey flooded Texas, Hurricane Irma made landfall in two locations in Florida. The size of the storm resulted in almost all Floridians having some impact from the storm. Some lost everything while others were much more fortunate. Marine Corps League members throughout the region immediately rallied to the aid of the less fortunate with offers of physical assistance and donations of cash and supplies.

Hurricane Irma, a Category 4 hurricane, made the first landfall in the middle Keys at Cudjoe Key on 10 September 2017 with an estimated 10-foot storm surge on the ocean side of the Keys. Throughout the Middle Keys, the hurricane caused catastrophic damage to: buildings, trailer parks, boats, businesses, power supply, mobile phone coverage, internet access, sanitation, the water supply and the fuel supply. Some areas in Marathon Key appeared like a blast area, while other areas remained relatively intact.

A second landfall was made, as a Category 3 hurricane, at Marco Island (Southwest Florida Coast) later the same day. A 7-foot storm surge occurred in Naples with some neighborhoods being flooded for more than 2 weeks. The storm continued up the peninsula of Florida, impacting most all Floridians.

Some estimates place the amount of damage from Hurricane Irma at a minimum of \$50 billion. Hurricane Irma affected multiple states in the South, but most notably Florida. Except for the Florida Keys, the total damage was not as great as officials and forecasters had warned. The Florida Keys suffered the worst of the damage in the US. After surveying the aftermath of Irma, Florida Governor Rick Scott said, "I thought we would see more damage" (on the mainland) but said "he witnessed devastation in the Keys".

Throughout Florida, at least 82 people died in storm-related incidents. Most of the deaths occurred from drowning, trauma, and carbon monoxide poisoning. At least 12 people are known to have died throughout the Florida Keys, although the true number may never be known due to so many that live off the grid throughout the Keys.

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Away from the path of the eye, a wind gust of 109 mph was recorded in Pembroke Pines. In Miami, storm surge flooded Brickell Avenue with waist-deep water, and two high-rise cranes collapsed. Another construction crane collapsed in Fort Lauderdale. In Jacksonville, flooding surpassed the record set by Hurricane Dora in 1964. Damage was experienced throughout the state. Over 2.6 million homes in Florida were without power for several days and some for more than two weeks. In the days after the hurricane, due to the heavy rainfall, numerous rivers throughout Florida flooded causing further devastation to homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

In the days immediately following landfall, there was no communication with the Keys. Some news media were able to helicopter into the area and report on the devastation. There is one Marine Corps League Detachment in the Florida Keys, the Marathon Devil Dogs # 1216 based in Marathon. We learned from the news broadcast that some of our members experienced devastating losses. After several days, we were able to establish intermittent communications with Commandant Mike Rhine and Paymaster Ken Bell of the Detachment. We learned that they had more than enough water, food, and most other necessities on hand from large donations from the Red Cross and other larger organizations. During this period, many phone calls and emails were received requesting information on how to help our members in the Keys. I did not have an answer because a good assessment could not be conducted. Our members in the Keys were busy assisting their neighbors and the community. They could not access their homes or did not have the time to determine their own impact yet.

Two weeks after landfall, Department of Florida PRO Robin Barker and I were able to make a short visit to the Marathon area for an assessment. We met with several of our MCL members, other veterans, some residents, and the County Mayor. We saw firsthand some of the devastation experienced in the area. We also witnessed a massive effort from charitable, religious, and government organizations in providing immediate aid such as food, water, shelter, and other recovery efforts to the area.

Department PRO Barker prepared and distributed numerous press releases with photographs describing what we witnessed. With the aid of Marine Corps League National Commandant Wendell Webb and Southeast Division National Vice Commandant Archie Sweet the word was spread throughout the League. The Department of Florida Board of Trustees established an account designated to aid our members impacted by Hurricane Irma. Within a few short weeks, more than \$30,000 was donated from individual members, Detachments and Departments throughout Florida and the Nation. Commandant Mike Rhine and Paymaster Ken Bell of the Marathon Devil Dogs were asked to conduct an initial assessment of the needs of their members. I followed up on the initial assessment with a personal visit to Marathon during the week of November 13<sup>th</sup>. I again spoke to several members and learned more of the needs for their recovery. Every one of them initially stated that "everything is good" or "we will survive". They each spoke of others that were in need, especially members of the community such as teachers, health care providers, sanitation workers, and others. They said these are the folks that really need assistance because if they move away the community cannot survive without them. I observed first-hand what it means to be part of a community and another example of our motto of "Semper Fidelis" by which the Marines of the Marathon Devil Dog Detachment 1216 live. It

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may be weeks or months before a true sense of normalcy returns to our fellow members in the Florida Keys. Some needs are not yet known; therefore, provision has been made to help when that time comes.

There are 28 members of the Marine Corps League, Marathon Devil Dogs Detachment 1216. Some of the members are spouses of others, and some live in other parts of the State and Nation. The vetting process determined that 12 of the members were individuals not related to one another and reside in the impacted area. They incurred varying degrees of impact from total devastation to lesser degrees of damage. Some had insurance or other resources to aid in their recovery, others had nothing. These 12 members each received a portion of the donated funds. The Detachment was provided with additional funds to meet the yet to be determined urgent and legitimate needs of the membership. The Department of Florida reserved a small portion of the funds to meet future yet to be determined needs of members in need because of Hurricane Irma. Any remaining funds will be maintained in the separate account and designated for use of Marine Corps League members in need due to a future catastrophic need. None of the funds have or will be spent for any administrative purpose, other than the cost to have a book of checks printed. There is not a service fee from the bank for this account based on maintaining a small balance and the combined balance with other Department of Florida accounts.

Commandant Webb and SEDNVC Sweet, please consider recognizing the contributors to this relief fund with appropriate National and/or Division level awards. I will provide each of you with a separate listing of all the known donors. The Department of Florida Marine Corps League has sent every known donor a thank you letter. A Department level certificate of appreciation or award will be prepared and distributed in the very near future.

On behalf of all the members of the Department of Florida and especially the members of the Marathon Devil Dogs I extend a heartfelt thank you to you and to all who have donated to make life a little bit better for our members in need.

Semper Fidelis,  
George LaMont