



PHOTOS BY SPC. JASON STADEL

A Soldier adds to the number of filled sandbags. Some were loaded on to five-ton trucks for distribution, while the city loaded some into metal containers and took them to various sites around the city.

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With the closing of many area highways due to rain, flooding and traffic congestion during last week's storm, most of Fort Bliss' non-essential and non-key personnel were sent home early by the commanding general. However, with torrential rains not letting up throughout the day, flooding of many streets and neighborhoods, the potential flooding of the Rio Grande and nearly complete shut down of Interstate-10, the El Paso city and county called on Fort Bliss for assistance.

The post information operations center was made aware of the situation and then asked 2nd Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery, to stand-by and prepare vehicles and Soldiers as they might be needed to assist in evacuations or rescue operations. 2-43 ADA was called because they are the Fort Bliss red-cycle battalion for August.

At 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, about a half hour after being put on stand-by, 2-43 ADA was put into action and told to provide 12 five-ton trucks, one wrecker and Soldiers to help El Paso with flood operations.

With an El Paso Police Department and Department of Defense Police escort, the "Strength in Honor" Soldiers and trucks moved from Fort Bliss to the Central Fire Station in Downtown El Paso to learn how they would assist the city.

"After we were told to be on stand-by, we started to put together a cohesive operation," said Sgt. Maj. Jesus Degracia, 2-43 ADA operations sergeant major. "All the first sergeants came together and really made everything happen." He added the entire battalion had come together with a plan of action in about an hour.

"When we went down to the fire sta-

# FLOOD

## WATERS SOAK CITY

### 2-43 Soldiers provide valuable assistance to El Paso

tion, the El Paso Police Department and El Paso Fire Department gave us fantastic support. They had everything ready so we could go out and accomplish our mission," said Sgt. 1st Class Jerry Jacobitz.

The move took place at 5:30 p.m. with about 30 2-43 ADA Soldiers.

The mission included transporting 10,000 sandbags to east El Paso (city employees and volunteers had the sandbags filled and ready for the Soldiers to transport) and 500 sandbags to Horizon City, keeping Soldiers on stand-by to fill more sandbags if necessary, delivering cases of "Jimmy Deans" to Logan Heights, having five-ton trucks ready for possible evacuation missions and delivering about 500 meals-ready-to-eat to residents in Pebble Hills in east El Paso.

Degracia said the missions tasked to 2-43 ADA went smoothly with no injuries. The unloading of filled sandbags was a major task for some of the Soldiers. With the help of a few El Paso police officers, eight of the Soldiers unloaded the sandbags at an east side Wal-Mart to be picked up by area residents and city workers.

"We had two five-tons completely filled [with sandbags]. Eight Soldiers and a few of the police downloaded almost 10,000 sandbags. It was a really big job," Degracia said.

The 2-43 ADA Soldiers assisting in the flood operations were some of the few Fort Bliss troops still on duty late Tuesday afternoon. The mission didn't end until 1 a.m. Wednesday. Although the last minute mission was trying on the Soldiers, motivation was extremely high, Degracia said.

"Some of these Soldiers had families at home they were worried about and couldn't get home to check on them, but nobody complained at all. They just went out and got the job done."

After the Soldiers returned from their mission Wednesday morning, the unit was placed on a 30-minute recall in case help was needed again. And again, on Wednesday afternoon, the IOC called on 2-43 ADA for assistance. This time the mission was to fill 4,000 sandbags in case more flooding occurred. The sandbags were taken to various points around the city for public distribution.

More than 100 Soldiers gathered at

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More sandbags are filled by the Soldiers. As of last Wednesday, El Paso city personnel had distributed 80,000 sandbags.



Soldiers load sandbags onto a truck.