

## STORM FACTS FROM 2007

Prompting a first-ever National Weather Service hurricane warning in the Pacific Northwest, the storm of Dec. 1, 2 and 3, 2007 (Saturday through Monday) wreaked damage reminiscent of a Japanese monster movie. Sometimes now called the Great Coastal Gale of 2007, the storm's top reported gust was 147 mph at Radar Ridge, an ocean-facing mountaintop in Washington.

Besides intensity, most locals shudder to recall the storm's duration. It was a one-two-three punch. A fairly typical storm on Dec. 1 led

almost without intermission into a wild combination of continuous wind and tropical rain fueled by remnants of Typhoon Mitag and Typhoon Hagibis. Destruction of Bonneville Power Administration high-voltage transmission towers cut off electricity to nearly everyone around the Columbia River estuary for up to two days. Thousands of fallen trees pulled down neighborhood power poles and lines, leaving some homes without power for a week or more. For a time, all highways out of the area were blocked by debris and flooding.

# Military rescued hundreds of people during 2007 storm

**Flooding concentrated in Vernonia in Oregon and along Chehalis River in Washington**

By **EDWARD STRATTON**  
*The Daily Astorian*

**S**tefano Guadagnuolo vividly remembers approaching the outskirts of Vernonia the morning of Dec. 4, 2007, as part of a military rescue team.

More than 11 inches of rain over a couple of days had caused the Nehalem River and Rock Creek running through the middle of town to swell by more than a foot, flooding streets and stranding hundreds.

"We got to Vernonia at daybreak, and we immediately started to search through the houses," he said. "We used the 5-ton trucks to go through the water, which was chest-high."

High winds battered the coast, causing massive property damage. But most rescues were because of flooding, punctuated by mass evacuations of hundreds in Vernonia by the National Guard, and by the Coast Guard and other agencies along the Chehalis River in Lewis County, Washington.

Guadagnuolo is a member of the 125th Special Tactics Squadron, a unit operated by the Oregon Air National Guard and the Air Force. Its ranks include combat operators trained in establishing communications and pararescue jumpers equivalent to paramedics.

Over the years, the unit has responded to several major storms in the U.S. Vernonia was one of the first, after Hurricane Katrina.

"We kept going from house to house to house, grabbing everybody we could and putting them in the back of the truck," he said. "We were transporting people to the fire station, where they had shelters and a kitchen. We did that all day until nightfall."

Floodwaters wrecked much of the city, including local schools. By nightfall, the Red Cross was reporting more than 550 people in shelters. Several hundred people were rescued from around Vernonia, Mist and surrounding areas, according to former Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde.

Then-Gov. Ted Kulongoski visited Vernonia after the floods, vowing to marshal state resources to help the town recover. By 2012, the city had opened a new \$40 million K-12 school high above the city's flood plain, paid for by local bonds, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, state contributions, foundations and donations.

### Flooding in Chehalis

Cmdr. Dave Bartram, executive officer at the Coast Guard's Air Station Astoria, was piloting an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter whose crew was rescuing two hunt-



OREGON AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Technical Sgt. Stefano Guadagnuolo, right, gets directions to help find the sibling of a local girl in Vernonia.



AIR FORCE

Some of the streets in Vernonia were under several feet of water Dec. 4, 2007.

ers stranded in high winds on Long Island in Washington's Willapa Bay when he received a message about flooding along the Chehalis.

"People were requesting assistance with evacuation," he said. "Essentially, the river going through there had overloaded its banks, washing out homes."

The Chehalis originates in southwest Washington, hooking through the west side of Lewis County before heading toward Grays Harbor. The river reached nearly 75 feet during the 2007 storm, 10 feet above flood level, and caused massive flooding, stranding hundreds and shutting down a 20-mile stretch of Interstate 5 for several days.

The Coast Guard sent two Jayhawks from Air Station Astoria on Dec. 3, along with an MH-65 Dolphin from Port Angeles, Washington.

Bartram's was the first helicopter to arrive. Chief Michael Spencer, a former rescue swimmer with the Coast Guard, was in the second helicopter from Astoria.

"It was probably the worst flying I've ever done, heading back Astoria," Spencer said of the winds, reaching 70 mph sustained with gusts over 100 mph. "Once we hit the (Interstate 5) corridor, it was just torrential rain."

"We turned the corner in the Chehalis River, and that whole valley was just one big river," Spencer said of the

Chehalis Valley.

Spencer remembers being hoisted from house to house, pulling stranded people off roofs and out of windows.

"Most people were either on the roof, or they were in a place where I could gain entry through a window," he said.

Spencer credits his flight mechanic for expertly directing his hoist and at one point helping he and a survivor avoid floating into a barbed wire fence.

Bartram said the Coast Guard would rescue nearly 40 people, along with more than 10 pets, over a stretch of about eight hours, before flying back to Astoria with the entire region out of power.

"It was total dark," he said. "Back then we had basic radar and a screen. We were using the buoy lights in the Columbia to get back."

Peter Troedsson, then commander of Group Astoria and now city manager in Albany, remembers the agency evacuating about 140 flood victims in Lewis County and another 30 around Tillamook, where crew from Station Tillamook Bay evacuated people using a skiff.

"By and large, the rescues were from flooding, and Clatsop County is more mountainous," he said.

Troedsson remembered closing the entrance to the Columbia, the supermarket shelves getting bare and a week without power.

"But everyone came together," he said. "A lot of citizens came together, helped each other, helped older folks get supplies."

Be storm ready.  
Download our app.

We work hard to make sure you have safe, reliable electricity. That means tackling tough jobs and being ready to roll when storms hit. You can be prepared



with an emergency kit and our free mobile app. Download the Pacific Power app to stay informed about outages at [pacificpower.net/app](http://pacificpower.net/app).

**PACIFIC POWER**