When Minutes Mean Lives Saved

In Disasters Red Cross Is Always Prepared to Give Quick Aid; Health and Life Saving Work and Help for Veterans Also Engaged 3,500 Chapters.

GOVERNOR BIBB GRAVES, of Alabama, concerned for the safety of several thousand citizens of his state during the severe floods of last March, picked up the telephone on his desk at the state capitol, called the Commandant of the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, and asked what he could do to relieve the situation.

"My pilots will take off in ten minutes, sir, and give you a detailed report," was the characteristic reply of the Commandant.

Two observation planes equipped with radio zoomed upward, to scout the thousands of flooded acres in search of refugees, and returning, told the anxious executive and the American Red Cross disaster workers who were with him, just where emergency help was needed.

Food, blankets and medicine were quickly assembled, and loaded into the planes. Soon five airplanes hovered over the water-engulfed towns of Flomaton and Brewton in Southern Alabama, and brought to the refugees huddled on nearby hilltops the first relief and news that had reached them since the river had rolled down upon them.

For six days Army planes from Maxwell Field, National Guard planes and the Navy planes kept the flooded territory, in which 76,000 persons were menaced, in touch with the Red Cross relief forces which had established headquarters at Montgomery, Alabama.

Locating Marooned

Minutes meant lives. When the radio of a plane flashed that refugees had been observed in trees and on housetops along the swollen back-water streams, and that apparently only paddle-propelled skiffs were available and they were stationed miles away, quick action was required to save those endangered lives. An outboard motor, heavily wrapped, was rushed by airplane, and dropped by parachute, with instructions to persons on the ground where the flood-trapped men and women were located.

As many as twenty-five Navy planes were operating in a day, and Maxwell Field had a large number of Army planes in the disaster relief service. Navy fliers, alone, made 113 flights, embracing 15,000 miles, on their errands of mercy. They delivered to marooned victims, 7,000 loaves of bread, 60 cases of canned goods, 20 bushels of potatoes, 100 blankets, 25 bundles of children's clothing, besides medical supplies and other relief materials.

When supplies of typhoid vaccine gave out, they flew off to New Orleans and returned in a few hours with ample quantities.

The majority of this material was dropped from the air to the groups of folk isolated upon spots of high ground, as there was no field for Army planes to land upon, and the surging water offered a poor harbor for the Naval amphibians.

Refugee Got Under Bundle

Remarkable skill in placing these bundles just where they were needed, with a minimum of loss due to packages falling into deep water, was displayed. Only two mishaps were recorded out of all of the hazardous flights made by the fliers who gave up rest and food to speed help to others. One of the Army planes was forced down in the water while loaded, and capsized. Pilot and observer got clear and were rescued from a tree-top. The second episode was less serious; one of the refugees who inadvertently got under a falling bundle escaped with minor injuries.

This continuous use of the airplane and the radio in the Southeastern flood period was one of the most thrilling episodes in Red Cross relief work. During the Mississippi Valley flood in 1927, airplanes were used for observation, but not for conveying needed supplies. Radio was utilized to flash news of location of marooned colonies, and a fleet of small steamers, motor boats and other water craft sped to the rescue.

But in the Southeastern flood, this modern magic helped the Red Cross to reach the isolated places with food and medicine, hours, if not days, before relief could otherwise have gotten to them. Only 18 lives were lost in the floods, which covered an area of more than 1,300,000 acres, due to the quick rescue work.

In the West Indies hurricane of September, 1928, radio played a major part in acquainting the outside world with the tragedy that swept over Palm Beach county and surrounding territory. The winds of tremendous velocity cut off communication, but from the click of the radio of an amateur operator came the cry for help which sent relief agencies rushing pell mell to the assistance of the storm victims. The Red Cross, forewarned 48 hours of the direction of the hurricane, already had its workers on trains en route for Florida, from Washington head quarters.

The radio brought news also of the destruction of Porto Rico in the same hurricane, and for days the only communication was via the Naval radio station at Washington.

Government Cooperates

These are only two measures utilized by the American Red Cross in its emergency disaster relief work. All agencies of the U. S. Government cooperate in the work.

A most important feature is the cooperation of the United States Weather Bureau, which keeps the Red Cross informed 365 days and nights of the year whether severe storms or hurricanes are brewing. The 3,500 Chapters of the American Red Cross also are being urged to set up disaster relief committees, so that if emergency should arise in their communities, they will be able to save every minute that might otherwise mean lost motion in getting ambulances, doctors, nurses to the scene, thus causing loss of life.

While the dramatic details of airplane fleets to the rescue, motor boats speeding to take marooned men and women out of trees, and the radio flashing the news of destruction are thrilling to read about—they perhaps cause the public to lose sight of the steady all-the-year-round program of the American Red Cross, through its Chapters, in working to preserve health and to save lives.

The Red Cross, for instance, is the largest single employer of public health nurses in rural work in the United States. Red Cross Chapters have for years led in introducing public health nursing into communities, where by demonstrating its value it found such favor that the state and county health authorities took over its support.

Safety Problems Differ

This campaign against disease and death is nation-wide, and is conducted through a majority of the 16,200 Red Cross Chapters and Branches in the United States. Community health and safety problems differ—so that the program is fitted to the problems of each section.

The Red Cross Chapter may battle for life against pellagra in one region, malaria in another. It may be helping to control a small-pox, typhoid or diphtheria outbreak; or it may be mobilizing hundreds of nurses to fight a terrible epidemic, such as influenza, following the World War.

Enrolled with the headquarters of the Nursing Service of the Red Cross at Washington are 49,000 nurses, qualified under the society's regulations, who may be summoned to service in time of emergency.

The Red Cross public health nurses have everywhere helped in the campaign to stamp out the dread diphtheria by aiding in immunizing children and cooperating with State Boards of Health. They also have cooperated in the "summer round-up" of the younger children, to make them fit before they enter school for the first time.

Nutrition classes among public school children and parents also are fostered by the American Red Cross, and during the past year 148,000 children were taught lessons about proper food habits.

The Red Cross Life Saving and First Aid service is one of the several agencies engaged in the fight to reduce the accidental death rate. Hundreds of expert swimmers, who are coaches in boys' and girls' camps or in public recreation work, are graduates of the Red Cross life saving methods, and certificated teachers of these methods to others. Almost every life saving crew at beach or shore in the United States is made up of accredited Red Cross life savers.

Teaches Police and Firemen

In the field of First Aid, the Red Cross has led in reaching industries and public utilities. It also has taught the majority of the police and fire departments of America how to resuscitate the victim of suffocation and how to bind wounds or injuries, to preserve life until the doctor is reached.

All of these activities are pushed by the Chapters of the Red Cross. The Red Cross assumes leadership where there is no other agency to take the lead in public health nursing, or some of the other activities, or, where other agencies are in the field, the Red Cross offers its services and its trained personnel for the benefit of the community.

When the Red Cross was founded 65 years ago in Geneva, Switzerland, its purpose was to give succor to the wounded and dying in war time. No need to repeat here how magnificently the American Red Cross carried on that task in the World War. Today the society still carries on for all disabled veterans who are in hospital, for all others who wish assistance in filing claims for the various types of relief due them under the law, and also for their families, should they be in distress. The Red Cross, as part of its Charter obligation, also does social service work for men in the regular Army, Navy and Marine Corps, in camps and posts at home, and follows them to foreign ports.

When the Armistice was signed November 11, 1918, 125,000 men and women in the American forces had made the supreme sacrifice—of these, 54,000 were killed in action or died of wounds and 70,000 died from sickness or disease.

Since that day 38,000 more have died as a result of their service—a total to date of 162,000 dead as a result of America's participation in the World War. And today there are 25,500 World War veterans in hospitals in the United States. These sick veterans are of three types—medical and surgical cases, many returning for treatment of old wounds, but few remaining permanently in hospital; the tuberculosis cases, of whom 16,000 have died in hospital since the Armistice, and the mental cases, who represent at present more than half of the hospital population. Of these latter, there are increasing numbers requiring hospital care, and Director Hines, of the Veterans Bureau states the peak of the number of mental cases of veterans of the World War is not expected to be reached until 1947.

"The Greatest Mother"

The American Red Cross—truly named during the war, "The Greatest Mother"—has never signed an armistice in its work for the service and ex-service men.

In forty-eight of the Veterans Bureau hospitals, and in all regular Army and Navy hospitals, there is stationed one or more representatives of the Red Cross, carrying on a recreational program ably aided by the representatives of many other societies and numerous individuals.

Many of the hospitals are in isolated sections, with railroad fare so high as to be prohibitive of frequent visits by relatives and friends to the patients. At these, the Red Cross women remain the only touch between the men and the outside world. The Government provides every physical comfort for them, and all types of social service and medical service. It has absorbed a great many of the former Red Cross labors, but recognizes there still are many things the public can do for these men, in remembrance. The Red Cross representatives are there, then, to direct and coordinate, at the request of the Government, the many treats which outside friends and organizations wish to arrange for the patients.

Motion picture shows, dancing classes, card parties and picnics all are arranged by the Red Cross; food delicacies, cigarettes, clothing and books contributed by Red Cross Chapters or other organizations are distributed.

The Government has repeatedly given great praise to the Red Cross for this work in all of the 48 hospitals, stating it has real therapeutic value in the mental cases, and is of great comfort to the patients suffering from other diseases.

Claims Are Pushed

As World War veterans continue to break down with mental disabilities, Chapters meet increased demands for assistance in establishing the claims of such men to Government compensation. In the selection of proper guardians and in making family adjustments, especially where a future of remaining permanently in hospital must be faced.

Recurrent disabilities of other types, particularly tuberculosis, requiring hospitalization of veterans bring repeated need for assistance in reopening compensation claims, in arranging for hospital admission and in making family plans during the man's absence. All of these are matters in which the Red Cross Chapters in the communities give service to the veterans and their families.

The value of Red Cross service to the men of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps and its appreciation by Commanding officers has been forcefully testified to in thousands of letters received at headquarters. After all, soldiers, sailors and marines are human beings in peace time no less than in war. Their personal and family problems do not cease upon their enlistment, but the nature of their service prevents their coming and going at will in efforts to solve these problems. Virtually all of them have families, perhaps at their stations, or nearby, or maybe several thousand miles distant.

Christmas Gifts Sent

Volunteers in Red Cross Chapters each year undertake to despatch Christmas packages to service men who are stationed at foreign posts or ports.

More than 45,000 of the Christmas bags—in gay cretonnes, loaded with knick-knacks and small comforts dear to the service man's heart—will go forward this Christmas to marines in China and Guam, sailors at many foreign ports, and soldiers on their foreign posts. These bags are filled by the women, according to their own fancy—but within limits of expense defined by the Red Cross—and go forward through Army and Navy channels for distribution on Christmas Day.

The Charter granted it by Congress names the Red Cross as the sole agency for carrying on disaster relief work and prevention measures against fire, flood, tornadoes and other catastrophes.

All of the health and life saving agencies of the Red Cross, operating all the year round in their various capacities, aid in realization of this pledge to "aid and prevent disasters." All can be called into action on a moment's notice. They are directed by experts in medicine, nursing, safety engineering, and the personnel is trained over years in the relief work.

During the past year the Red Cross was called into action in 120 disasters in the United States and its insular possessions. This was the greatest number of disasters in any single year which brought the society into action. The disasters occurred in 38 states, and at the time that the Red Cross had just closed its major relief operation in Porto Rico and Florida following the West Indies hurricane, it had workers engaged in 19 states, on 22 disasters.

These 120 disasters—117 of which occurred in the United States, and three in its insular possessions—ranged from town and forest fires, explosions and dam breaks, to such major calamities as the floods in the southeastern states in the early Spring of 1929 and the West Indies hurricane of September, 1928.

Each of these disasters was of heart-breaking importance to the community in which it occurred, although news of this distress may not have spread beyond the state's confines. In each instance, the American Red Cross was on the ground, rendering the same emergency assistance and, if necessary, rehabilitation assistance, that it gave in proportion in Porto Rico or in the Mississippi Valley.

When a small tornado swooped upon a town in Arkansas and laid waste its public buildings and stores and disrupted business, the townsfolk were just as hard hit economically as were great sections in Florida during the hurricane. The same individual assistance, the same methods for help were set up by the Red Cross in the Arkansas town as were in the larger disaster relief operations in the East Coast state.

Total expenditures during the year in disaster relief work by the national organization were $8,020,000. The Chapters also raised and expended $463,000 directly in emergency relief.

Chapters Great Help

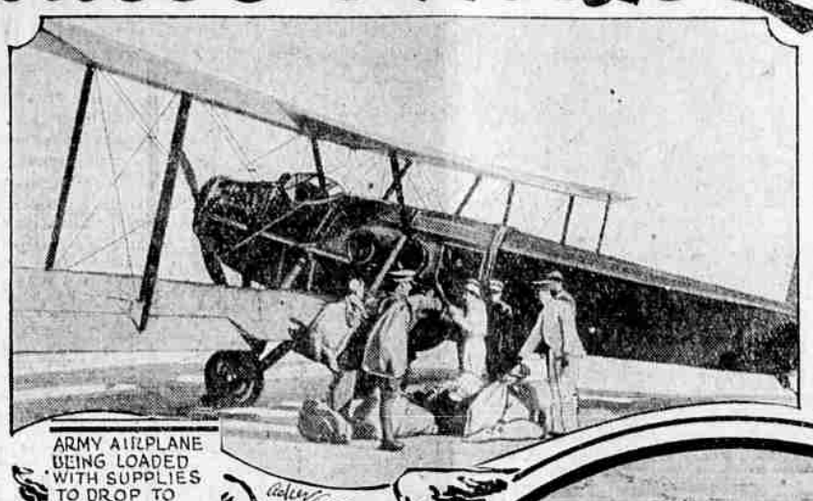
Of the 117 domestic relief operations, 23 were directed by a member of the national staff and financed in whole or in part out of national funds; 40 were directed by local chapters with financial assistance from the national organization and 54 were directed and financed by the local chapters exclusively.

Violent atmospheric disturbances such as tornadoes, hurricanes, cyclones, and destructive storms were the cause of 47 per cent of the disasters under consideration; 32 per cent were occasioned by floods; 10 per cent by fires and the remaining 11 per cent by a variety of natural and induced causes of relatively infrequent occurrence.

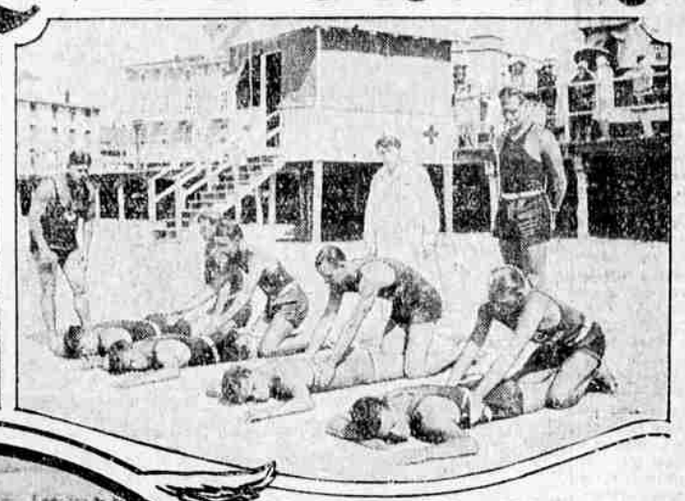
The marked increase in the number of relief operations by the Red Cross is not necessarily an indication of an increase in the number of disasters, but an indication of increased recognition by the public of the Red Cross as the agency best fitted to cope with the relief problems of administration and finance.

An example of cooperation between the national society, the local Red Cross Chapters and the community, in a disaster, may be cited: Following the destructive cyclones of September 13, which laid waste large rural areas in four counties in Nebraska and South Dakota, killing nine persons, injuring 81 and destroying 409 buildings and damaging 919 others, the Governors of both states issued proclamations urging their citizens to contribute to a general relief fund. The response was gratifying, and 96 per cent of the $32,250 expended was contributed by the citizens of these two states. From this fund, 570 persons were assisted in restoring their homes and farm buildings, and the replacement of household furnishings, farm implements and other necessary articles which they were unable to provide for themselves.

Support for the Red Cross activities of health and life saving and disaster relief comes from the annual membership roll call, which is held from Armistice Day to Thanksgiving Day, November 11 to 28.

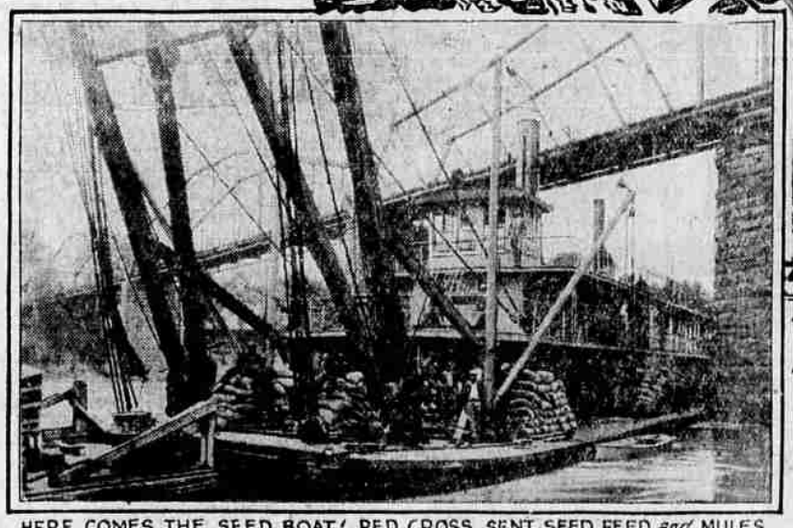


ARMY AIRPLANE BEING LOADED WITH SUPPLIES TO DROP TO MAROONED FLOOD REFUGEES IN ALABAMA



DEMONSTRATING RED CROSS LIFE SAVING AT CAPE MAY, N. J.

FLOODED TOWN IN ALABAMA AIDED BY RED CROSS USING AIRPLANES AND RADIO



HERE COMES THE SEED BOAT! RED CROSS SENT SEED, FEED and MULES ALONG ALABAMA RIVER TO REACH FLOODED FARMERS.

A RED CROSS BABY PROPER CARE AND FEEDING AS TAUGHT BY RED CROSS NURSE, HAVE PRODUCED RESULTS