

# Duncan Supports Hurricane Sandy

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ACC-APG



An entire neighborhood in Brick, NJ was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. (Photo by Christopher Duncan)

Christopher Duncan, a security officer with the Army Contracting Command – Aberdeen Proving Ground had just completed his weekend drill with the New Jersey National Guard as Hurricane Sandy pushed toward the New Jersey coastline Oct. 29.

Weather reports warned that the storm would make landfall the next day and Duncan's status changed to that of an activated National Guardsman providing support after the storm.

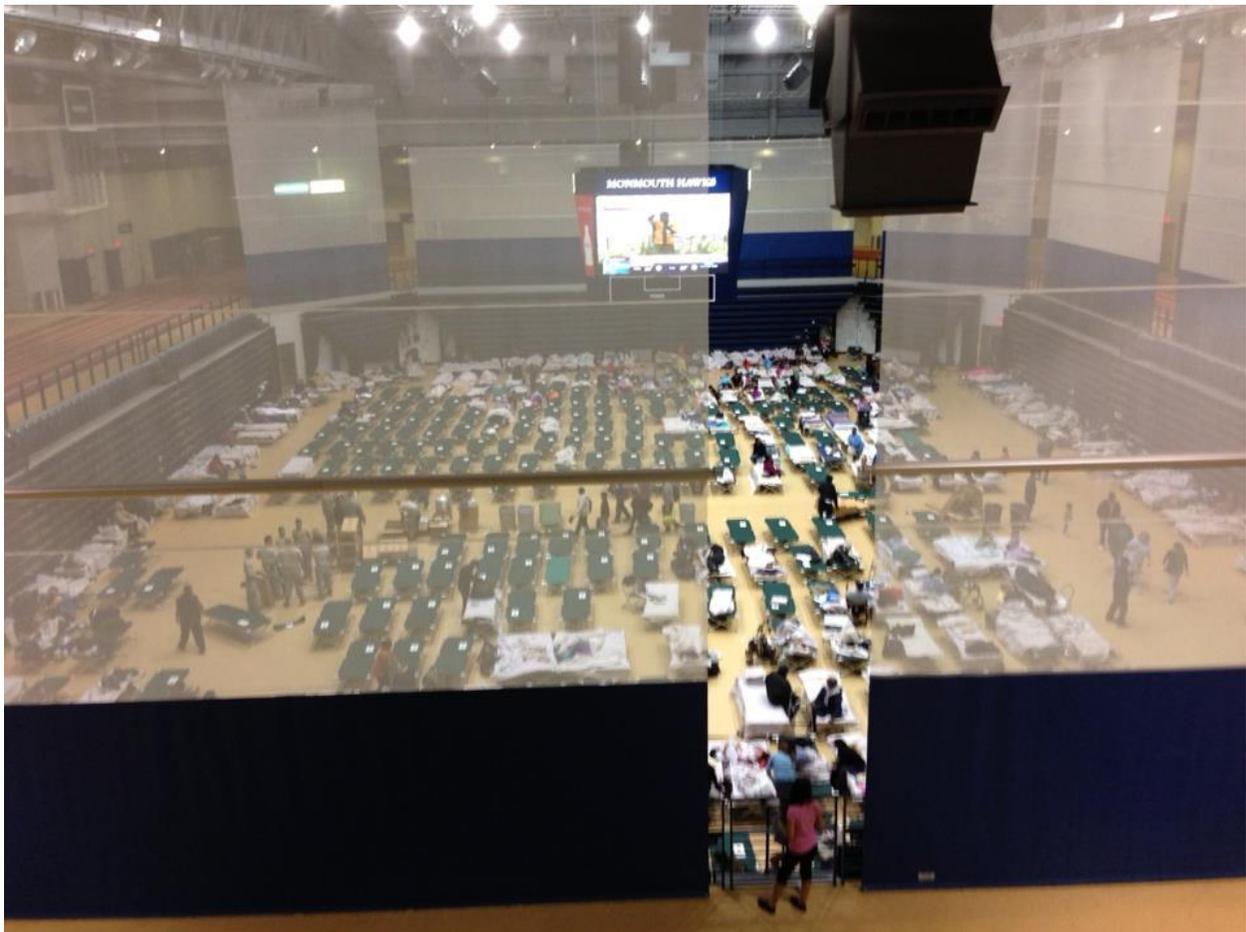
Duncan, second lieutenant, is assigned to Company. C, 1/114<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and was tasked to lead a team of 40 Guardsmen to manage the interior and exterior security at a shelter in Monmouth University, N.J.

“I was told to prepare resources to support the largest shelter established in New Jersey, consisting of more than 1,200 occupants,” said Duncan, who served as the mission commander. “I didn’t have a frame of reference to understand exactly what I needed and I wasn’t sure how long I would need to support the shelter.”

Duncan’s team filled five vehicles with supplies of food, water, tents, and cots and made the 45-minute trip from the training site to the shelter. They slept in a second floor conference room on the floor.

“The main obstacle I had was the lack of electricity,” recalled Duncan. “The university had a generator but it only controlled emergency lighting and didn’t support the water pump for the 10 toilets and showers within the facility.”

Duncan immediately placed an order for portable toilets but with the high demand during the storm aftermath, it took four days for them to arrive. Toilet flushing was done manually by pouring water.



The initial set-up of the Monmouth University Shelter two days prior to Hurricane Sandy's arrival. After the storm hit the New Jersey coast, this shelter filled to 1200 occupants, according to Christopher Duncan, Security Officer with Army Contracting Command – Aberdeen Proving Ground. (Photo by Christopher Duncan)

The security team worked 24-hour shifts and faced a multitude of issues such as looting, fist fights, medical emergencies and families that were separated by and during the storm. The Guardsmen did not carry weapons and police officers were called to address hostile situations. Items such as coffee and cigarettes became high value items due to the shortages of supplies, according to Duncan.

After a week of duty, the shelter was no longer needed and closed. Duncan was asked to remain on duty by his commanding officer and was assigned to secure Long Beach Island, N.J., approximately an hour drive from the university. The team slept on cots in an ambulance bay and used the local gym for showering.



In Long Beach Island, NJ, National Guardsman and employee of the Army Contracting Command – Aberdeen Proving Ground repositions a flag upright that was knocked over by sand and water from Hurricane Sandy. (New Jersey National Guard Photo)

During the day the team set-up check points to ensure only residents were allowed access. Construction contractors were only allowed access if they were escorted by the homeowner since it was discovered that looters were dressing in contractor uniforms to gain entry into homes.

“At night we established patrol positions on the beach to guard against looting,” Duncan explained. “Prior to our arrival, looters would steal vacant boats and use them for hauling stolen merchandise from the local homes. They stole items such as TVs, tools, appliances and anything of value. When we arrived, we used night vision and thermal vision technology to monitor the beach and we notified the Coast Guard when we detected a looting in action. The first night we caught five. In the beginning we detected an average of three per night but this tapered off when our presence became known. “

During Duncan's three weeks guarding the island, he witnessed human behavior at its worst and at its best.

"We were sent here to secure properties against thieves, but the local community embraced our presence and supported us in many ways," said the 31-year-old. "They donated food, coffee, and home-baked goods. One woman found out we didn't have pillows for our cots so she donated 300. We used what we needed and donated the rest to the local community."



National Guard Soldiers conduct an After Action Review and security shift change at sunrise on the southern tip of the Barrier Island, NJ in what used to be a parking lot. Guard members patrolled the beach after Hurricane Sandy to maintain security. (Photo by Christopher Duncan)

After the team's mission was complete in Long Beach, Duncan was asked one more time to remain on duty to assist with the security mission. The noncommissioned officer in charge asked Duncan if he would remain to lead the mission. He couldn't leave the team and let's do it was Duncan's reply. This time his commanding officer told Duncan to prepare himself for leadership and assigned him 130 personnel to guard the Barrier Island area of New Jersey. Duncan established a mission center in Brick, N.J., and controlled access to the island area, patrolled the beaches and worked closely with the local police to establish and maintain a safe environment for residents.

To build a good working relationship with the community and the police force, Duncan organized community days and invited everyone on the island. A corner bagel vendor in Brick donated food for the events.



Army National Guard member, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Christopher Duncan, and Police Chief Nils R. Bergquist of Brick Township, NJ, worked together to maintain security after Hurricane Sandy. Duncan organized "Community Day" events to build camaraderie with the local police and residents. The first "Community Day" was attended by more than 200 Island residents, according to Duncan. (Brick Police Department Photo)

"The community days lifted our spirits after witnessing so much devastation that Hurricane Sandy left in her path," Duncan pointed out. "There were house trailers that were uprooted, highways that were buried in sand, houses that were destroyed by wind, water or fire."

As Christmas approached, the National Guard organized a gift drive and collected 14 pallets of toys and gifts, according to Duncan. Guardsmens members delivered the gifts to a church for distribution to local families.

“Many families weren’t planning a Christmas,” Duncan said. “They lost their homes, some of them their businesses and insurance claims hadn’t been paid yet. The gifts that we donated were distributed within 24 hours.”

Duncan returned to work at ACC-APG on Jan. 7 after approximately three months of hurricane duty. When he left home in Pennsylvania, Duncan thought it was just for a weekend drill and when it was all over he was exhausted.

“I slept for two days,” he recalled. “I learned a lot about management through the whole experience. I had to supervise a group of people, keep the mission functioning properly and deal with personal crises as they occurred. Many Soldiers were also dealing with home damage from the hurricane and one completely lost his house and his full-time job. If given the opportunity, I would do it all over again. But, the next time I would definitely pack better.”



An American flag flies from a sand dune in Holgate, NJ overlooking the damage from Hurricane Sandy. The first floors of these two-story homes were washed away from the storm. The road, Long Beach Boulevard, is completely covered with sand. (Photo by Christopher Duncan)



The destructive force of Hurricane Sandy not only damaged homes but the winds and flooding displaced cars as well. An employee with the Army Contracting Command – Aberdeen Proving Ground witnessed firsthand cars buried under houses on the Barrier Island in Brick, NJ. (Photo by Christopher Duncan)