



Who Do the Local Red Cross
and Newspaper Call

When They Need Aerial Photos of Flooding?

Photos by Capt. Jay Jondro, Michigan Wing

State Highway M-50, a key evacuation route, was closed when the River Raisin rose over the bridge. No other bridge crosses the river for 10 miles.

By Capt. Steven Solomon

The first call came in at a little after 4 p.m. from the local chapter of the Red Cross. The second, less than 30 minutes later, was from the county's daily newspaper.

Both callers wanted to know the same thing: Could the Monroe Composite Squadron take photos of flooded houses and roads in the Monroe County area of southeast Michigan?

They called the right person. Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Mark Woodruff received permission to use a Civil Air Patrol airplane, a Cessna 172, which took off a half-hour later from its base at the squadron's headquarters at Monroe Custer Airport.

"The Red Cross was evacuating homes," said squadron public affairs officer and photographer Capt. Jay Jondro, "and they said pictures would be used to ensure that residents living in homes in danger were contacted and to plan for possible evacuation routes to avoid roads where flooding had occurred."

The Monroe News — which the day before had reported that water from the

150-mile-long River Raisin had spilled over the 12-foot-tall Waterloo Dam into Veterans Park — wanted aerial photos of the cresting river, particularly alongside a state highway now listed as closed, for its news coverage.

“We had flown a similar flood mission for the City of Monroe Fire Department in December,” Jondro said, explaining that the firefighters needed the photos because “they provide evacuations in the city and, of course, the pictures would help them with info on flooded areas.”

After the December mission for the Fire Department, the squadron provided a CD of the photos to all emergency services units, municipalities and media in the area.

“They became aware of our capabilities and have called on us for other missions since then,”

Jondro said.

The aircrew — 1st Lt. Carl Sweeney, pilot; 1st Lt. Philip Howard, observer; and Jondro — decided

during their preflight briefing that, in addition to documenting the condition of the county’s secondary roads, they would also take photos of all bridges and underpasses along their route.

“Aside from getting a good angle for a shot and keeping the wings out of the picture, the most challenging thing for me was trying to fly above the river all the way up,” said Sweeney, who noted the River Raisin is called the most crooked river in the world. “The river’s so crooked, you lose it in the trees.”

The river would finally crest at 1.86 feet above its 9-foot flood stage. Flooding along the river was described as the worst in more than 25 years.

“We flew west away from Lake Erie,”

added Howard, a private pilot who was at the airport working on his skills when he volunteered to join the flight crew after the call went out that another member was needed. “The river was quite a bit wider than it usually is. Several homes along the river were surrounded by water.”

Jondro added, “Monroe had received several days of downpours by this time, and that, coupled with thawing ground, created flash flooding throughout the county. Farm fields were turned into lakes following another day with more than 4 inches of rain.”

After an hour aloft, the mission was completed and the photos were sent via e-mail in time for the newspaper’s printing schedule. Later, CDs of all photos taken during the mission were produced for other county and emergency agencies.

And then Woodruff, the squadron commander, made a few calls of his own: Would the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office or the Monroe County Emergency Management Division need his squadron’s assistance to help with any evacuations? ▲



The complex at top is Monroe High School. All schools in the area were closed because of the flooding.



This flooded area was four miles outside Monroe, Mich.