



United States Homeland Emergency Response Organization  
PO Box 90453  
Austin, TX 78709-0453

# After Action Report

## Executive Summary

Heavy rains began to fall in Central Texas on 22 May 2007 and continued for the next week. This resulted in flash flooding from the Hill Country area north toward Bell County. These floods necessitated the rescue of persons trapped by flood waters and people who had been caught in the flash floods, particularly at low water crossings. During the period of time from 22 – 31 May, US-HERO responded to a number of missions. This after action report details this response.

## Units Deployed

### ***US-HERO Teams Involved:***

- Dive Team 8 – Morgan's Point, Bell County, Texas
- SAR Team 8, City of Sunset Valley, Texas
- SAR Team 10, Williamson County, Texas
- SAR Team 11, Fayette County, Texas
- SAR Team 16, Lufkin, Angelina County, Texas
- SAR Team 17, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas (support)

### ***Other Teams responding via Mutual Aid with US-HERO***

- Hays County CERT Team, Wimberley, Hays County, Texas
- CENTEX Search & Rescue, Bryan, Brazos County, Texas

## Mission Totals

- Total Man-hours – 564
- Number of Rescue Technicians – 26
- Number of Canine Assets – 4
- Number of Water Assets (Boats) – 4
- Number of incidents responded to - 5
- Number of lives saved – 3
- Number of bodies recovered 2



## **Mission Specifics**

### ***Mission #1 – Bell County***

22 May 2007

Units – Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team:

The Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team of US-HERO was called to assist in a rescue attempt in Harker Heights off of F.M. 3219. Our Team had the only boat available to deploy to this area. Upon arrival Coordinator Joe Medrano and Rescue Diver Arnie Light launched the boat and made our way to the victim who was holding onto a tree. She apparently had been there for over an hour before we reached her. As we approached her, Rescue Diver Arnie Light risked his own life by extending half his body out of the boat to grab the victim from rushing water and pulled her into the boat. The tree limb broke just as he grabbed the victim. He will be awarded the Life Saving award for this action. Later this same morning we were called to two other locations in an attempt to get people from their flooded houses. Coordinator Gus McMillen arrived and assisted us with these attempts. We were not able to launch the boat safely due to the condition of the launch areas. We assisted other rescue crews with victims this date.

### ***Mission #2 – Bell County***

24 – 25 May 2007

Units – Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team:

On Thursday 05/24/07, the Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team of US-HERO was called again to assist in the recovery of bodies in Killeen Texas on Water Crest Rd. A subject drove into the swollen creek at this location but was able to save an infant and another child that was 12 years old. The victims that did not make it out of the vehicle were 5 and 7 years old. After searching until 2:00 A.M. we called off the search due to fatigue and weather conditions. We resumed the search the next morning at 7:00 AM. After arriving the next morning Team Leader Jon Holman was able to meet with an eye witness who gave us a better location of where the vehicle went down. After getting this information we searched the other shore area and found the vehicle within 30 minutes. After locating the vehicle Team Leader John Tatum and Rescue Divers Johnny Holt and Lewis Ecker were deployed. Divers had to physically break windows out of the vehicle to gain access into it. After a few minutes and clearing the windows the body of a child floated between the three divers. Team Leader John Tatum grabbed the body and swam the body to the boat at which time I grabbed the body and secured it into the boat. A few minutes later Diver Johnny Holt was able to retrieve the last body and surfaced with the body and handed the body to me. Both bodies were taken to the shore and released to the Justice of the Peace who pronounced them. Divers recovered safety equipment and exited the water.



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***Mission #3 – Bell County***

25 May 2007

Units – Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team:

Just after exiting the water the Morgan's Point Underwater Recovery Team of US-HERO was called again by Killeen Police Department to assist in another body recovery in a swollen creek. Witnesses state that a subject was trapped in the vehicle that had floated down the creek bed. We arrived and deployed Rescue Diver Jon Holman and Arnie Light. Both divers were tethered from the shore due to rushing water. No bodies were recovered in this mission. Apparently the subject was able to free himself from the vehicle. He was found deceased a week later by authorities.

***Mission #4 – City of Sunset Valley, Travis County***

28 May 2007

Unit – SAR Team 8:

At approximately 2 AM on 28 May, heavy rains again fell in the Austin Metro Area and in the Hill Country to the west. The National Weather Service issued a small stream advisory and a flash flood warning. Due to the holiday schedule for Memorial Day Weekend and the flooding problems, SAR Team 8 of US-HERO was activated by the City of Sunset Valley Police Department. SAR Team 8 members reported to the Police Station and began to monitor the flooding issue with the creek in the residential neighborhoods. SAR Team 8 members assisted the police throughout the day in managing emergency operations in the city.

***Mission #5 – Fredericksburg, Gillespie County***

28 May 2007

Units – SAR Team 8 and 10:

At approximately 7:30 AM, US-HERO received a request from the Gillespie County Sheriff's Office to assist in the search and recovery of a 22 year old man who had been caught in a flash flood at a low water crossing on 25 May 2007. One half of the responders of SAR Team 8 and SAR Team 10 deployed to Fredericksburg. Upon reaching the scene, the teams were briefed by the Sheriff's Office and then deployed to search a five mile section of the Pedernales River from the Highway 290 bridge back towards Fredericksburg. In high heat and humidity conditions, a ground/bank search was undertaken. The conditions in the flood area were taxing and dangerous. One member had to be evacuated for heat stress. Body of the victim was not located this day.



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29 May 2007

Units – SAR Team 8, SAR Team 10, SAR Team 11, Centex SAR:

US-HERO units deployed again on Tuesday to continue the search operations north of the Highway 290 bridge. Using cadaver dogs, john boats and search personnel, the teams searched more stretches of the Pedernales River and adjacent overflow areas. A cadaver dog alerted on an area, which was then marked by GPS coordinates. Due to river flow conditions, the boat was unable to ingress the area for a thorough search.

30 May 2007

Units – SAR Team 8, SAR Team 10, SAR Team 11, SAR Team 16, Hay County CERT, Centex SAR:

US-HERO units again deployed on Wednesday to continue the search operations. The search area was the Barron's Creek area where the victim crossed the low water crossing. This search was approximately 3.5 miles in length, from the low water crossing to where the creek empties into the Pedernales River. Using a combination of cadaver dogs and ground search personnel, a thorough search was done. The victim's vehicle was located and given a thorough examination, as well several pieces of the victim's clothing were located. The victim was not located on this mission.

**Addendum:**

Victim was located at the GPS coordinates that the dog alerted on Tuesday, 30 May. On 2 June, a Texas Game Warden in a kayak was able to ingress the area using the GPS coordinates and found the body tangled in brush below the water line. The body of the young man was found wearing blue jeans and one white tennis shoe. He did not have a shirt on. He was found about 1/4 mile after the creek empties into the river. This is where we had a number of alerts but could not get boat access, where some blue/white material was found that matched his shirt. He apparently was held submerged by a tree and became exposed after the water receded. He was likely a couple of feet under the surface.

**Lessons Learned:**

1. Compliance with Incident Command System Protocols must be enforced. In one situation, a member working in the Incident Command Post, in a non command role, ordered field teams to be extracted from the field. This was done without the permission of the Incident Commander and against the wishes of the Ground Branch Director. This resulted in interrupting the mission and put the field teams into un-needed risk, by having them to climb out of a rough area and hike up to a mile to an alternate extraction point, instead of searching until they reached the designated, original extraction point.



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2. Ground teams need to have at least some type of water craft, capable of searching in shallow, flood conditions.



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## Recommendations:

1. Team Captains should review ICS protocols and ensure that members understand the need to abide by ICS protocols at all time when on missions.
2. Each team secures some type of water craft for post flood searching. This could be:
  - a. Canoes
  - b. Kayaks
  - c. John boats (with motors)

## Conclusion:

I would like to thank each and every member of US-HERO and our partners for their help in what was a very trying and tiring week of search and rescue. The State of Texas was widely impacted by flash flooding and the conditions were trying. We saved lives and helped bring closure to the families of the victims that died in the floods.

Photos and videos of the operations can be found on the US-HERO Website, <http://ushero.org>

Bruce D. White, Chief  
US-HERO