



Photos courtesy John G. Howard

The National Guard used helicopters to fly in foot and supplies to the people of Pineville who were cut off during the 1977 Flood.



Pine Street during the flood.



So much mud and sludge after the flood. Area mine companies send their men and machines to help clean up the city.



Kentucky Avenue from Cherry Street toward the Courthouse Square.



Flood

continued from A12

The first help to arrive was Governor Julian Carroll and members of his administration. He immediately declared an emergency and called President Jimmy Carter, urging him to declare Pineville a Federal disaster area. The Governor ordered the National Guard and the Kentucky State Police to Pineville. They controlled traffic, transported emergency personnel and guarded against looters. Governor Carroll was wonderful. He told me to just tell him what we needed and that his phone would be open to us regardless of who he was with or where he was, and it was.

As soon as the water receded the Salvation Army and Red Cross arrived and pitched their huge tents. The Baptist organization set up their mobile kitchen. All provided sandwiches and soft drinks and later hot meals. They distributed cleaning supplies and sanitary kits as well as blankets, bedding, and some clothing. Trucks came from all over Kentucky and neighboring states bringing food, clothing, and cleaning supplies. It really angered me when I would see some people in line for these much needed items and they were not even close to water level.

Fraud, looting, and other illegal activities follow disasters and something must be done about it.

The Corps of Engineers arrived and immediately began to estimate damages and prepare damage survey reports. We counted on them to get our water and sewage treatment plants into operation. Charlie Dean took the responsibility of working with state and federal agencies to get all city services back in operation.

There was a steady roar of trucks and equipment removing mud and debris. Local coal companies sent their manpower, trucks and heavy equipment and they will never be forgotten. The federal government awarded Tomkins & Associates, of Texas, a \$1.1 million debris removal contract. By the time their equipment arrived by rail, the coal companies had the mud and debris removed in most sections of the city but Tomkins collected their money.

Most residents were forced to throw their furniture and appliances into the front yards. First, it was hauled and dumped across the road and just north of Engle's Drive-in but it all had to be loaded and hauled again because it was dumped in the floodplain. Another million from the bureaucracy moved it all to the landfill in Middlesboro. This

quickly filled our only landfill site. The rest of Pineville is buried on Highway 119, next to Save-A-Lot. It's a wonder it wasn't ordered moved to London because it too was in the floodplain.

The Mennonites and Amish arrived, along with volunteer groups from all over Kentucky and other states bringing pumps and carpentry tools. They were wonderful and a real inspiration. They worked like mules all day but at 5:00 p.m. all work ended and they washed and dressed in their religious attire and held their service, usually in someone's yard. I will never forget these people and still plan to visit them someday.

What the Cumberland River didn't take, the 'looters' did. Our residents would save their television or a chair, table or an appliance and would set them outside in the sun to dry and they would be stolen. In some instances our victims would leave their flooded home to go to a relative or friend's home to eat or rest and when they returned home everything was gone. We dispatched National Guardsmen and KSP to different areas of the city but the thieves would come wearing army fatigues and sometimes driving surplus army trucks and take what they wanted. We caught some but not enough.

It was a miracle no lives

were lost but you could not convince a local undertaker of that. He was at the command center the day the water finally receded and wanted one-hundred body bags. We finally convinced him there were no deaths.

Before the water receded, people were without food and water, especially those with a lot of refugees in their homes. We loaded boats and went into the grocery stores and got food and various items that had not been touched by the floodwaters, especially pampers and baby food as well as toilet paper. We were told by the health department that everything in the stores had to be destroyed. We thought this was ludicrous when there was such a desperate need. Water was later trucked in but a funny thing, no one had any clean containers. On top of that, army trucks were dispatched to local dairies to haul on gallon containers. The problem was they had no tarp over them and the jugs blew out of the trucks. The drivers had to travel at 25 m.p.h. to get the much-needed containers here.

Fast foods were brought by helicopter from Middlesboro and with the food from stores we went about distributing boat load upon boat load of water and food supplies. We even delivered some fresh meat from Ray Long

that came from a refrigerated truck bound for his store but trapped on Tennessee Avenue. I could not begin to place a value on all that Ray gave away and made available through his store. We emptied my then future son-in-law, Freddie Hunter's supermarket. He gave it all and wasn't reimbursed anything. We took food to those trapped in the cemetery and to all those in need on the hillsides. I remember Jim Coomes standing on the roof of his garage and my throwing him a carton of cigarettes. I stopped off to visit "Peanut" Peace on his rooftop. While I was there, we tried to move some furniture that was floating in his home and breaking his windows. I waded into Jackie Howard's home and secured a deep freeze that had been banging around.

A lot of people through this was the end of Pineville. A number of people told me there was no way to come back. The federal government was threatening to move the whole city to a former strip-mine site, out of the floodplain. But if anything good came from all of this, it would be that the people of Pineville were drawn closer together.

I wrote in the first issue of the Pineville Sun after the flood, "We cannot, we must not, and we will not give up."



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