

Utah National Guard HISTORY HIGHLIGHT



Apr 2023

UTNG Flood Support of 1983

*"Morale is high when a call comes to provide service to the community."
Maj. Gen. John Matthews, 1983*

40 years ago, Utah saw record breaking precipitation from late 1982 into the spring of 1983. An abnormally deep snowpack, coupled with above average spring temperatures, created the perfect setup for some of the worst flooding in Utah recorded history.

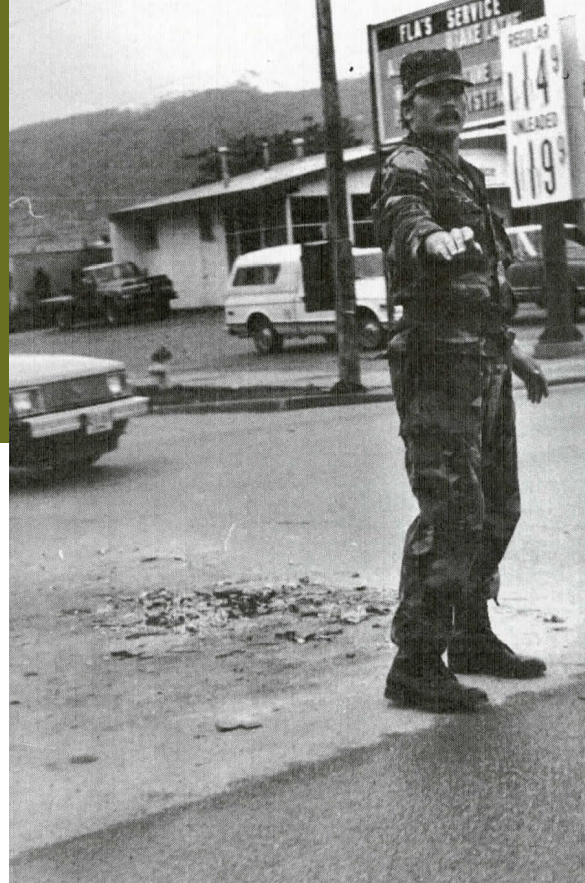
As waterways across the state were overwhelmed by runoff, Governor Scott Matheson called on the Utah National Guard for support. By the end of fiscal year 1983, the state spent \$188,400 on Guard support for all the emergency services performed. The Guard used approximately 3,700 man-days and 200 flight hours for disaster relief.

Maj. Gen. John Matthews, the adjutant general for Utah, said, "when called up, both Guard members and members of the community mutually benefit. Guard personnel receive valuable training, and the community receives necessary assistance. There is a special feeling that comes when a Guard member is doing something that really counts."

Soldiers and Airmen from the 1457th Engineer Battalion, 151st Civil Engineer Flight, 145th, 222nd and 140th Field Artillery Battalions, 625th Military Police Company, 163rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and 19th Special Forces Group performed numerous tasks in 13 counties across the state. These tasks included dike construction and repair, spillway, levee and bridge repair, channel, road and debris clearing, ice-jam removal, reconnaissance, surveillance and traffic control.

Floods were not the only issue that spring. During a severe snowstorm in Sanpete County, large herds of sheep and elk were left stranded. The Guard was tasked with clearing a roadway to the herds. They were also called to airdrop hay to feed the herds that had been without food for several days.

Company A, 1457th Engineer Battalion uses more than 850 pounds of explosives to clear an ice jam on the Strawberry River, enabling the river to flow once again.



Flood Control

A Soldier from the 625th Military Police Company directs traffic around a flooded street in Salt Lake City. Many counties across the state relied on the aid of the Guard to protect its citizens and minimize the damage caused by the flooding.



UTNG Flood Support of 1983

“Morale is high when a call comes to provide service to the community.”
Maj. Gen. John Matthews, 1983

One of the more notable stories was the Guard’s task of clearing frozen waterways. These frozen waterways caused natural stream flow to leave its normal channels. Many homes, hundreds of acres of farmland and bridges were threatened by the water flows caused by these ice dams.

The Strawberry River at the entry to Starvation Reservoir had one of the largest blockages. The ice was drilled, and small charges were placed throughout 3,500 lineal feet of stream channel effected by the blockage. The explosives were shot progressively from the downstream block to a point 4,000 feet upstream. After the detonations, the ice broke up and the river began to flow normally.

Many correlations can be made from the spring of 1983 to our current conditions. Unlike the years leading up to 1983, the state has invested heavily over the past few decades in mitigation and preparation efforts. The snowpack this year exceeds the totals of 1983, however there are key

differences. In 1983, Utah was not in a drought. The Great Salt Lake and many reservoirs were near capacity. Farmington Bay and Jordanelle Reservoirs were not built as they are today. According to the NDAA, there is ample room for excess runoff to move into these bodies of water. Additionally, the soil saturation is not at the levels it was in the past, offering options for the melting snowpack. There is hope on the horizon, but the UTNG is prepared to assist this year as it has in the past.

Throughout the state in 1983, damages from flooding totaled more than \$621 million. This number could have been much higher if not for the valiant efforts of the Utah National Guard and the many volunteers throughout the state.

Sources:

“Looking back at the 1983 Flood”, KSL News
UTNG 1983 History Report
USGS Report, 1983
National Integrated Drought Information System

Cleanup begins after State Street in Salt Lake City was drained following the immense flooding in June, 1983.



Members of the 1457th Engineer Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group, 163rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and 140th Field Artillery assisted in channel clearing, water supply protection, roadway repair and dike construction in Utah County.