



# MEDIA RELEASE

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**CONTACT: Nick Atwood**  
**615-313-0835 (OFFICE)**

## **Tennessee National Guard Opens Sparta Armory As Winter Storm Shelter**

**NASHVILLE, TN** – The Tennessee National Guard opened its Sparta armory on Saturday February 21, to house residents of White County who were without power as a result of the winter storm that swept across the state this week.

Within a couple of hours the number of residents without power seeking shelter filled the armory to its capacity.

“My first count after we began accepting residents was exactly 80 personnel” said Sgt. Geovani Mariscal, administrative and supply NCO for Detachment 1, 777<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company. By early evening the number of residents would drop to 30 as many were able to find shelter with friends and loved ones throughout the area.

All those currently residing in the armory live on Bon Aire Mountain, one of the areas hit hardest by the storm. Large amounts of snow and ice accumulated in the tops of trees, violent winds snapping branches off as the front moved in through Friday night. Hazardous road conditions, broken utility poles and mangled wires left practically everyone on the mountain without power. Some residents claimed it was the most damage by a storm of any kind for as far back as they could remember. While the recovery effort is comprehensive and ongoing, many reports estimate weeks before power and normal life are restored.

Mariscal’s wife, Adriana, also jumped into action to support the local community in its time of need. At first glance she has the appearance of a highly skilled leader of a volunteer organization who works with the local community. Her directions are calm but focused and many in the building require her attention for the answers to such questions as, “where is the bathroom” or “when will dinner be available” or “do you have any extra diapers for my baby”.

Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Frank Hensley, personnel NCO, 1176<sup>th</sup> Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in Johnson City, Tenn., and his wife, Belinda, are also aiding those in need at the armory in Sparta. The couple live in Sparta and jumped to help the local community, and “because Belinda grabbed me and said c’mon let’s go help out as much as we can,” Hensley said.

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Staff Sgt. Waco Anderson, Readiness and Training NCO of Detachment 1, 777<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company, is there also, coordinating with the White County Executive, Denny Wayne, about where to store food donations from a local establishment. It turns out, because of the outpouring of generous donations throughout the community, the armory storage bins and freezers are full.

“I’m simply amazed at the level of support we continue to receive from this community,” said Anderson.

Another example of this support was seen when a local church had to cancel its regularly scheduled services on Sunday, due to the majority of the congregation residing on Bon Aire Mountain. Adriana and Belinda made several phone calls and shortly after, services were back on and in a new location. People flooded into the armory greeting their friends, and some even brought food and items of necessity to leave as a donation.

White County is not the only area affected by the storm, its reach extending east and north into the surrounding counties. There are six other Soldiers at the Sparta armory also serving to aid those stranded there, as well as vehicles and personnel for two Debris Clearance Teams in support of road clearance operations in Putnam and Overton counties.

“We will be here until the mission is complete and everyone is safe and able to return to their homes,” said Mariscal.

**CAPTIONS:**

**001- Sgt. Giovanni Mariscal, administrative and supply NCO for Detachment 1, 777<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company, conducts an information and safety brief for displaced personnel residing at the National Guard armory in Sparta, Tenn., Feb. 22.**

**002- A Tennessee National Guard Soldier in the Sparta, Tenn., armory assists in distributing food and water Feb. 22 for White County residents displaced by the winter storm that moved across the state last week.**

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