



PRESSRELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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After 24 Days, the Lone member of Task Force 3 is finally home back in the Bay Area after returning from Puerto Rico

After 24 days, Carl Levon Kustin has finally returned home to the Bay Area this weekend from Puerto Rico. The lone member of California Task Force 3 (CA-TF3), one of the Bay Area's Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Teams located in Menlo Park, Carl was first deployed for Hurricane Irma and was based out of Puerto Rico conducting Search and Rescue operations to places like Saint Thomas and other Islands. Once those operations were completed, he was scheduled to come home until Hurricane Maria appeared to gain strength and then directly hit the small island, causing historic damage!

Kustin rode out the Hurricane along with over 276 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search and Rescue Task Force members from across the Country who were told to shelter in place in the Intercontinental Hotel so they could be immediately be deployed directly after the Hurricane had passed. They group rode out the Hurricane together despite sustained winds of 150 miles per hour and gusts of 165 miles per hour that caused unprecedented damage and destruction all around them.

After the Hurricane passed on Wednesday he wrote: *"Since then, and presently we have performed Recon missions for all 6 islands, Search and Rescue Ops for St. Croix, Vieques, and Puerto Rico. We are finishing ops on St. Croix, Air Ops for targeted searches on the islands of Culebra and Vieques, and have been working three Divisions on Puerto Rico (That sustained the most significant damage from Hurricane Maria with a population of 3.5 Million. I am presently working as the Division Grp/Sup of the East Division and are bringing up to speed the new Branch Director for Puerto Rico, and the new Division Group Supervisors."*

On Thursday he wrote *"The teams are performing to a level that would make everyone proud. Some personnel are on their 3rd Hurricane assignment, and continue to work at a nonstop pace. Yesterday I was on a Recon Flight when we were finally able to access some of the interior mountain range of Puerto Rico. This has been hampered by weather conditions and available air assets. Within 5 minutes in the upper mountain range we found a gathering of people signaling for help near a washed out bridge. Our pilot was able to insert us close by, we were able to spike in to a neighborhood of approximately 16 people. We were able to address their medical needs*

and to relay their current status to the IMAT. There are still hundreds of these areas yet to be assessed.

On Friday he wrote: *“Since my last update I finished up my responsibilities as Puerto Rico Division, but was asked to be a part of a special group called City Assessment Team (CAT). Due to the complete and total destruction of all comms on the islands, we were the only working group that performed field assessments that the FEMA Director was asking for and needed.”*

On Saturday he wrote: *“We were tasked with making contact with ALL 12 Zones (Includes the Islands of Culebra and Vieques) 80 plus cities, and make contact with their EOC’s, Hospitals, and other critical infrastructure systems, while conducting SAR missions, and getting all that data asap back to our Government. As you could imagine it was a mission on top of a mission. All personnel knew that hospitals were running out of fuel for generators, or out of food, water, and/or medications. Our teams quickly became intel gatherers and once again the FEMA US&R Program proved to be capable of doing anything asked of us to help take care of those in need and connect the dots. We accomplished that task and submitted that final report Friday September 29, 2017. The crews in the field exhausted themselves with typical operational periods lasting from 0700 to 2100 with some working throughout the nights. They did amazing work.”*

On his return he wrote: *“There are two FEMA US&R teams remaining in the Puerto Rico Branch (NY-TF1 & IN-TF1) with a very small IST contingency. There was tremendous pressure to keep us all there, but many of us have gone well beyond the normal time out, and we are pretty exhausted. The military had arrived and was ramping up and conducting humanitarian and logistical missions. I can’t tell you in words how proud I am of our program and the team that I represent and the other Teams I was honored to work with. I am so happy to be home in an undamaged and clean home with power and able to just hug my wife and finally get some sleep.”*

Carl Levon Kustin is a retired Battalion Chief formerly with San Mateo City Fire Department and is a founding member of California Task Force 3, sponsored by the Menlo Park Fire Protection District but supported by 16 other private firms and Fire Agencies from San Jose to San Francisco to Monterey along with a very dedicated group of civilian professional like doctors, structural engineers, search dog handlers, heavy equipment operators, communications and information specialists, hazardous material specialists, to name few.

If you would like to speak with or interview Carl, please email Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman at harolds@menlofire.org. Thank you!

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