

Martin stood to serve in post-Katrina New Orleans

By Jeffery Seay
 Editor in Chief

C.J. Martin's face bore the weariness of two weeks' worth of grueling duty in the flooded destruction of New Orleans, a world that was upturned by Hurricane Katrina.

After his ordeal, while on a five-day furlough to visit parents Bill and Diane Martin of Tallahassee, the Florida State University alumnus and New Orleans police detective took a much needed and well-deserved break from his obligations of service to colleagues and civilians alike.

Martin (B.S. '96, Criminology and Criminal Justice), who has been a scuba instructor for the past 10 years, is currently assigned to the New Orleans Police Department's bomb squad and dive team. He started his career with the department in 1998 as a narcotics detective, and later was assigned to the department's cold-case squad.

FSU Photo Lab / Ryals Lee



C.J. Martin

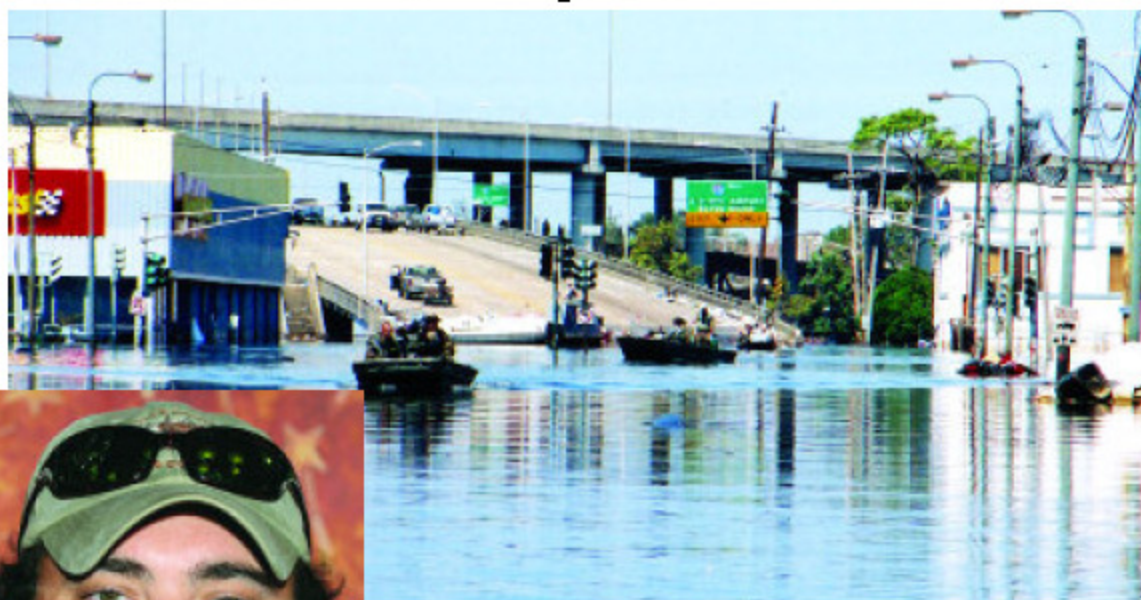
On Sunday, Aug. 28, Martin reported for duty around 10 a.m. to help in such preparations as placing departmental boats and rescue equipment, along with complements of four divers and two sergeants, in key locations throughout the city.

As the hurricane passed over the city, Martin watched it from inside his police truck with his dogs Scout and Renegade in the New Orleans police headquarters parking garage.

"I was just waiting for it to pass so (my fellow officers and I) could go out and do what we had to do," he said.

After the storm, Martin and his colleagues started to conduct an assessment of their surrounding blocks. Within a few hours, however, the 17th Street Canal levee broke, and floodwaters started to rise quickly.

"Once the flood waters got to



C.J. Martin

Officers launch rescue effort from Interstate 10 ramp.

ment in the days leading up to the hurricane's landfall, the reality of post-Katrina New Orleans was a shock.

"During the first couple of days, when we'd be out on one of our boats, it was surreal to see the water level so high, and people in such need. Being limited to what we were capable of doing — not having helicopters — it was frustrating. But at the same time, we were just as desperate as the civilians were. Even though we had an obligation to help people as best as we could, we weren't much better

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off than they were."

The first night, Martin said that members of his 11-man contingent went up to the roof of police headquarters simply to get some relief in the cool night wind, and survey the city.

"We got up on the roof and it was just pitch black," he said. "I used to go up there with my tripod and camera and shoot cityscapes when I was in Homicide. Now, you couldn't see anything, except for a building burning in the distance from an electrical fire."

Over the ensuing days, Martin and his colleagues ran scout

and rescue missions on their departmental boats, sometimes beginning at dawn.

"The back of headquarters has a loading dock that we wound up using as a makeshift sally port to launch our boats, because the loading dock was flooded," For the first seven days, Martin said, this became the routine. And except for the sporadic cell phone signal from one corner of the roof of police headquarters, they'd usually get the "all circuits are busy" message.

But serving the residents of

New Orleans was foremost in the daily grind. During the daylight hours, Martin participated in rescue missions launched from the sally port.

"We started picking up people by boat from rooftops and the second floors of their houses, and were able to take them to the Broad Street overpass (an on-ramp to Interstate 10)," Martin said. "By Day 2 or 3, we had Black Hawks, Coast Guard Dolphins and Chinooks (helicopters) assisting us, airlifting people from there.

"After the military arrived, we got a truck — an F-350 with a

flatbed on the back — loaded with a couple of pallets of MREs (meals ready to eat). We'd load the boat up from those, and gallon jugs of water, and we'd go around to people we couldn't easily evacuate and who were waiting on helicopters to come in, and we'd deliver these necessary items."

By Day 5, Martin and those on duty with him learned about the chaos erupting elsewhere in the city — snipers shooting at rescue helicopters and firefighters — from the fuzzy reception of TVs powered by generators.

Around the ninth day, Martin was able to get close enough by boat to his home — the second story of an old-style Louisiana house with a wraparound wooden porch — to find it intact.

He also was able to arrange for the transport of Renegade and Scout, his dogs, out of the city with an animal-rescue group. His parents picked up the dogs in Baton Rouge, La.

Around Day 12, Martin began conducting scouting missions for some of the federal agencies that had brought in equipment, including U.S. Customs out of Miami.

In the end, after Martin and the officers in his contingent were able to hook up with the majority of the New Orleans police force, he discovered that most of them had done the same things he had.

"They were bunkered in, in small groups, 10 and 15 people trying to do their jobs, not knowing whether they were being left behind or if there were other officers around."

Martin told of one officer who had been in Atlanta as the hurricane prepared to make landfall. Just as Martin had made the decision not to leave his post during the most difficult of circumstances, the officer hitchhiked back to New Orleans courtesy of a law enforcement relay that drove him from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

"I probably had about 10 messages from guys just like him who said, 'We're on our way.'"