

# Pilots fly NC nursing home residents with dementia to safety as medicine runs low

BY JULIA COIN  
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More than 100 nursing home residents — most with dementia — were hoisted onto helicopters and flown across 80 miles of North Carolina’s damaged interior on Tuesday. They’d been stuck in Burnsville since Friday, when Helene hit the southeastern United States with a wrath that hasn’t been seen in some areas for more than a century. Volunteer pilots made about 20 trips in their own helicopters — from two-seaters to Black Hawks — flying northwest from Hickory to rescue 76 residents in Yancey House, Mitchell House and a few

others nearby. The U.S. Army — via a Chinook marked by an image of singer Lionel Richie’s face, with a troop from Davenport, Iowa, inside — made one trip. It was the last trip. They had 34 seatbelts on board. Luckily, said Capt. Cody Nolan, there were only 34 residents left. “That’s because I prayed,” said Lindsey Duch, the vice president of health policy and innovation at ALG Senior, a company with about 30 nursing homes from Charlotte to Asheville. “We had our own pilots going out and getting people.” She worked with Operation Airdrop, a nonprofit that sends volunteer pilots with personal aircraft into

disaster zones. The pilots were set to rescue 100 from an orphanage Tuesday, said Matt McSwain, the organization’s Hickory coordinator, but when they heard the kids got replenished food and water, they pivoted. The seniors would soon run out of resources — namely medicine. Shana Pitts, another ALG Senior executive, said they’d been waiting for government help since Thursday. “It was a little frustrating,” she said. But the furrowed, concerned look disappeared from her face when residents wheeled up to the sliding airport doors in Hickory. One held a Bible in her lap, atop of a flowery, ankle-length skirt.



Staff with the company ALG Senior and volunteer nurses carry a nursing home resident from Burnsville, N.C., out of a rescue helicopter in Hickory on Tuesday. The helicopters are flown by volunteer pilots.

The nurses welcomed patients with chipper smiles. “Hey, sweet lady! How’re you?” one asked as a woman in a pink hummingbird shirt with long gray hair rolled up. “Alright, now go steal some snacks,” another said after checking one diabetic man’s sugar. Inside the terminal, on a table with a leafy fake

plant, sat an opened pack of Lance peanut butter crackers, the kind grandma might have at the bottom of her big purse. Then McSwain got another call. This one was from the N.C. State Highway Patrol. “They just gave me a mission,” he said. “Why is the highway patrol calling me? I should be calling them.”

North Carolina Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd stopped in at the Hickory airport early Tuesday. They offered verbal support, McSwain said, which was more than some parts of the government.

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Smoke billows from the site of an Israeli airstrike on Thursday in Beirut, the principal city of Lebanon where Iran-backed Hezbollah forces have a strong presence.

## Israel hits Beirut as world awaits its reaction to Iran

BY HENRY MEYER  
Bloomberg News

Israeli warplanes bombed Beirut and traded hostilities with Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon as the country’s forces kept up their campaign against the Iran-backed militant group. Nine people died in the center of the Lebanese capital after an Israeli strike on a medical site affiliated with Hezbollah, according to local authorities. The Israel Defense Forces said it killed 15 Hezbollah militants in an overnight airstrike on a building used by the group in the town of Bint Jbeil, and ordered civilians in some areas to leave immediately. The Lebanese army said an Israeli strike against one of its posts in the south of the country killed a soldier. Israel said Wednesday eight of its troops were killed in battles against Hezbollah, its first casualties since starting a ground incursion earlier this week. The Israeli government is yet to retaliate for Iran’s barrage of missiles on Tuesday evening, which caused little damage and few casualties. World powers are concerned that, should it strike key Iranian assets, the Islamic Republic will lash out and escalate the



In northern Tel Aviv, Israel, on Tuesday, Israel Defense Forces personnel inspect a restaurant complex after it was hit by missiles launched from Iran.

conflict, dragging in more countries and potentially disrupting global energy shipments. U.S. President Joe Biden said Israel should hold off from targeting Iran’s nuclear facilities, something Tehran has long warned would provoke an aggressive response. “The answer is no,” he said to a question about whether the U.S. would support such an attack by Israel. “They have a right to respond, but they have to respond proportionally.” Israel has carried out a series of devastating attacks in Lebanon since last month that almost wiped out the leadership of Hezbollah, Iran’s main proxy militia, considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. and other coun-

tries. Iran said its salvo against Israel was because of those assaults and the assassination of a senior Hamas official in Tehran in July, which the Islamic Republic blamed on Israel. Israel sent troops into southern Lebanon on Monday in a bid to uproot Hezbollah militants along the border. Hundreds of Lebanese civilians have died in Israeli air strikes in the past two weeks and a million people have fled their homes in the south and some other parts of the country, Lebanon’s government says. The European Union announced it’s increasing humanitarian aid for Lebanon by 30 million euros (\$33 million) to more than 100 million euros a year. Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu is pushing ahead with the campaign against Hezbollah despite calls by the Biden administration and allies including France and Saudi Arabia for a cease-fire. Netanyahu said his government has no choice because diplomatic efforts to stop Hezbollah drone and missile strikes on Israel have failed. Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib told CNN that Hezbollah’s longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah had agreed to the 21-day truce proposed by the U.S. and other states just days before Israel assassinated him on Sept. 27. Netanyahu has widespread support domestically for the ground and air offensive in Lebanon, which is also an effort to ensure tens of thousands of displaced Israelis can return to their homes in the north. The prime minister is under pressure from Israelis to respond far more forcefully to Iran’s salvo than he did in April. Israel hit an Iranian military facility in a limited strike that month, after Tehran fired 300 missiles and drones that were largely intercepted and did little damage. Israel’s options include targeting the OPEC member’s oil infrastructure or military bases. Potentially the most extreme scenario would be an attack on its nuclear facilities, something called for by former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, among others.

## US has military forces deployed across the Middle East

BY MIKE IVES  
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As U.S. warships helped Israel shoot down missiles from an Iranian attack Tuesday, the Pentagon was preparing to send thousands more U.S. troops, including three additional aircraft squadrons, to the Middle East. That highlighted the scale of the U.S. military presence in a region where war appears to be spreading. Here’s an overview of where U.S. forces are operating in the Middle East, and what they are doing:

### EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- The United States has an amphibious assault ship and three guided-missile destroyers in the eastern Mediterranean, the part of the sea that borders Israel and Lebanon.
- U.S. warships there helped Israel shoot down Iranian missiles Tuesday, President Joe Biden told reporters after the attack.
- An aircraft carrier, the USS Harry S. Truman, left Virginia in late September on a scheduled deployment to the eastern Mediterranean. As of Monday it was still crossing the Atlantic.

### RED SEA

- In the Red Sea, which lies south of Israel and borders Yemen and other countries, U.S. forces have been trying in recent months to stop attacks on commercial ships by the Houthis, an Iranian-backed militia that has described itself as acting in solidarity with Hamas. Some American ships have come under attack.
- As of Monday, the Navy had deployed several guided missile de-

stroyers to the sea, according to the U.S. Naval Institute.

### GULF OF OMAN

- The USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier is on an extended deployment in the Gulf of Oman, south of Iran. Like other aircraft carriers, it is part of what is known as a carrier strike group, which also includes fighter jets and guided-missile destroyers.
- In August, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin sent the Abraham Lincoln’s strike group to the Middle East as part of an effort to strengthen the U.S. presence in the region. On Sunday, he ordered it to remain there.

### MILITARY BASES

- About 40,000 U.S. troops are stationed on bases across the Middle East. On Tuesday, the Pentagon declined to say how many more it was deploying, saying only that it would send a “few thousand.”
- As of September, about 2,500 troops were in Iraq, many of whom served as a defense against attacks by a resurgent Islamic State group, and 900 in neighboring Syria.
- Qatar, across the Persian Gulf from Iran, hosts the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East. Nearby Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates also host U.S. bases, as does Djibouti, an African country across the Red Sea from Yemen.
- Kuwait, southeast of Iraq on the Persian Gulf, had about 13,500 U.S. troops on bases as of 2021. At the time, only Germany, Japan and South Korea had more U.S. forces. Kuwait was a hub for U.S. forces during the Iraq War.



In 2022, the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman leaves the French Mediterranean port of Marseille. The Truman left Virginia in late September on a scheduled deployment to the eastern Mediterranean, where it will take part in U.S. operations in the Middle East.