



Rescuers evacuate flood-trapped residents in Zhuozhou, north China's Hebei Province, last Friday. — Photos by Xinhua

# GRASSROOTS FLOOD HEROES:

## Ordinary individuals, extraordinary deeds



This aerial photo taken on August 2 shows rescuers transferring flood-trapped people in Zhuozhou.

Wang Yong

When rescuers in rubber boats rushed to a flooded residential neighborhood in Zhuozhou City, north China's Hebei Province, on the morning of August 2, they found themselves blocked by a main entrance gate, which was half submerged in the deluge and locked inside by a solid ground latch.

By that time, the flood had cut off water and electricity supply to the newly built neighborhood. With most families at a loss on what to do, a young resident of the neighborhood decided to dive into the deep muddy water, *The Paper* reported.

It was a dangerous dive, as water had risen close to the second floors of many residential buildings, carrying floating trash, but Meng Lingpeng went ahead nonetheless. At noon, he wore a swimming cap and a pair of goggles and jumped into the turbid water from outside his second-floor apartment.

"It was so murky that I could see nothing under water," Meng recalled later. "When I finally found the ground latch, I tried many times to pull it up but in vain."

Undeterred, he dived many more times and groped in darkness for the ground latch of another entrance gate. Eventually

he pulled the submerged latch out of the ground and opened the gate for rescuers. By that afternoon, all the residents had been safely relocated.

"Most residents can't swim. I'm a retired soldier and I started to learn swimming when I was a teenager," he said in an interview. "But it was the first time I swam in a flood, having to face many new challenges such as floating trash and feces."

Had it not been for his neighbors who recorded his brave endeavor, this story of an ordinary Samaritan would have been lost to the general public.

Meng's story and those of many other ordinary people reveal the better angels among ourselves as we collectively fight heavy floods ravaging many parts of north and northeast China in the past week.

According to a recent report from [nfpope.com](http://nfpope.com), the website of a leading Chinese magazine, Zhou Yahui, a veteran rescuer, also dived into muddy floodwaters early this month to remove a submerged gate latch as he and his comrades tried to relocate a half-paralyzed old person to a safer place in Zhuozhou. With closed eyes, he fumbled around with great difficulty before finding the latch on the gate to the elder's flooded courtyard.

On August 3, a group of firefighters

drove a rubber boat to a flood-besieged middle school in Zhuozhou, trying to get people out of the doldrums. However, as *People's Daily* reported on Sunday, the boat happened to perch 1 meter below a second-floor platform where the stranded people stood — it was hard for them to climb down.

So, Cao Boyuan, a young firefighter, half squatted and used his shoulders as a "ladder" and his back as a "bridge" to help the victims move safely into the rescue boat, *People's Daily* said.

If we look beyond the extraordinary deeds of these ordinary individuals, we will see a great power and passion in grassroots people — be they soldiers or vendors — to help each other tide over difficulties in trying moments.

We will see how soldiers trudged through an 18-kilometer mountainous road to save a badly injured girl during floods in suburban Beijing; how vendors donated trucks of watermelons to rescuers and volunteers in Zhuozhou; and how some restaurant owners in Zhuozhou turned their eateries into free distribution centers for relief supplies.

It is not a story of one or two heroes. In the current fight against raging floods, everyone, however ordinary, is possibly a hero.