

OOORAH! Marines collect 12,000 toys for tots

By Penny Randall
Staff Writer

U.S. Marines from Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One on board NAS Meridian delivered almost 12,000 new toys on Dec. 17 to the Salvation Army. The toys were collected during the 2010 Toys for Tots campaign – three times the number of toys collected in 2009.

Officials from the Salvation Army welcomed the Marines and the toys which made Christmas special for thousands of children in Neshoba, Newton, Kemper and Lauderdale counties in East Mississippi.

"I'm overwhelmed by the generosity of the Marines and the community," said Mary Welch, who along with her husband, Steve, are the commanders of the Salvation Army in Meridian. "We had a 40 per-

cent increase in those who registered for assistance this year. This is truly a blessing."

The toys were dropped off at the former Save Rite Grocery Store on North Frontage Road. Welch said thanks to the officials at Winn Dixie, they were able to use the massive building for their collection and sorting center.

2010 was a record breaking year in terms of toys and monetary donations which totaled \$24,338.53. The toys were distributed to needy children in the East Mississippi area just in time for Christmas.

Staff Sgt. Anthony Walker, 2010 Toys for Tots coordinator, said the contributions from the community, both in the amount of toys and in the money raised, were outstanding.

"I really can't put my finger on it as to why we did so much better this year than in years past," Walker said. "Regardless of the reason, this just proves the giving and compassionate nature of the people in this community."

In addition to the Salvation Army, Toys for Tots also donated to the Wesley House Community Center, individuals, as well as several area churches.

"I would like to say thank you to the organizations who donated money this year, such as the Optimist Club and Wal-Mart," Walker said. "This year was a testament to the community who came out in a big way – an unexpected way. We had Marines out in the community every weekend for two months. I think the community enjoyed seeing the Marines working hard for Toys for Tots."