

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL RUSSEL L. HONORÉ
COMMANDER, FIRST U.S. ARMY**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
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COMMANDER, FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY
COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE – KATRINA

Introduction

Chairman Collins, distinguished members of the committee: I am here to address you today regarding the role of the Department of Defense in responding to Hurricane Katrina and in supporting the Secretary of Homeland Security as the principal Federal official for domestic incident management.

Hurricane Katrina not only tested the nation's ability to respond to a major disaster, but also the resolve of the American people. The initial response to the aftermath of Katrina was characterized by selfless acts of courage and compassion. The unselfish actions of first responders, private citizens, military personnel and volunteers from all corners of the nation who confronted this disaster represent the hallmark of this great nation. Many key and essential personnel along the Mississippi and Louisiana Coast, who could have departed the area, did not. Instead, they remained to perform critical services at hospitals or first responder functions. Heroes – like the businessmen of Elberta, AL, who provided over 150,000 meals in 17 days; the Director of Emergency Services for the City of New Orleans who supervised the medical triage efforts at the Convention Center evacuating over 19,000 patients in a single day; and

the extraordinary response by our service men and women who immediately reacted to save lives and property – all rose to the occasion in unison. Many of these people had their own families and property directly impacted by the storm, but they continued to serve. Therefore, I would like to begin by recognizing the unheralded efforts of these selfless Americans and offer my greatest appreciation and gratitude for their sacrifices.

Enormity of the Task

The most destructive natural disaster in the history of the United States, Hurricane Katrina struck with successive blows between the 25th and 29th of August 2005. Initially striking southern Florida as a Category 1 hurricane causing 14 deaths and millions of dollars in property damage, the storm stalled and then grew in intensity in the Gulf of Mexico before finally veering slightly to the east of New Orleans as a Category 3 storm, resulting in one of the country's worst natural disasters. At times, Katrina appeared to fill the entire Gulf as it reached a peak of Category 5 strength. The worst occurred as Katrina made landfall in the vulnerable New Orleans area – a densely populated city already eight feet below sea level. The East Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast received the full wrath of Katrina's 140-MPH sustaining winds and a tidal surge that was over 30 feet high, leaving a trail of destruction and debris for miles inland. The New Orleans levee system, overwhelmed and severely damaged in several locations, failed resulting in millions of gallons of water quickly engulfing and flooding the homes of hundreds of thousands wreaking havoc and death. Thousands of residents, who stayed in their homes rather than evacuate, had only minutes to escape before becoming

trapped in their attics or on rooftops. Access to information about the affected area was severely hindered post-landfall by disabled communication systems, downed power lines and cell phone towers, and inaccessible roads and railroads due to downed trees, flooding and damaged overpasses. The flooding and damage across Louisiana and Mississippi affected hundreds of thousands of residents, creating a crisis of national proportions. Demands for assistance extended to the regional and national level as the number of displaced Americans paralyzed the states' ability to provide food, water, fuel, traffic management across LA, MS and adjoining states. The storm did not distinguish between the wealthy and the poor, civilians or members of the Armed Forces; over 118,000 service members and their dependents living in the four-state area were displaced or significantly impacted by Katrina. Destruction existed as far as the eye could see.

The affects of Hurricane Katrina extended well beyond the Gulf Coast and the City of New Orleans. The effects of Katrina also impacted the nation's economy. Infrastructure, critical oil and natural gas refineries that provide a major source of the nation's energy, were either damaged or rendered inoperable due to damage or the loss of the available work force. Hydrogen resources, used in the production of steel, were temporarily halted. Roads, bridges and rail systems sustained extensive damage, preventing interstate commerce. Port operations in New Orleans, as well as up and down the Mississippi, were halted as sunken and damaged vessels blocked piers and waterways.

Magnitude of the Response

The timeliness of the DoD response hinged on the capability to assess the situation. Pre-positioning Defense Coordinating Officers into the projected affected area and the deployment of the Forward Headquarters from the United States First Army provided human eyes on the ground to determine as quickly as possible the extent of the damage and support required. Fifth Army deployed an Operational Command Post (OCP), 24 Soldiers, to the LA Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to augment the LA Defense Coordinating Officer/Defense Coordinating Element (DCO/DCE) to provide planning support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and enhance communications and coordination capability for JTF-Katrina. JTF-Katrina was established the evening of 30 August 05. JTF-Forward Headquarters was fully supported by the JTF-Main (250 personnel in Atlanta, Georgia) and USNORTHCOM (1200 personnel in Colorado Springs, Colorado) via "Reach Back" capability in order to synchronize effects and to prevent adding victims to the affected area.

The ability to SEE FIRST and UNDERSTAND FIRST allowed us to ACT FIRST in shaping a timely, robust and coherent response plan. Environmental problems reached crisis stage as the effects of oil spills, benzene spills, and bacteria from spoiled food, human and animal waste, and human and animal remains began to affect the populace still in the area and the relief operation. The inner city poor and the elderly, who lacked transportation, were stranded and needed assistance. Large numbers of citizens were gathering in and around the Superdome and Convention Center with their numbers growing due to the lack of life-sustaining food, water and sanitation services throughout the affected Parishes, ultimately requiring the evacuation of 69,000 personnel.

Over the next week, critical units and capabilities from all branches of the military flowed into the Joint Area of Operations (JOA) to form the Joint Task Force. These included the Joint Force Maritime Component Command, led by Rear Adm. Kilkenney; the Joint Force Air Component Command, led by Maj. Gen. Mayes; the Marine Forces Command, led by Maj. Gen. O'Dell; the Army Forces Command, led by Maj. Gen. Caldwell; and the Joint Logistics Command, led by Brig. Gen. Terry. Numerous National Guard forces cooperated and collaborated with the JTF, and the resulting synergy proved critical to the success of the overall relief effort. There were two major force headquarters for the National Guard: (1) the 35th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Mason, worked for The Adjutant General (TAG) for Louisiana, Maj. Gen. Landreneau, and (2) the 38th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Vadnais, worked for the Mississippi TAG, Maj. Gen. Cross. Ultimately, National Guard service members from all 50 states, 3 territories and the District of Columbia participated with the JTF.

From the start on 29 Aug 05, Transportation Command assets were placed on alert. The USNS Comfort, a Navy Hospital ship, was ordered to prepare for deployment, as was the USS Bataan, then operating in the Gulf of Mexico. All National Guard aircraft positioned in FL, AL, TX, LA and MS were made available to support operations across the affected areas by pre-existing Emergency Management Assistance Compacts (EMAC). These aircraft commenced operations four hours after the hurricane passed, moving medical patients, evacuating personnel,

performing cargo transport missions, and conducting search and rescue missions in the first several hours.

On 30 Aug 05, the federal response expanded as the USS Truman, the USS Iwo Jima, the USS Shreveport and the USS Tortuga were deployed to provide humanitarian assistance. The Air Mobility Command's C-5, C-17 and C-130 aircraft were used to deliver logistics stocks and evacuate displaced personnel. Meals-Ready-to-Eat were pre-staged at Fort Polk, LA. Fort Polk and the Naval Air Station New Orleans were activated as shelters for displaced persons, and medical assets were activated for 24/7 operations at Camp Beauregard, LA; Jackson, MS; and Maxwell AFB, AL.

Quick Fixes

Prior to my return from the Gulf Coast, VADM Allen, US Coast Guard, and MG Landreneau, Adjutant General (TAG) from Louisiana, and I informally discussed areas for improvement that should be considered:

1. Establish pre-event unified Command and Control (C2) organizational structure.
2. Pre-position unified mobile disaster assessment cell.
3. Designate a single DOD point of contact for the Federal Coordinating Officer to coordinate requirements.
4. Implement a local/state employee Disaster Clause to dual-hat/train employees to fill key disaster support manning shortfalls.
5. Pre-position common interoperable communications assets.

6. Establish external support (push packages/funding) to fill common resource shortfalls.
7. Pre-allocate space in State Emergency Operation Centers to integrate federal or other external agencies.
8. Develop a Continuity of Government Plan that sustains government functions 24/7.
9. Pre-arrange support contracts for required resources.
10. Acquire and integrate assured power supply capabilities (gas stations, pharmacies and local EOCs).
11. Gain industry commitments to re-establish critical services.

Conclusion

At its peak, JTF-Katrina was supported by over 22,000 Title 10 uniformed personnel from all services. In executing this mission, JTF-Katrina executed the priorities established by local, state and federal authorities to save lives, provide basic human sustainment, and restore basic services. Through extensive coordination and collaboration, JTF-Katrina assisted local, state and federal agencies in providing immediate response and disaster relief operations which included: conducting air and sea rescues; searching house to house for survivors; providing emergency medical care; evacuating displaced citizens; providing emergency resupply of food, ice and water; collecting human remains; developing and reporting damage assessments; restoring basic infrastructure; repairing levee breaches for the de-watering of New Orleans; opening ports and waterways; and providing life sustainment subsistence to stranded livestock and pets.

The ability of our Armed Forces to react to such a devastating hurricane speaks volumes to the readiness, professionalism and training of our Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard forces. They performed efficiently and effectively, in coordination and collaboration with local, state and federal agencies under the most austere conditions.

Improvements can and should be made to ensure our responses to future natural or man-made disasters meet the challenge. We stand ready to assist in this endeavor. As we look forward from today there are 111 days until the next hurricane season.