

# USAES Deploys Katrina Recovery and Relief Support

By Major Jason Hedges, Royal Australian Engineer

In the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, the United States Army Engineer School (USAES), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, responded to the United States Army Corps of Engineers® request for support within 24 hours. In September and October 2005, USAES deployed 21 volunteers—Team Katrina—to Louisiana and the surrounding regions. This was no easy task; among other things, orders had to be prepared and travel arrangements had to be made, to include finding available rental cars on short notice.

The volunteers—USAES faculty members, support staff, and students—were assigned to critical liaison or headquarters staff positions by the Corps. They were responsible for providing leadership and operational planning support. Upon arrival, Team Katrina personnel were deployed to almost every affected parish and immediately began to work alongside Corps of Engineers employees, local officials, state and federal agencies, and nongovernmental organizations to provide much-needed emergency support to citizens of the Gulf Coast. Many Team Katrina personnel were employed as liaison officers, facilitating valuable information flow between the Corps of Engineers and the local authorities. They also contributed significantly to the development of a common operational picture for Corps commanders. Their efforts

enabled the commanders to see, understand, and act as part of the overall emergency support function. As emphasized by a Team Katrina member serving as an assistant operations officer in the Louisiana Recovery Field Office, communication was the bottom line. He and other Team Katrina personnel held key headquarters positions to support the Corps's chain of command and kept information flowing.

Team Katrina personnel were exposed to the complexity of the interagency framework of large-scale disaster response operations. A captain serving as an operations officer with the Joint Field Office in Louisiana worked closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). They accomplished many things, including setting up a fully functioning operations center within a week. This operations center tracked all recovery operations for the state of Louisiana, to include Operation Blue Roof (a free program that places temporary roofs of blue plastic sheeting on homes or facilities); debris removal; ice and water delivery; as well as meals, ready-to-eat (MRE) delivery. The liaisons from each parish reported real-time updates to the operations center.

The extent of the damage to New Orleans and the surrounding areas needed to be seen to be believed; the devastation was significant. Structural assessment, debris removal, and sanitation problems were the big issues faced.



**Hurricane Katrina destroyed waterfront restaurants in Jefferson Parish. These two photos show the pier where they were once located.**





Debris from the restaurants was pushed into a pile near the lake in Jefferson Parish.



A statue is the only surviving piece of this monument in Jefferson Parish.



Debris and wind damage were apparent in Old Metairie, Jefferson Parish.

The building in the background, located North of Interstate 10 in Jefferson Parish, had most of its windows blown out during the hurricane.





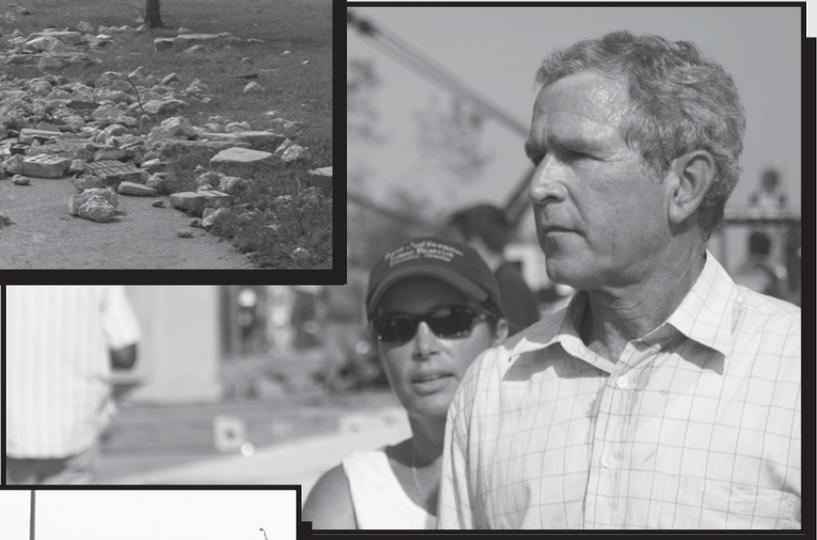
**This is the site of the oldest house in New Orleans, built in the 1700s. It was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.**



**Scattered debris was all that was left of a makeshift levee for Lake Ponchartrain.**



**President George W. Bush visited Louisiana to view the devastation in September while Team Katrina members were deployed. Also shown in the picture is the president of the Jefferson Parish Levee Board.**



**This is an Interstate 10 staging area for evacuations in Jefferson Parish.**

Storm surges and levee failures caused by Hurricane Katrina, a Category 4 storm, left much of Orleans Parish flooded. Water poured through and over the levees. The 17th Street Canal—which separates Jefferson and Orleans Parish in New Orleans, Louisiana—experienced structural failures. The canal’s levee was the site of one of the major levee breaches. When Hurricane Rita hit just twenty days later, levee repairs were not complete and some areas began to flood again.



**These photos show flooding in the area adjacent to the 17th Street Canal.**



**This photo shows the breach in the 17th Street Canal levee.**



**Repairs were made to the 17th Street Canal, and some debris was removed.**



Team Katrina personnel provided invaluable junior leadership focus to Corps of Engineers operations at the tactical level. The military uniform, regardless of branch or service, gave instant credibility and an expectation of leadership and agility. A task force was created to drain water from the area—Task Force Unwatering. One Team Katrina member who served as a liaison officer for the task force stated that the experts with the skills and techniques were brought together to execute the tasks. The task force operated temporary pumps, brought in sandbags and rock, and sealed breached areas in the levees.

**Flooding occurred at City Stadium, Morgan City, Louisiana.**



**Pressure forced water up through this drain pipe.**



**This housing area near Lake Ponchartrain, Metairie, in East Orleans Parish, suffered extensive flood damage.**



**This car dealership in Plaquemine Parish was also flooded.**





**City Park in Orleans Parish was completely underwater.**



**These photos show some of the extensive damage at a Yacht Club in Orleans Parish.**



**This yacht was found three blocks away from the lake in Orleans Parish.**

At the recent Army Engineer Association Engineer Regimental Conference, Lieutenant General Carl A. Strock, Chief of Engineers, praised the efforts of Team Katrina personnel. *“The team from the Engineer School provided exceptional support to the Corps of Engineers and made a significant difference to the people of the Gulf Coast.”*

The decision by USAES to deploy Team Katrina generated numerous benefits. It proved to be an overwhelmingly positive experience, both professionally and personally. It exposed junior leaders to not only the Corps of Engineers but also to the vast array of governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations operating in a very complex framework to achieve humanitarian assistance on an unprecedented scale

within the United States. Team Katrina personnel also had a unique opportunity to directly assist their fellow Americans in a time of need.



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All photographs courtesy of Major John Espe.