

Prepared Statement of Brigadier General Brod Veillon

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Good afternoon Chairman Collins and members of the committee. I am Brigadier General Brod Veillon. I am the assistant Adjutant General for Air of the Louisiana National Guard.

On Sunday, August 28th at about 10:00 a.m., The Adjutant General called and asked me to coordinate the Louisiana National Guard's support of Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Search and Rescue efforts in response to Hurricane Katrina. I called a 2:30 p.m. meeting of the agencies that would participate in the search and rescue operation. The meeting occurred at the Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness. Representatives from the following agencies participated: United States Coast Guard, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana State Police, FEMA and FEMA DMORT, as well as Civil Air Patrol. We discussed capabilities of each of our organizations and areas of responsibilities.

I arrived at the Louisiana National Guard Headquarters, Jackson Barracks, New Orleans, on Sunday, Aug. 27th at 5 pm.

The National Guard, as well as the Louisiana Wildlife and Fishery had positioned small boats and rescue equipment at Jackson Barracks to be used for the Search and Rescue effort.

Sunday night, I was in the National Guard Joint Operation Center monitoring the storms progress.

Monday morning, August 29th as the eye of the storm approached New Orleans, flood water began to quickly rise; it went from about one foot deep, mainly associated to the heavy rains, to 10 feet deep with in 30 minutes. This was a dramatic surge of water. Jackson Barracks was quickly covered, in some places it was over 20 feet deep. A local AM radio station was reporting that the industrial canal levee had broken and the 9th Ward was flooding.

We had pre-positioned 18 boats at Jackson Barracks. The rapidly rising water prompted concern that we may lose the equipment and motors, so I directed national guardsman to move all equipment and outboard motors to the second floor. Wildlife and Fisheries also had boats parked on trailers adjacent to our operation center and I noticed they were all floating with the trailers attached.

By mid afternoon on Monday, Aug 29th, the wind and rain had subsided enough where we could use our boats to begin the rescue efforts. Because of the depth of the water, we used one of our small aluminum boats to motor over to the larger Wildlife and Fisheries boats. I put a guardsman into the water with bolt cutters to cut the boats loose from their trailers; we bailed them of their rainwater and put 2 National Guardsman in each. At that time I was thinking we would probably find a few people who would need help. We moved out into the immediate neighborhood and as I looked around, there were people on rooftops in every direction calling for help.

There were many natural gas pipeline breaks which formed small geysers, and several houses were on fire. I was expecting to find a few, but what I found were hundreds. My team and I began taking people into our boats. The water was deep enough to allow us to dock our boats on the rooftops. The wind and rain made it very difficult to maneuver in and around these homes. Telephones and electrical lines had to be lifted by hand to allow us to pass beneath them. At the

third house I approached, the people there advised me that their neighbor was trapped in her attic. We docked on her roof and removed a roof vent. Looking down we could see her crying for help. My crew and I used an ax to cut a hole in her roof and several of us reached down and lifted her to safety. The rapidly rising water had forced her up into her attic where she became trapped, unable to go higher and could no longer go down.

This sequence of events was repeated over and over and over again. National Guardsman cutting holes in rooftops to lift people out. Our boats would quickly fill and we would motor toward the Mississippi River levee, which took them out of immediate danger and placed them on good high ground. This action made them visible to follow on forces who were tasked during my earlier coordination meeting to evacuate them by air, land, or boats on the river.

We continued this effort until night fall. At that time the Joint Operations Center moved from Jackson Barracks to the Louisiana Superdome. Search and rescue operations continued thru the night. I boarded one of the helicopters to the Superdome and continued my coordination from there.

During the night National Guard as well as United States Coast Guard helicopters began flying over the city and assisting the situation. It was clear that Hurricane Katrina had dealt a catastrophic blow to the city of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana. When the sun rose on Tuesday morning the Superdome was an island, surrounded by 6 feet of water in every direction. I could see columns of smoke rising from several buildings in the city.

The Superdome had become the center of gravity of our search and rescue efforts. We used the top floor of a parking lot as an additional helicopter loading zone. Helicopters began lifting people from roof tops throughout the city bring them to the dome. National Guard medics

would assess the rescued for medical care, we would give them food and water and direct them away from the helicopter landing area. Sometimes we were lifting people to safety via a hoist and other times these helicopters were landing lightly on rooftops where people would climb in.

We used the EMAC process to request and receive additional helicopters from other states to assist with the search and rescue effort. In every direction I could see helicopters over all parts of the city hovering and lifting people to safety. This helicopter operation went on 24 hours a day. At night our crews were using airborne spot lights and night vision goggles as well as on board infrared capabilities. The city was completely dark at night and many who were awaiting rescue, would use flash lights to signal us.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fishery used their boats to comb through neighborhoods, house to house, searching and rescuing people from their flooded homes. All high ground, bridges and elevated highways, became drop off points for the boats. Helicopters were used to pick up people at these sites and transport them to the Superdome. In the days following the storm, the number of helicopter as well as boats assets grew rapidly, as more and more states, as well as the federal government sent personnel and equipment in to assist us. With each passing day, more and more people were lifted to safety. By Thursday, September 1st, most of the people in need had been rescued.

In many areas of the city the water was too deep for our high-water vehicles to enter. So we relied to a great extent on small boats and helicopters. Except for the Chinook helicopter, we were only able to take small groups at a time, but over time all were brought out to safety.

I am very proud of the efforts of all who were involved in this effort; State, Federal, Military and local volunteers, in the face of Hurricane Katrina, the greatest natural disaster to hit the United States, a disaster of biblical proportions, over 72,000 people, were safely lifted to high

ground and evacuated out of the city. I am proud of the National Guard and proud that I had a part in the Hurricane Katrina effort. I look forward to answering your questions...

Thank you,