

# An Interview with Victor E. Renuart, Jr.

**JFQ:** A recent RAND Corporation study called for carving out 9,000 Army National Guard Soldiers to form 10 homeland security task forces, including training and equipping, ahead of the next major natural disaster or domestic terrorist attack. Although multiple command and control structures complicated the military response to Hurricane Katrina, how differently are we structured now to meet the next crisis?

**General Renuart:** Using last year's hurricane season as a good example, the Secretary of Defense signed an execute order, which authorizes me to have a force available so that we could respond leading up to, and in response to, a hurricane that might occur along—I started to say the gulf, but really any of the states that are affected. That, interestingly, gives me about 8,200 troops and a variety of capabilities that I can have divided into what we call three tiers, some that would do preliminary work with an affected state, some that would do an immediate assessment process after landfall, and then a group of forces to help in recovery. I can use that force anywhere in the country; it's available today. Forces are identified, but they are not sitting in their barracks waiting for me to call. As we see a storm begin to develop, I increase their readiness, their alert posture, such that should they be required—and we exercised a portion of these during the preparation for Hurricane Dean in Texas—I can move them into place.

Different from the RAND study, I believe this gives maximum flexibility. The RAND study, unfortunately, was not aware of or informed by some of the processes we had already put in place at NORTHCOM [U.S. Northern Command] since Katrina; it was also not informed by some of the relationships that we've built with the National Guard in the states and the National Guard Bureau since Katrina. And to a degree, the study did not acknowledge what has become one of NORTHCOM's principal roles: to study the gaps between what a state

and the National Guard Bureau, through its emergency management compacts, can provide in the event of a disaster, and where the Federal Government, in terms of the military, may be asked to provide support.

We've done a lot of that work now in our 10 FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] regions, and we have defense coordinating officers assigned to each. They work closely with the FEMA region director as well as with us and the Department of Homeland Security, and we've built a pretty good matrix of what's there and what's needed. Our role, as we see a potential natural disaster coming, is to anticipate the places we think landfall might occur and to identify the gaps in that state or those states and then begin to posture support.

A bit of a long answer to a short question, but we proved that—during the preparations for Hurricane Dean, for example, which fortunately went to the south—we had teams in place in Texas well before landfall to begin to evacuate critical care patients, should that have been required. So that capability was already there on the ground *before* the potential for landfall. It's that kind of interaction and collaboration with the Federal agencies as well as understanding and having a relationship with the states that has brought us a long way and eliminated the need for the kind of capability that the RAND study called for.

**JFQ:** *There are Civil Support Teams [CSTs] in almost every state and territory, and their specific mission is to quickly respond to a WMD [weapons of mass destruction] event, assess the situation, and request follow-on assets. Seventeen chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive enhanced response force packages [CERFPs] were to be certified by the end of 2007. Could you address your ability to respond to multiple near-simultaneous attacks on U.S. soil involving weapons of mass destruction?*



General Victor E. Renuart, Jr., USAF, is Commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command.



**General Renuart:** First, the CSTs do provide that quick look, first response, sort of "how big is the boom" assessment. They do have a limited ability to do some analytical work and certainly to help in consequence management to a degree, but mostly in the category of defining the size of the problem. The 17 CERFPs provide a more robust capability to come in and begin to assist the state in the consequence management portion of that. And for many events, that may be enough. If it is a chemical spill or an explosion at a chemical production facility that is relatively limited, those capabilities can and should be sufficient. In the event that we have a catastrophic event, or in the event that we have multiple events, albeit each of them may be slightly smaller, we need to have a capability to move a fairly robust response force into place that can certainly assist in the consequence management piece, can assist in the medical response, can assist with some engineering capability to help mitigate the site, and begin to isolate it from the general population as best you can.

Today, we have notionally filled one of these forces. We call it the CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force, or CCMERF. We have notional sourcing to fill

Col David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), and Dr. Jeffrey D. Smotherman of Joint Force Quarterly interviewed General Renuart at his Pentagon liaison office.

one of those. We do not have sourcing to fill the other two forces that we've been tasked to build, and as a result, multiple, near-simultaneous attacks today would be a challenge; we don't have the size of force necessary. The Department of Defense has made a commitment to build those, and so we hope that through fiscal 2008, we'll begin to see the funding and the identification of forces so we can do that. The key to this is that these forces cannot be on a 2-week recall. They have to be accessible because if the event occurs today, the American public will expect a response tomorrow. And so, these are forces that have unique skills, they have to be trained, they have to be mobile enough so that we can get them to the site, and they have to be ready enough to move on a relatively short notice so that they can come in to fill the void that will come from CST to CERFP to something larger. I think we're on a good track to have all the forces certified by the January 1 time period.

**JFQ:** *You recently commented that you enjoy success coordinating and cooperating with interagency partners. What advice can you offer to commanders and staff officers to achieve similar success?*

**General Renuart:** The last place in the world to make a new friend is at the scene of a disaster. You have to build a relationship over time. You need to plan together for the events that you may have to practice. And so my first recommendation is to reach out to those other agencies that you may have to deal with. You want to understand how *they* view the world, what *their* culture is. You need to understand what capabilities they bring. By the way, they need to understand what capabilities you bring, so it's a two-way discussion. My experience has been, whether it's building a coalition of 70 nations during OEF [Operation *Enduring Freedom*], or a coalition of 45 agencies at NORTHCOM today, everyone needs to feel as if they are a partner. Each will bring a different capability, some large, some small, but each has to feel like they are integrated into the planning as well as the execution. And so, if you don't make the first move, if the Defense Department doesn't say, "Let us be part of your team," or "Come be part of our team," then it's likely that it won't happen because, often, we're seen as kind of the big dog in the pack, and that can be intimidating to smaller agencies, so we have to make the first move.

**JFQ:** *One of NATO's [North Atlantic Treaty Organization's] successes has been that even small countries benefit from membership, each contributing proportionally (for example, Iceland had no offensive military capability but contributed access for NATO bases). Why does NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command] continue to be a U.S.-Canadian command rather than expanding to incorporate Mexico and other hemispheric nations? Wouldn't such an expansion serve the interests of all?*

**General Renuart:** Having had a good deal of experience in both NATO and now in NORAD, and in building coalitions for both OEF and OIF [Operation *Iraqi Freedom*], I see the real value in a large coalition of friends committed to the same purpose. NORAD, however, was a binational command formed during the early days of the Cold War to protect the air sovereignty of the United States and Canada. At that time, Mexico wasn't included in the Cold War threat that we saw. In today's world, we continue to see a unique relationship with the United States and Canada, not just in the air domain, but now in the maritime domain. The nature of the terrorist threat focuses on the West, and so we certainly have to have a collaborative relationship with our European friends. That works very well through the NATO structure.

But there also is an imperative that we have a close working relationship with nations in our hemisphere to defeat terrorism. In that role, Mexico *does* have an important part to play. We do have a great relationship, improving every day, with the military in Mexico. The government-to-government relationship is strong, and we're seeing more opportunities to collaborate and to share information with the Mexicans. Through this sharing, they can better view threats to their nation, with counternarcotics as the principal threat. But they are also supportive of the United States and realize that in any avenue through which illicit traffic occurs, the traffickers don't care whether it's drugs or people or terrorism. These traffickers are looking to make money by facilitating flow through their system. So the Mexicans have been very helpful to ensure that we get any information that might indicate a terrorist movement. Fortunately, we've not seen that yet, but I have no doubt that people are trying.

So there is a relationship among the three nations as it relates to illicit trade and trafficking. I think we will continue to work with Mexico on a variety of mutual topics.

Canada has also reached out to the government of Mexico, the militaries have reached out to each other, and they too are collaborating on a variety of common areas, the maritime domain being the principal one. So I think there's room for us to continue those relationships. I'm not sure that we're at a point where we need to change what NORAD does; I think building this coalition of partners for specific topics is really the way we will move forward, at least in the near term.

**JFQ:** *JTF [Joint Task Force]-NORTH seems to have a much broader mission than the counterdrug mission of its predecessor, JTF-6. Please speak to the challenges facing and successes of JTF-NORTH.*

**General Renuart:** JTF-NORTH is a great example of an economy of force effort, if you will. It's a small joint task force with specific experts allowing them not only to support the counternarcotics mission along the border but also to monitor the flow of illegal aliens. There is also an implied task: they keep their ear to the ground for the potential movement of terrorist entities through that same system. They have been very successful in working with the border and customs folks along the northern border on a couple of exercises. So we see their focus initially on the southern border area, but with applicability along our northern border as well, and we think that's a very good growth area for JTF-NORTH. How we shape and structure them for the future, we're still working on that.

**JFQ:** *What is unique to your command and the AOR [area of responsibility] that senior JPME [joint professional military education] professionals should know about? What are some of the challenges and initiatives that are different from other regional combatant commands?*

**General Renuart:** The first and most important challenge and difference is that our AOR is our homeland, and so we focus every day to ensure that those JPME students have a safe place to go to school. While a little tongue in cheek, that really is a very solemn task. We have, in many ways, a broader interagency connection to the rest of our government than our other combatant commands may. We also are limited constitutionally in a way that none of the other combatant commands are—well, that's not true—that very *few* of the other combatant commands are limited. Certainly



STRATCOM [U.S. Strategic Command] has some limitations that they have to be very careful of, similar to ours in terms of the limitations of the use of the U.S. military within the boundaries of our nation. We also have a challenge in that our interagency activity isn't just with elements of government, but we work with private industry, we work with each of the 54 states and territories, because their roles and responsibilities differ from state to state, and yet our ability to respond, whether it's to a bridge collapse in Minnesota or preparation for a hurricane in Texas, or preparation for the United Nations General Assembly in New York—each of those are different, and yet NORTHCOM brings a capability to bear in each of those. And so the diversity, the very active interagency process, and the state engagement program are all unique to NORTHCOM and provide for a pretty dynamic environment.

**JFQ:** *You have come out publicly as being an advocate of the National Guard. What actions have you taken in that role? How have you been engaged with state and local authorities?*

**General Renuart:** First, my goal was to get to every state in my first year. I'm failing in that somewhat, but we have made a lot of progress. We've been out now to 18 states, I've seen 16 state Governors, I've seen 4 Lieutenant Governors, I've seen the emergency management directors in every one of those states, I've seen the adjutants general in every one of those states. I've spoken to the National Guard Association of the United States convention in San Juan, with all of the adjutants general, and with nearly 3,000 members of the Guard from all over the country. I've accepted an invitation to speak to the National Governors Association. So our outreach program is something that is important to us, it is something that is critical to NORTHCOM's success in that we must have a relationship with the states and the adjutants general all across our country.

We've worked hard with the National Guard Bureau to collaborate on those equipment shortfalls that are unique to the non-Federal mission. In other words, the Army and the Air Force are tasked to, and will budget for, the traditional equipping of the Guard for what I'll call their wartime missions—deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, air deployments all over the world, the global airlift transportation system. But there are some unique

capabilities that Texas might need, or Maine might need, or Montana might need, that are over and above the traditional Department of the Army or Air Force funding line or table of allowance. Our job is to work with the states in cooperation with FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security to say, "What is required to deal with this event in this state? What does the Federal civilian response entity bring, and is there anything left that there's no other place to go for than DOD?" Whatever those are, those are the things that we put into our commanders integrated priority list, we take it and advocate for the JROC [Joint Requirements Oversight Council], we advocate for funding as we go through our normal POM [Program Objective Memorandum] cycles. We've got something called a gap analysis ongoing with our 10 FEMA regions, which tells me what capabilities the Federal and civilian responders don't have, so I can begin to look at what we might need to support a particular state Guard with. We'll continue to work through that as we go through the fiscal 2010 POM cycle in the coming spring.

**JFQ:** *USNORTHCOM just celebrated a 5-year anniversary. How has defense support of civilian authorities evolved over that time?*

**General Renuart:** First, the fact that we are here occurred because of a lack of focused DOD homeland defense capability. This lack has been underlined since Hurricane Katrina by the imperative from the people of our country to ensure that we don't have a state left without the capacity to respond to the people. Our job is not to come in and take over an operation in a state. Our job is to ensure that as the Governor and the adjutant general see the need, we are on the doorstep with the right kinds of capabilities for them to continue their response, or to increase the size of their response, or to sustain it over time in an area where it might be a long recovery process. So states should not feel threatened by the support of the Department of Defense. The Department of Defense role is to make sure that the things the Governors need are ready when they need them. The people of this country demand that their elected officials take care of them, help them respond when disaster strikes. It shouldn't matter whether it's Guard or Reserve or Active duty; we owe those same people—those are our families. That's what's unique about NORTHCOM—it's our homeland, our hometowns that we are helping to protect. So

we should not have a circumstance where Governors feel that they have nowhere to turn.

Our role at NORTHCOM is to ensure that with every event, we are looking at what kinds of things we might make available to help. The key is support—not to come in and command, but to support. I think we've made a lot of progress in that regard, and I think we're building the relationship across the country with Governors, Lieutenant Governors, adjutants general, emergency management directors—that's our mission. And I've not encountered anyone who has an objection to that. We've had a great response from states all over that have said, "We really need your help. We really do need some assistance. And so the fact that you're preparing to put it in place almost before we ask is comforting. Maybe we won't have to ask, and that's okay. But maybe we do, and if we do, we know that it will be ready." And that's our real mission.

**JFQ:** *Thank you, sir.*

U.S. Army (Lee Kika)



**Gen Renuart speaks to National Guardsmen at Muscatatuck Urban Training area during joint military/civilian emergency management exercise Vigilant Guard**