

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH VICE ADMIRAL ROBERT PAPP,  
COMMANDER, COAST GUARD ATLANTIC AREA SUBJECT: THE COAST GUARD'S PREPARATION FOR  
MULTIPLE ATLANTIC STORMS TIME: 9:30 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the  
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Kind of a busy morning here this  
morning for the Bloggers Roundtable. And we appreciate you all joining us and  
standing by. And with us now as we move right along, we're joined by Vice  
Admiral Robert Papp, who's the commander of the Coast Guard Atlantic Area for  
the U.S. Coast Guard. And Admiral Papp, Ms. Brook, thank you very much for  
joining us.

ADM. PAPP: Well, good morning. It's a delight for me to be here. And  
this is the first time I've done something like this, so I'm sort of venturing  
out into new waters for myself. But I do know a couple of the people that are  
on the line, so it's a delight to be able to talk to them this morning.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Vice Admiral Bob Papp.  
I'm the commander of Coast Guard Atlantic Area. And if you are not familiar  
with Coast Guard Atlantic Area, it is an area stretching from the Rocky  
Mountains east to the Persian Gulf, and north from the Arctic down to the  
Antarctic, and I am the person who's responsible for carrying out all Coast  
Guard missions within that area.

Now, on a practical basis, what we do is we have five district  
commanders, rear admirals who are distributed in Boston, Portsmouth, Virginia,  
Miami, Florida, New Orleans, and Cleveland, Ohio, who carry out those day-to-day  
missions. And from Portsmouth, Virginia, where I have my headquarters, we  
oversee all those operations, set priorities, allocate resources -- and by that  
I mean ships, planes, boats and people -- to respond to any contingency  
operations that may come up.

Of course, we are today focused on Tropical Storm Hanna which is coming  
up the East Coast. I think we're pretty well prepared for that. We have our  
7th Coast Guard District and our 5th Coast Guard District, that are -- set  
hurricane conditions, are working with port partners, and making sure all our  
resources are safe or in safe haven for the passage of the storm; and then  
prepare to do restoration or rescue operations afterward.

Our next focus of course is Hurricane Ike which really has my attention  
today. It's developing into quite a powerful storm out there, and should be, if  
it stays on its current track, should be in the south Florida area somewhere

around Tuesday or so. So we're also making preparations for that operation while at the same time doing recovery operations from Gustav from last week.

So it's been a busy week or so for us here at Coast Guard Atlantic Area, and -- but we've got some great people. We don't have a lot of bench strength, but we're moving forces around in preparation for each one of these operations to position them so that we can respond.

The other thing that I would just mention to all of you this morning is we are a little somber this morning. Even though it's in Pacific Area, we lost a Coast Guard air crew yesterday. They were flying one of our H-65 helicopters, a crew of four. They were out doing an exercise with a small boat about five miles south of Honolulu. In the midst of the operation, they crashed. We don't know what the cause is at this point. Three of the four bodies have been recovered. We're still conducting a search for the fourth person in the crew. So we just ask that everybody keep our Coast Guard shipmates in their thoughts and prayers, and it's just a stark reminder for us that the things that we do are done in dangerous environments. Even in the most benign of times, taking a ship away from a pier or a boat away from a slip or putting an aircraft in the air has inherent dangers. And we send our people to do some very dangerous things.

So with that, I'll turn it over to you for your questions. MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much. And our condolences to the families of the lost crewmen and the Coast Guard as a whole.

Peter, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Admiral Papp, good morning, sir. This is Peter Stinson with An Unofficial Coast Guard blog.

ADM. PAPP: Good morning, Peter.

Q Great to have you at the roundtable, sir.

As you're well aware, following Katrina, sir, the offshore oil infrastructure in the Gulf of Mexico received substantial damage, which took a year or more to repair. And during this time, there were a number of accidents resulting in the loss of life, including a commercial diver who was the son of a long-time shipmate, a member of the Coast Guard family.

My question is this, sir: What is the Coast Guard doing to provide oversight to the offshore industry so that the industry is not self-regulating, which appears anyway to be not adequate?

ADM. PAPP: Well, Peter, there are a number of agencies who have different degrees of responsibilities offshore. I'm not familiar with the specific case -- I'm sorry, I should say I am -- I have some basic familiarity with the case. I don't have the details on that case, or any other cases, although I have my staff starting to do some research for me so that I can get a lot smarter on the diving industry and our responsibilities there.

All I would say is it's shared responsibilities. There are regulations that the Coast Guard puts out there. The fact of the matter is that most of those regulations are probably put into effect after accidents -- or rather they are reviewed after accidents occur. There is, as you can imagine with literally thousands of diving, commercial diving operations, going on each day, it's near

impossible with Coast Guard resources to be out there providing any sort of supervisory or inspection-type of activities, so it's more of an after-the-fact thing.

It's -- it's -- I would liken it probably to the commercial fishing industry, which is another -- has even more losses of life each year, and you have some very independent industries out there who for the most part resist over-regulation. So the regulations that we do have are rather limited. And as I said most of the time, they get applied after the fact when conducting investigations -- unfortunately, most times after a casualty has occurred.

Q Yes, sir, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jim. Q Good morning, Admiral. Jim Dolbow with An Unofficial Coast Guard Blog.

ADM. PAPP: Hi, Jim.

Q One of the -- each time a major hurricane pops up on your radar, what are your top readiness concerns?

ADM. PAPP: My top readiness concerns are, first of all, to make sure our Coast Guard people are prepared to do their jobs. Just by virtue of where we are located, along the coast, and the fact that -- that one of our most important resources, aircraft, that we use for conducting rescue and recovery operations, are extremely vulnerable, we spend a lot of time looking at where that storm might land.

So going back to my opening statement, even though Hanna is upon us right now, I'm really focused on Ike right now and trying to figure out where exactly that's going to land and where we position our forces. We also have to worry about our families. It's very difficult when you have Coast Guard families also along the coast.

If they are in danger, then you've got Coast Guardsmen who are having to worry about families as well as worrying about doing their jobs.

So if I give you a for instance, as Gustav approached the coast in the Gulf, one of the first things we focused on was evacuating the families, making sure they were taken care of. We had pre-designated locations for them to go to, mostly with the Department of Defense, at bases where they could be taken care of. Then our folks could turn their thoughts to making sure that our equipment is placed; that we have resources on standby, whether it's extra communications gear, aircraft, air crews, that we can bring from around the country and put them far enough inland so they are safe when the storm comes over, and then that we can position them to follow the storm in and get them out there during post-storm surveys and rescue and recovery operations.

So that's what we're doing down south right now. Admiral Branham, who's the 7th District commander, is making decisions as we speak about where he relocates his forces. He most likely will break up his headquarters staff. We have a continuity of operations location at St. Louis, Missouri, which we have set up for Atlantic Area so we can move district staffs there. He's likely to put part of it there and also perhaps move part of it out to San Juan to the sector office so that he has his staffs distributed to conduct a full range of Coast Guard activities down there.

Meanwhile we're repositioning aircraft within the 7th Coast Guard district and looking across the other districts to identify -- we've already put out an alert order to identify air crews, aircraft, disaster assistance teams and other things that we will need once the storm passes and at the same time going out to the commander, Pacific Area, to have him identify forces that he might be able to deploy to us as well.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Lauren.

Q Yes, I'm from the Virginia Pilot. My name is Lauren King. So we're based right here in Norfolk nearby you. ADM. PAPP: We're neighbors, Lauren. Good morning.

Q Exactly, right across the tunnel. What I was wondering was if you could give us some sort of comparison. I know I've heard some people call Hanna a dress rehearsal for Ike, but at this point, we don't know exactly know where Ike is going to go. But I wanted to see if there was any way you could give me an example of how it appears Hanna is going to come, and if you could compare it to a previous storm that's hit the area to show us what it is that people can expect here, and what you guys would have to do to address the resulting issues.

ADM. PAPP: Lauren, that's a great question. I think what I've heard, you've probably heard because you and I are listening to the same news down here, a lot of people are asking questions because their last storm, major storm, in recent memory was Isabel. Isabel came in at a completely different angle, came in at full storm force, and worked its way up the Chesapeake Bay.

The difference with Hanna is that, first of all, it's at tropical storm strength now, and it is skirting the coastline, and the particular meteorological conditions are such that it's helping to weaken the storm, even though it may strengthen a little bit because of the Gulf Stream, it probably will hit the North Carolina shore with a direct blow, and then the land will absorb some of its energy so that by the time it gets to Hampton Roads here, it's going to be diminished significantly.

Now yes, there's still going to be some dangers. Any time you have high winds, gale force winds or otherwise, you have the potential for power outages and other things being broken and also the potential for torrential rains which can cause flooding.

I wouldn't -- in fact, I have not referred to it as a dress rehearsal. We actually do dress rehearsals throughout the year. We do exercises -- in fact, Atlantic Area staff back a couple of months ago actually did what we call a continuity of operation plan, movement out to St. Louis. And when I say COOP, it's continuity of operations. And we know that if you had a major, major storm coming here to the Tidewater area, it probably would shut down the Portsmouth Federal Building where we have our headquarters. So in advance we would move out there and set up our headquarters there so that we could continue to control our operations.

Now those are the sort of things we do year round in preparations for storms, other natural events or other man-made terrorist events that could

potentially occur. So it's a year-round thing for us. Hopefully, regardless of the severity of the storm, we've done enough preparation and training and drills to be prepared for it. And you just put those plans into execution when you have a real storm coming.

Q All right, thank you. MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And Jennifer.

Q Yes, hi, this is Jennifer Ladd (ph), and I'm in Jacksonville, North Carolina, which apparently is going to get hit with a direct blow by Hanna. I was actually wondering what the challenges are preparing for multiple storms in a row, because it looks like it's possible that Ike might come here as well. How do you prepare for that?

ADM. PAPP: Well as I said earlier, we keep our eyes -- even though we're focused today on Hanna, I'm looking beyond that towards Ike and trying to figure out where it goes. You know, for me personally, I had a trip down to south Florida planned for next week for a number of things, to visit some of the commands that we have liaison with like Southern Command, and the Joint Interagency Task Force in Key West, and to do a ceremony down there. I've put all those plans on hold simply because I don't know where that storm is going to land and because those people down there are now focusing on storm preparations. I didn't want to add another layer of complexity to them while they're making plans for engaging in that storm.

One of the things that we really stress, not only with our own people, but as we talk to the public, is personal preparedness for these storms as they come. I think the worst thing people can do is perhaps get apathetic because storms turn out to be not as severe as they thought they might be or they did an awful lot of preparation and then the storm veers somewhere else.

Time and time again, experiences would tell us that preparations made for a storm are never wasted because it gets you in a frame of mind. It gets your personal property, your family, prepared and in the safest position possible for the worst possible eventualities. And so one of the things that deeply concerns me is that because Hanna didn't turn out -- might not -- might not, I emphasize -- turn out to be as severe as we once thought, people might -- might not adequately prepare for the next storm that's coming down along the line.

Most Coast Guard people have been assigned in various places and have lived through storms, and seen the destruction that they can do. So I'm not so worried about Coast Guard people losing a sense of urgency as I am the public because if the public doesn't take personal preventive actions and take care of themselves, it ultimately ends up causing work for us in very dangerous conditions.

The example I would give is, after Katrina, everybody knows how -- the thousands of rescues we needed to do after Katrina because people did not evacuate or were unable to evacuate or thought they could ride the storm out. We had similar numbers of forces mustered for Gustav, and we didn't have a single search-and-rescue case after Gustav because all of the proper precautions were taken. Secretary Chertoff was down there personally directing operations. We had great evacuation plans. And the preparations and the work that was done in advance this time saved us an awful lot of dangerous work after the storm had passed.

MR. HOLT: All right. Any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, this is Peter Stinson again.

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Admiral, during Gustav, I see that more than 500 Coastees were prepositioned along with 31 aircraft. What's the cost involved with that? Where does the money come from? And what's the impact on readiness to those units where those personnel are no longer serving?

ADM. PAPP: You know, the cost to repositioning people -- first of all, the aircraft are paid for; the people are basically paid for. It's like any day in the life of the Coast Guard. On any given day, I have certain challenges, certain threats that we evaluate daily and then we assign resources to attack those threats.

So whether it's a hurricane or whether it's a drug enforcement case or a search- and-rescue case, we're constantly making decisions on how we apply the resources that we have. So the helicopters, the ships, the people, those are pretty much costs that are already taken care of. Where we incur extra costs is perhaps unexpected deployments where we're paying per diem costs for people who are forward deployed. There are damage -- damage to stations and other equipment that will be absorbed. What we do is we accumulate all these costs, and then they're assigned against a code, and ultimately we take it out of our Coast Guard budget in the short term. Under most circumstances, in my experience, Congress will at some point do a supplemental appropriation bill to reimburse the various agencies for the costs incurred during -- as a result of a storm.

So the other cost, though is, what does it come out of because there are other Coast Guard things that aren't being done. We haven't done a full assessment. Obviously, the aircraft that we preposition, they would've been back in their districts doing other things. We may have lost some training time because they're forward deployed. Obviously, the boats that we have down there might've been assigned to go out and do law enforcement activities. We had a 270-foot cutter that was doing migrant operations in the Florida straits which we redirected to go up into the Gulf to serve as a command-and-control platform and a place for helicopters to land.

Those are mission costs that perhaps we won't be able to reimburse those hours back to the mission that they were performing, but we will just absorb that in another mission area.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay, anyone else?

Q Jack, Jim Dolbow.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q I have a follow-up. Admiral Papp, could you talk a little bit about the Coast Guard's role in the interagency process, in particular, the Coast Guard's relationship with FEMA and DOD?

ADM. PAPP: Absolutely. In fact that has been my life for the last week. I've spent -- each day I've spent probably at least -- and this is over the last weekend, the holiday weekend, starting last Friday through today and probably through this weekend as well, at noon today I will be on a FEMA senior leadership conference. That -- that will be a video teleconference, and we will be linked up with FEMA directing it from the National Rescue Coordination Center. And probably if not Director Paulison, the Deputy Director, Admiral Johnson, will be leading that. And, in fact, yesterday, Secretary Chertoff popped into that meeting.

But that's probably the best function of what we do in the interagency is tying everybody together. And it's not me doing it, it's the Department of Homeland Security doing it. And one of the beauties of this organization is it's brought these agencies together and enables us to talk and communicate to each other and identify our needs, shortfalls and challenges.

And that's basically what we do during the VTC. We get a briefing from the National Hurricane Center which levels the playing field in terms of information on the storms for all of us. Then there are reports made by the various FEMA regions, and then down to the state level where the state emergency operations centers do their reports along with their federal coordinating officers from FEMA.

Then we go to the interagency. And we'll have -- typically we'll have the Army Corps of Engineers, us the Coast Guard, and NORTHCOM, all on the video teleconference, so all of us are hearing real time exactly where we are in terms of preparations, identifying shortfalls, and seeing where we can help each other, and making sure that we don't have any seams or shortfalls that have not been addressed.

That's followed up later each day with a teleconference of what we call the senior leadership group, which is the internal Department of Homeland Security. That's always with the secretary. And I've been on there, along with the commandant of the Coast Guard and the other component heads from the Department of Homeland Security. And it's an update to the secretary as to exactly where we are, where we think we are going, and identifying any shortfalls or challenges that we have.

Q Thank you, Admiral.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

ADM. PAPP: You're welcome, Jim.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And any other follow-up questions?

Q I do have one, actually.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Going back to what Jennifer was talking about, we both have a very similar mindset of the storms sort of eye us here, I wanted to know, for the people who aren't necessarily taking Hanna seriously, what would be your best advice for them if you had the opportunity to talk to them? ADM. PAPP: My best advice to them would be just a very personal experience. I spent a significant amount of my lifetime along the shore out on the water, and I know how very difficult it is to predict, anticipate, and make judgments about

weather -- and even with the best of technologies, meteorologists, and others, weather will surprise you, and it can get very severe very quickly.

So in spite of what you may hear in terms of how it may be weakening or may bypass us or whatever it might be, everybody, everyone, should take personal precautions because weather is a magnificent, frightening and challenging thing to deal with, and we have no control over it. The only thing we can control are our personal lives and our activities. And I would urge everyone in the path of a storm to make sure they've got batteries, food, that their houses are secured, that they listen to the local weather, they find out whether they're in an area that might be subject to tidal surge, that they do exactly what I did yesterday, take a walk around the house and see what's loose out there, secure any -- we took down our flags. We took down our patio furniture and made sure there's nothing that could fly around and cause extra damage. Just everybody should do a personal assessment of where they are and how their family is and make decisions based upon what could potentially be the worst of circumstances.

Q Thank you very much.

ADM. PAPP: You're welcome.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you, sir. Anything else?

Q I have one. This is Peter again.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Admiral, you mentioned the COOP, and St. Louis as being the location, and that you all did a drill earlier. What lessons have been learned either through the drill or in the latest actual implementation of the COOP in terms of command and control and continuity of operations?

ADM. PAPP: Well, I think first of all -- now I was not here in Atlantic Area when they did the COOP exercise. I was chief of staff of the Coast Guard when that occurred, and it was a nationwide exercise. And I actually COOPed from Coast Guard headquarters up to Martinsburg, West Virginia. So that was my experience during that particular exercise. I can comment on that personally. And -- but I have also been out to St. Louis to see the facilities, because as chief of staff I was paying for them. And -- and I know what we've got out there.

What we've -- what we've found I think some of the general lessons learned is, first of all, we are a heck of a lot better than we were three, four, or five years ago, because under most -- under most circumstances three, four, five years ago, you didn't have places to go to. We hadn't even thought about it, and -- and we just would have to wait, sometimes for weeks, for power to be restored, and to get people back into buildings.

Isabel really taught us a lot of lessons. Because I was in Coast Guard headquarters back then, and as you might recall, Coast Guard headquarters got shut down for weeks afterwards except for a few individuals as we tried to restore the building. So we learned from that. We -- we started looking for places to COOP to. St. Louis was identified as a good location, and a big enough building that we actually can use for multiple scenarios, and multiple staffs, if we had to. But it's a good location for any one of our districts to -- to COOP to if they have to.



I think what we are learning as we go along is, we probably have to continue to invest in the site, increase our capability to deal with classified information -- we have limited capability out there now, and I think we have to make that more robust. And, you know, we learn small lessons every time we do it, whether -- you know, whether -- ranging from making sure we have enough hotel rooms reserved and have people to process orders, reassigned accounting data and other things to deal with before we go out there.

So you know that's part of the exercise process is to learn these things, and then when you do the real thing, you get lessons from that as well and you continue to grow and learn and make improvements as you go along.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. We are about out of time here. Do you have anything, any final comments for us, sir?

ADM. PAPP: I just appreciate the opportunity. It's great to be able to talk to folks about what the Coast Guard is doing. I'm obviously very proud of our folks, our shipmates, that are out there doing -- (audio break). I always ask for continued support for the Coast Guard. (Audio break) -- that I described to you right up front that goes from the Rocky Mountains to the Persian Gulf. I've got 21,000 active duty people that are doing the job out there, and there are police forces for major cities in this country that have 20,000 uniformed people doing a job just for a city. I've got 21,000 out there doing the 11 Coast Guard mission areas over that huge geographic area.

Granted, we've got force multipliers like our Coast Guard auxiliary, our reservists, and our civilians, but it's a big job, and it's a challenge. And usually we do so well in like operations like Katrina because we can flow and move forces around. But we often create the misperception that we can do it on a sustained basis. But the truth is, we don't have very good bench strength. So we do our best, and we hope that the public understands and acknowledges that the Coast Guard does a great job, but it is a small service. And we look to have them rally for our support whenever Congress is considering our appropriations and support at that end.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much. Vice Admiral Robert Papp, he's commander of Coast Guard -- excuse me, Coast Guard Atlantic Area. Thank you for joining us for the Bloggers Roundtable today. We appreciate it very much.

ADM. PAPP: Well, thank you for the opportunity.

MR. HOLT: All right. Hopefully we can speak to you again.

END.