



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®  
New Orleans District

# RIVERSIDE

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JUNE 2008

**Employee  
emergency  
preparedness**                      **2008  
hurricane season**

**The de-authorization of MRGO**

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June 2008  
Vol. 21 No. 3

Commander  
Col. Alvin B. Lee

Public Affairs Chief  
Maj. Timothy Kurgan

Editor  
Ricky Boyett



**On the cover:** A merger of an image of MRGO during construction and recent aerial photograph.

**Winner:** The "J" Award, the Department of the Army journalism honor, 2000 and 2003.

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# Knowledge is power; *transparency is the key*

*"If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed; if you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed."* – Mark Twain

*Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.* - Martin Fischer

**O**penness and simplification is the only way we can empower the community with an understanding of what's going around them. We need to be available to help them understand what we're doing, where we're headed and what their risks are now and into the future.

How do we do that? *First, we empower ourselves.*

With the sheer amount of work moving through the district, it's difficult to find the time to look beyond our own projects. But together, we need to make a concerted effort to explore all aspects of the New Orleans

District, the Hurricane Protection Office, and Task Force Hope so that we each have a better understanding of the bigger picture, and how our efforts impact the local communities that we serve, we live, and we work in.

To help you do that, we are retooling *Riverside* to make it a timely and relevant communication tool for keeping all of our team members informed about the great work our expanded team is doing and to discuss the difficult topics we all face daily.

As you've all heard me say before, our first weapon for reducing risk is communication. By continuing to communicate with each other, we can set the record straight.

We have held over 70 public meetings in the Greater New Orleans area to discuss the proposed projects that we are doing as part of the Greater New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System to provide the citizens of Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and St. Charles Parishes with 100-year protection by 2011. We are using these public meetings as opportunities to provide open and transparent communications directly to the public and allow the public to interact one on one and ask questions on complex issues that we deal with daily. As these meetings have evolved over time, we have incorporated the lessons learned to increase the knowledge of the people that we serve. For, Example, these public meetings now have an "open house" portion that facilitates an

open interchange of ideas and information.

We have recently worked with TFH, HPO, and ERDC to develop a short video that explains the Greater New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System and the progress that is being made on the system. Additionally, at our recent Emergency Preparedness Day event at Audubon Park we rolled out our new status maps of the risk reduction system to the public. I encourage each of you to view the map on our internet at <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps/100yr-design-map.html>. The video will be posted as soon as the final updates are made. Please look for opportunities to use this video and the status maps to communicate all of the great work that our combined teams have accomplished over the past three years and the risk that remains in the overall project. Thanks for all that you do!

## Essayons!

Col. Al Lee



Scott Riecke



# It's hurricane season Are you prepared?

by Amanda Jones

**I**t's June again and that means our personal hurricane preparations should be complete. But for those who are new to the area and aren't sure how to get prepared, and for the local loafers who have yet to prepare, you're in luck. Since there currently aren't any hurricanes heading our way, it's not too late to start getting ready and *Riverside* is going to help.

## Safe Haven

The first thing to understand is that Safe Haven is not guaranteed, so don't rely on it in your planning.

Safe Haven is a Department of Defense program established by Congress to cover pay, travel and lodging expenses for DOD employees forced to evacuate from their normal duty station. There are two basic requirements for district employees to receive Safe Haven coverage.

First, the evacuation must be ordered by the installation commander or anyone above the commander with proper authorization, such as

the Mississippi Valley Division commander or the chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The second requirement is that whoever orders the evacuation must also authorize Safe Haven.

Other important points to remember are the following:

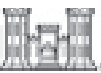
- Even when the district commander directs employees to comply with local government evacuations, it does not guarantee Safe Haven allowances.
- Employees who choose not to follow the commander's official order to evacuate will not receive Safe Haven allowances.
- There are authorized evacuation locations, but employees and their families may evacuate to any location in the United States (excluding Alaska and Hawaii).
- Safe Haven benefits will be either the actual cost or the rate at the authorized location - whichever is less.

## Have a plan

This brings us to the next important point - have an evacuation plan. Decide in advance where you plan to evacuate. Then, pick up a copy of "Louisiana Citizen Awareness &

### *Important Numbers to have:*

- Employee Information Center .....1-800-522-5672  
(wait for the operator, then dial 1-5874)
- District Main Number .....1-800-362-3412
- District EOC..... 1-877-533-5224
- Vicksburg Employee Information Center..... 1-601-631-5874
- Louisiana State Police.....1-800-469-4828
- Gov. Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness..... 1-225-925-7500



Disaster Evacuation Guide” for the metropolitan contraflow plan. These can be found in your local stores and gas stations, or you can call the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness at 1-225-925-7500 to get a copy. This will help you plan your evacuation route.

## Family disaster supply kit

Next, get your family disaster supply kit. Your kit should include, at the very least, a three day supply of the following:

- Water (one gallon per person per day)
- Nonperishable food
- First aid supplies
- Emergency supplies such as flashlights, battery-operated radio, batteries, rubber boots, etc.
- Special items such as infant supplies and prescription medicine
- Important family documents such as insurance policies, bank statements, important telephone numbers and an inventory of household goods.
- If you plan to stay in a shelter, be sure to also pack blankets and pillows for each family member.
- work items:
  - o CAC
  - o IMPAC card
  - o Travel credit card
  - o CEFMS card
  - o Passwords

Be sure to inspect your kit every six months, ensuring your stored items are still fresh. Store your kit in a convenient place and ensure it fits in your car.

Corps employees should also ensure their contact information is up to date in the Employee Status Database, which can be found on the intranet under “Employee Information.” Also, employees and supervisors should know how to contact each other, so office contact lists should be kept up to date as well.

All employees should have the phone number to the employee information center as well. Employees who call in within 72 hours after an evacuation are guaranteed continued pay.

It’s also a good idea to make a family communications plan. Designate a friend or family member outside the state as a point of contact. As many of us learned during Katrina, most local numbers were not working, so ensure all family members know how to contact the designated person.

Everyone, however, should assess their personal needs to determine how to prepare for an emergency. For those who choose to board their windows, check with your local home improvement stores for “how to” clinics. If you’re evacuating with pets, ensure the place you plan to stay can accommodate them.

After reading this, you should feel somewhat equipped to get your hurricane plans started. Just remember that hurricane season is from June 1 to Nov. 30, so reassess your family’s requirements as needed.



# Addressing the season:

## Communicating as a team

**W**hen the Gulf Coast enters a hurricane season, local and national interest in the progress and effectiveness of the Greater New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System increases significantly. During this 2008 hurricane season, which marks the midpoint in the HSDRRS six-year development time frame, this increased awareness is expected to be even further amplified.

Throughout this pivotal season, the third since Katrina, maintaining a strong communications link with our stakeholders is a vital component in achieving our immediate and long-term goals of reducing risk in the area. In our efforts to strengthen this bridge, it is important to remember that every employee is an integral component of all of our communication efforts.

### Everyone's a spokesperson

Although the majority of us will never deliver a presentation or be interviewed for the Discovery Channel, we are all frequently called upon to be a spokesperson for the Corps. Everyday, we are asked questions by family, friends, and neighbors. Because they know us, many of these individuals seek us out instead of attending the public meetings or open houses. And each time we answer one of their questions, we are, in effect, speaking on behalf of the Corps.

This daily interaction with the residents of the Greater New Orleans area can be a powerful tool in helping increase the reach of our communication efforts. However, to successfully take advantage of this opportunity, we must first strive to strengthen

our communication between each other. Only with a well-informed internal audience can we hope to improve the awareness of our activities at the community level.

The 2008 Hurricane Season Strategic Communications Plan is an excellent starting place for building this internal communication. Within these pages, one finds an excellent source for what we have accomplished, our works in progress, and our future projects. Moreover, each employee can gain insight into our communication objectives for the season and how we intend to fulfill these goals.

By familiarizing oneself with the strat com, you can improve as you fulfill your duties as an informal neighborhood spokesperson for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. You may even be able to work a key message or two into your conversations.

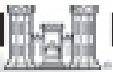


USACE photo  
Wade Habshey and Soheila Holley collaborate during MVN's media tour earlier this month

### The blueprint

The main objectives of the 2008 hurricane season is not only progress toward the completion of the system, but the overall long-term goal of becoming more open and transparent than ever when working with the media and general public. In other words, we will work to become viewed by the general public and special interests as an organization eager to share our information without any hidden agenda.

Accomplishing this goal requires that we make our progress more visible, deliver the best and most up-to-date information to our stakeholders, and bolster confidence among the general public that the Corps is the best place to receive the most current and accurate information. Most importantly, achieving our objectives ensures that we will have successfully helped people understand their risk in living in the Greater New Orleans area.



We will continue our efforts to seek out and maximize any opportunity to reach our target audiences through speeches, displays, media interactions, community meetings, and partnerships. During these events, we shall provide our stakeholders with the best available information.

Along with providing the most accurate and up-to-date information, the Corps will also use these public venues to celebrate the progress and

accomplishments made during the development of the HSDRRS. Keeping the public informed of completed projects improves awareness while building confidence in the current levels of protection.

However, the Corps' campaign to become an open and transparent organization will not end with the provision of valuable information. Our communications team will also directly engage the media and public to correct any inaccurate or

*(Hurricane Season, Continued, pg. 10)*

## A brief overview of the HSDRRS

### Past

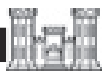
- New Orleans is the first city in the nation to have a comprehensive system assessment of risk
- Repaired, rebuilt, and strengthened 256 miles of levees and floodwalls, including 22.7 miles of new levees, 2.3 miles of new floodwalls, and 3 gated closure structures
- 48 awarded contracts, totaling \$86 million, have been completed
- awarded 47 construction contracts worth \$1.4 billion
- Pumps at the three outfall canals have about a 16,000 cfs total pumping capacity
- As of June 2008, we have hosted over 70 public meetings in five parishes

### Present

- The greater New Orleans HSDRRS is stronger and better now than pre-Katrina
- Awarded \$700 million IHNC surge reduction contract, the linchpin of the HSDRRS and the largest design-build civil works project in Corps history
- Currently 20 miles of levee and 2.5 miles of floodwall are under construction on the West Bank
- Flood protection levels are improved, at or near 100-year level of protection in most locations in the Lake Pontchartrain Orleans Lakefront area
- Nine SELA contracts awarded in Jefferson Parish, the last of which should be completed by late summer of 2009

### Future

- Over the next 6 months, will award 24 contracts and advertise 25 more contracts with a combined value of \$2 billion
- Construction of IHNC surge barrier will begin in fall of 2008 and be completed by 2011
- Construction of a rock structure for the total closure of MRGO will be completed by the start of the 2009 hurricane season
- Partnering with the state of Louisiana in the analysis and design of a full range of risk reduction measures which will span comprehensively across all of coastal Louisiana. Plans will be presented in November 2008 and a plan will be ready for coordination in December 2008.



# Saying goodbye to MRGO

## A look into the life of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet

By Kelly Stoll

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005, the New Orleans metropolitan area suffered widespread flooding and wind damage. St. Bernard Parish was one of the hardest hit areas.

Many people believe that the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) served as a “hurricane highway” and was a direct cause of flooding in St. Bernard Parish, the 9th Ward and New Orleans East. Many residents and some elected officials called for immediately closing of the MRGO.

Others, however, depend on the MRGO for commercial navigation and for recreational and commercial fishing and shrimping. Most users of the MRGO value it as an easier, quicker outlet to and from the Gulf of Mexico.



USACE photo

ends, it is important to remember its history as a lesson for many of the Corps projects.

### The beginning

In the 1940s, Port of New Orleans officials as well as local and national elected officials, requested that the federal government build a shorter navigation route from New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico. These leaders, along with the state government, envisioned two purposes for this channel - a safer, more efficient route to the Gulf and economic development spurred by expanded navigation capabilities in the vicinity of the new channel.

The vision included expanded port facilities and a new “Centroport,” a vast import/export complex complete with warehousing, a cargo airport, and road and rail connections. The Centroport was planned for the area that is now the north and south shores of the Almonaster-Michoud area of Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes, and the area on the west side of the

Left: Construction on the MRGO reached the midpoint of the ten-year long project in 1963.

MRGO in St. Bernard Parish.

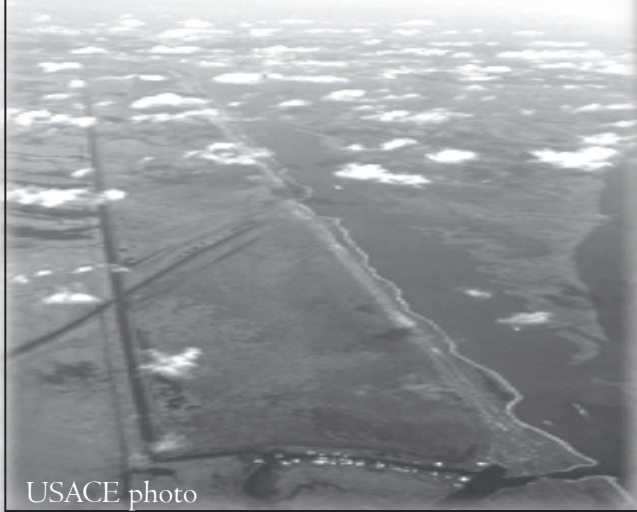
The Louisiana Legislature of 1944 officially empowered the governor “to aid and assist the federal government in obtaining and completing...a tidewater canal from New Orleans to the Gulf on the eastern side of the Mississippi River...” The U.S. Congress authorized channel construction through the River and Harbor Act of 1956, and authorized the channel to be built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Construction began in 1958 and concluded 10 years later. The

On June 5, 2008, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works forwarded the Chief of Engineers’ recommendation to Congress and the MRGO from the GIWW to the Gulf was officially de-authorized as a federal navigation project. For more than 40 years, the channel provided a link for the shipping industry. As the MRGO era





Aerial Photograph encompassing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet from Bayou Dupre to Bayou Bienvenue.



new channel was called the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet.

### Recent conditions

Shallow-draft and deep-draft navigation vessels carrying a wide variety of commodities, including petroleum products, chemicals, forest products, manufactured goods, machinery, and food and farm products used the MRGO. In addition, the oil and gas industry has relied on the MRGO to service offshore oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico.

Hurricane Katrina caused shoaling in the MRGO channel which limited its depth to 22 feet, and thus restricted deep-draft access. Many deep-draft reliant businesses were severely impacted. Two companies chose to relocate while others are either trying to recover or planning relocation.

### Coming to an end

“As the final report moves to Congress, thus de-authorizing the channel, it marks a significant milestone in the Corps’ history,” said New Orleans District Commander Col. Alvin Lee. “We are ending almost 40 years of shipping on the channel. In addition, we are

## MRGO at a Glance

- Records show that construction of ship canal was considered as far back as 1852.
- MRGO was authorized by the US Congress in 1956, with construction beginning in 1958 and completed in 1968 at a total cost of \$92 million in federal funds
- Construction included 311 million yards of dredged volume
- MRGO is 37 miles shorter to the Gulf than the Mississippi River route.
- The original authorized dimensions:
  - 650’ surface width
  - 500’ bottom width
  - 36’ controlling depth
  - 76 miles in length
- Statistics show that the use of the MRGO steadily increased in terms of tonnage until its peak in 1978; and in terms of the number of vessels, it peaked in 1982. Over the last 20 years, use of the MRGO has generally been decreasing
- From 1985 to 2003, dredged material was used beneficially, creating an average of approx. 16 acres per year in the inland reach wetlands, and approx. 21 acres per year on Breton Island
- Direct costs, fully funded by the federal government, have totaled over \$580 million since 1958
- Congress has currently appropriated \$75 million that will be used toward shoreline protection of the MRGO and Lake Borgne area.
- MRGO will be closed with a rock structure just south of Bayou La Loutre near Hopedale, LA. The structure will be 12’ wide at the top, 450’ wide at the bottom, and require 391,500 tons of stone. Work is expected to be completed prior to the 2009 hurricane season.

(MRGO continued, page 10)



*(HURRICANE SEASON, Continued from page 7)*

misleading information that may arise.

Finally, in all of the Corps' communication efforts, we will reinforce individual risk responsibility. During each outreach effort, we will reiterate that risk will always exist for the residents of this area. Although we will stress that the HSDRRS is stronger now than pre-Katrina, we must emphasize that there can never be a zero-risk protection system. We can assist in the collective effort necessary for buying down risk by providing information on which our stakeholders can make risk-informed decisions.

## **The Handbook**

Public perception of an organization improves when the employees are believed to have a vested interest in its success. In addition to a better understanding of our goals, one of the ways to improve our public image is by increasing our knowledge of the Corps' works. By familiarizing ourselves with the past, present, and future work on the HSDRRS, we are

demonstrating that we are an organization in which everyone is committed to improving the safety of our community.

Furthermore, when speaking with friends and neighbors, accurate and up-to-date examples of our efforts strengthen your ideas. For example, reinforce the Corps' commitment to expeditiously providing the Greater New Orleans area with unparalleled levels of storm surge protection by mentioning that we completed the interim closure structures and substantial pumping capacity of the three outfall canals in eight months (a task that would normally take three to five years).

The foundation for building a strong communication bridge between the Corps and the general public is first strengthening our own internal communication. In doing so, we will create a unified team working toward an important single cause, increasing public safety and awareness in Southeast Louisiana. It is this group effort that will allow us to achieve our goals of delivering accurate and timely information to every affected resident in the area.

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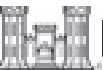
*(MRGO, continued from page 9)*

working with our partners in state government, to continue a commitment to coastal restoration here in south Louisiana."

The report recommends the construction of a closure structure made of rock just south of Bayou La Loutre near Hopedale, La. The structure is to be designed and constructed at full federal expense, with the state providing lands, easements and rights of way as well as operation and maintenance responsibilities upon completion. The structure will consist of approximately 400,000 tons of rock and will completely block the MRGO channel. The work on the closure structure is expected to be completed before the beginning of the 2009 hurricane season.

## **Moving Forward**

The Corps is currently developing a comprehensive ecosystem restoration plan. This plan will cover areas affected by the MRGO. The Recommendations from the plan would be integrated in the Corps' Louisiana Coastal Area Program, which is already working to ensure the sustainable future of Louisiana's coast.



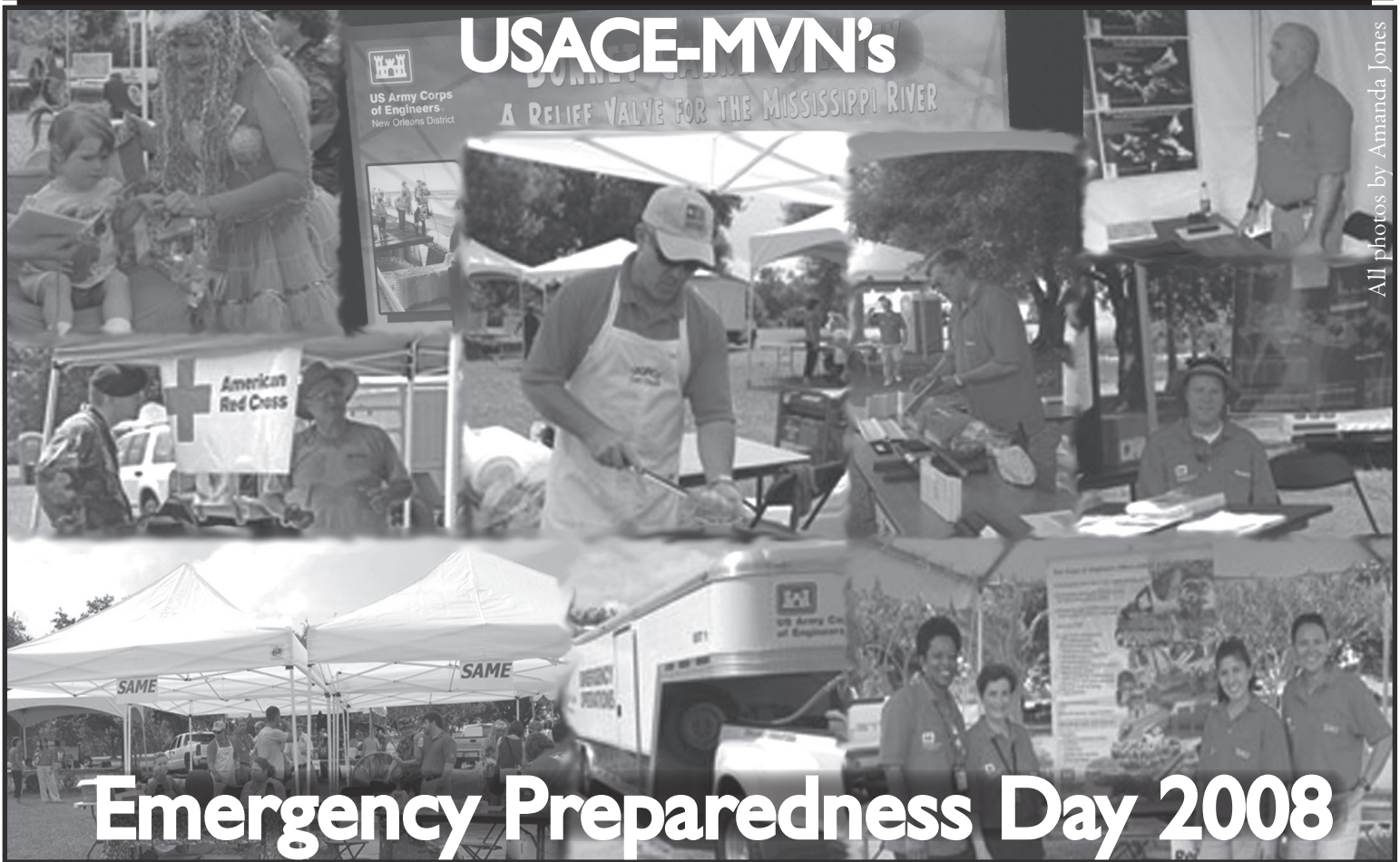
# GIBBS NAMED WHEELER "CREWMEMBER OF THE YEAR"

**T**heodore L. "Teddy" Gibbs (OD-YM), Cook aboard the U.S. Dredge *Wheeler*, was honored June 11 as the "Crewmember of the Year", in front of an enthusiastic Wheeler crew. This award is presented every year to a crewmember selected by management who deserves special recognition for demonstrating the abilities, values, work ethic, and personal drive.

Capt. Morehouse presented the award to Mr. Gibbs at a crew safety meeting, stating that "Teddy is one of those individuals who does everything with a quest for excellence, who leads by example, and who is always cheerful, positive, and honestly caring about his shipmates. He's been just great with everything he does." Chief Engineer Jerry Winter, in nominating Mr. Gibbs, wrote, "He makes the entire crew better."



Courtesy Photo



All photos by Amanda Jones

# Postcards from Iraq

**“Most rewarding experience ever”**

By Emily Mullet, Administrative Assistant  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region South District, Iraq

Hi, I'm Emily.

I deployed to Iraq one year ago. It was one of those 'just-do-it-now and think-about-it-later' spontaneous decisions. Before I knew it, I found myself packing my bags, saying good-bye to family and friends, and starting my adventure both nervous and excited, not really knowing what to expect.

What I found was similar to any other Corps family that I've worked with. They

are the same worldwide -- a great team of experienced people with positive attitudes and as friendly as can be. This past year went by like the blink of an eye. Maybe it was because of the 7-day work week or maybe it was just because I enjoyed it that much.

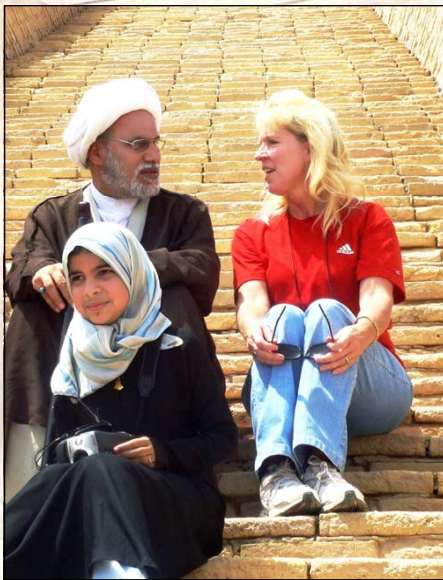
Who are these people at GRS? They are a team of multifunctional professionals who focus on solutions. They are a superb staff responsible for variety of projects improving essential services throughout southern Iraq -- their efforts are resulting in new medical facilities, more classrooms, water treatment plants and distribution lines, road paving, courthouses, etc. They work side-by-side with Iraqi engineers and others. They provide much-needed jobs to local Iraqis who report to work every day with the hope that their children and grandchildren will have a brighter future.

I'm so proud to have been part of this historic mission. I encourage you to consider volunteering -- you will find it to be one of the most rewarding experiences ever, as I have ... so rewarding that I plan to return again.

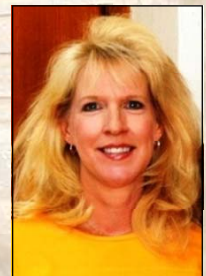
Essayons!

(P.S. to Matthew: Will be home soon, son!  
Miss you. Love you - Mom)

Emily H. Mullet  
New Orleans District



Emily Mullet talks to a Sheik on the steps of the Ziggurat at Ur, an ancient structure built during the third millennium B.C. It's located at Tallil Air Base in southern Iraq.



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