



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Mississippi Valley Division



Corps Hurricane Response

Task Force Hope Status Report

June 12, 2007

New Chief of Engineers Visits New Orleans

*“We’re Going to Protect
This City to the
100-Year Level by 2011 or
Break Our Backs Trying....”*

- Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp



By Susan Spaht

On May 17, Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp became the 52nd Chief of Engineers and Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He assumed the position from Lt. Gen. Carl A. Strock who retired after 36 years of military service.

On May 29, the new Chief of Engineers kept a promise. He made his first official trip as Chief a visit to New Orleans. On his three-day tour of the area, he vowed to restore public trust in the Corps of Engineers and restore its credibility, and to meet its commitment to improve the hurricane protection system to the 100-year standard by 2011.

“The number one domestic priority of the Corps of Engineers,” said the new Chief, “is the restoration and construction of the hurricane protection system.”

Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp graduated



Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, the new Chief of Engineers and Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, greets employees of the New Orleans District on May 31 during his first official trip as Chief. (USACE Photo by Anne Marino)

from the U.S. Military Academy in 1972. He earned a Master of Science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan, and a Master of Business Administration degree from Long Island University in New York. He is a registered professional engineer.

Before accepting the position as 52nd Chief of Engineers, Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp was the Commanding General, U.S. Army Accessions Command and Deputy Commanding General for Initial Military Training at Fort Monroe, Va. He has held numerous command assignments including the 326th Engineer Battalion,

101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

During his recent visit to New Orleans, Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp visited hurricane-damaged areas, inspected the Corps’ construction sites and met with local elected officials and community groups to see first-hand what

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“The hurricane protection system is the number one domestic priority of the Corps of Engineers....”

- Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp



Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp takes questions during a press conference at the 17th Street Canal on his first official visit to New Orleans as Chief of Engineers, May 31. (USACE Photos by Michael Maples)

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

New Chief of Engineers Visits New Orleans for First-hand Look at Hurricane Protection System



Senior Project Manager Jim St. Germain, left, gives the Chief a tour of the 17th Street Canal pumps and gates.

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has happened to this area and what needs to be done.

“There’s such great promise and hope for this city to get back on its feet,” the general said, “and to be even better than it was.”



To read the full biography of Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp, go to this Web site: <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/releases/lgtvan.htm>



Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp, seated right, meets with officials from Plaquemines Parish during his recent visit to New Orleans. At left, seated, are Col. Jeffrey Bedey, Commander of the Hurricane Protection Office; and (partially hidden) Karen Durham-Aguilera, Director of Task Force Hope. At center, seated, is Parish President Billy Nungesser; and far right, partially hidden, is Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division.

American Society of Civil Engineers Issues Independent Hurricane Report
Lessons Learned from Katrina Can Make Nation Safer

The article below is an excerpted re-print of a news release issued by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

In a report issued June 1, 2007 by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), experts who have studied Hurricanes Katrina and Rita made public their opinions about what went wrong in New Orleans—and why.

“It’s so easy to react to armchair theories and colorful sound-bites,” said David Daniel, PhD, P.E., president of the University of Texas at Dallas and chair of the ASCE **Hurricane Katrina External Review Panel**. “In our report, we offer a rational basis from which the nation can move forward.”

Experts from the ASCE External Review Panel say findings from their research efforts conducted after Hurricane Katrina, in some cases, challenge conventional wisdom. The conclusions of the research also hold important lessons that extend beyond New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to affect:

Areas protected by levee systems throughout the United States;

Hurricane-prone coastal communities;

Population centers located in areas at high risk from natural disasters including flood-

ing, wildfires, and earthquakes; and

Large-scale and complex engineering projects or agencies responsible for major infrastructure.

The ASCE External Review Panel was established at the request of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to conduct real-time expert peer review of the USACE’s Inter-

“The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers invites internal and external evaluation of its operations, its processes and its work. The Corps embraces change and pledges to be open and responsive as we meet the challenges and changing needs of the public we serve.”

- Karen Durham-Aguilera
 Director, Task Force Hope

agency Performance Evaluation Task Force (IPET). The IPET published a nearly 7,000-page report documenting its findings. In addition, reports have been issued by research teams organized by the University of California, Berkeley, with funding from the National Science Foundation, and by Louisiana State University.

Taken together, these reports represent a body of scientific research that can provide clear direction for national and local authorities charged with protecting communities from natural and man-made disasters. The External Review Panel warns, however, that science may be overshadowed by lingering misper-

ceptions and unsubstantiated theories.

Separating Fact from Fiction

Examples of some of the commonly held misperceptions related to Hurricane Katrina and its devastating effects on New Orleans include:

PERCEPTION: Hurricane Katrina was only a Category 3 hurricane at land-fall—how could it have overwhelmed the levees?

REALITY: Hurricane Katrina was one of the largest and strongest storms to hit the coast of the United States. As Hurricane Katrina crossed the Gulf of Mexico from Florida, it rapidly gained strength and grew to a Category 5 hurricane offshore creating a tremendous storm surge that was carried onshore. The surge level in coastal Mississippi exceeded that of the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004.

As Hurricane Katrina approached land, it weakened to a Category 3 hurricane. However, the storm remained very large, and the surge from the offshore Category 5 was immense. The storm surge was the cause of the wide-spread flooding and damage in New Orleans.

PERCEPTION: Without the levee failures, New Orleans would not have been devastated.

REALITY: During Hurricane Katrina, parts of New Orleans—a bowl par-

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tially below sea-level—were inundated with 13.6 inches of rainfall in 24 hours. The storm surge along the Lake Pontchartrain lakeshore was about 12 feet above sea level.

The IPET developed models to compare deaths and property damage caused by the breaches in the hurricane protection system to scenarios in which the floodwalls and levees remained intact but overtopping occurred, though the pumping system did not operate.

The conclusions? Even without breaching, Hurricane Katrina's rainfall and surge overtopping would have caused extensive and severe flooding—and the worst loss of life and property ever experienced in New Orleans.

As of August 2, 2006, 1,118 New Orleanians were confirmed dead and 135 people were still missing as a consequence of Hurricane Katrina. By comparison, the IPET estimated that approximately 686 people would have died—even if the system had not breached. The IPET estimated that approximately \$21 billion in property damage occurred as a result of Hurricane Katrina. By comparison, \$17 billion worth of property damage would have occurred even if the hurricane protection system had not breached.

PERCEPTION: The Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (MRGO) is a “Hurricane Highway.”

REALITY: The myth that MRGO, a rarely used shipping channel, is a

hurricane highway was widely reported after Hurricane Katrina, and continues today. It goes something like this: during a hurricane, storm surge from the Gulf of Mexico is amplified within the long section of the MRGO and funneled straight toward New Orleans.

Not so, according to complex computer models that re-created storm conditions. The reality is that for large storms, the channel of the MRGO simply cannot carry enough water to cause flooding. On the contrary, the modeling indicated that following Katrina, the MRGO enhanced the post-storm drainage of surge waters from flooded New Orleans back out to the Gulf.

The computer modeling did indicate



Engineers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers review plans at the London Avenue Outfall Canal during a regular check of on-site construction work. USACE Photo)

that for smaller hurricanes, the geometry of the MRGO and nearby canals might have the effect of increasing the storm surge by a small amount (less than half a foot).

While there may be valid reasons for and benefits to closing the channel, the false perception that MRGO is a hurricane highway should not influ-

ence that decision.

PERCEPTION: The hurricane protection system failed, in part, due to malfeasance during construction.

REALITY: “Malfeasance” in the construction industry refers to intentional unlawful acts such as substituting inferior materials or using substandard construction techniques.

The engineering studies performed by the IPET and others were not criminal or forensic investigations. However, the researchers found no indication of malfeasance in the constructed projects for those sections of levee that were carefully investigated. On the contrary, actual conditions (called “as built” conditions) were consistent with the design and construction specifications.

“The flaws that led to the system’s failure,” says Daniel, “can be primarily attributed to questionable engineering and management decisions resulting from external pressure, cost concerns, and flawed system management—not construction malfeasance.”

Lessons Learned

During the course of its work, the External Review Panel developed a deep un-

derstanding of the underlying issues that led to this tragedy. Recognizing their obligation to share these findings so others may learn from this tragedy, the panel developed a list of lessons learned and associated calls to action. This report is published in its entirety on the ASCE Web site: www.asce.org



JCAC Holds Third Joint Press Conference on June 1



The Joint Communications Advisory Council holds its third press conference at the Sheraton Hotel on June 1, the start of hurricane season 2007. The JCAC is a coordinated effort of communications professionals representing agencies involved in the evacuation and/or protection of citizens in a tropical storm event. Representing the Corps of Engineers were Karen Durham-Aguilera, (second from left on the dais) the Director of Task Force Hope; and Col. Jeffrey Bedey (center, facing dais), Commander of the Hurricane Protection Office; and Col. Richard Wagenaar (right side of Bedey), Commander of the New Orleans District. (USACE Photo)

Public Meetings Planned

The New Orleans District Corps of Engineers will be conducting a continuing series of public meetings in the New Orleans area to present the current status of the environmental compliance effort, provide updates on construction projects, and answer questions on the proposed 100-year hurricane protection system for the West Bank and the Lake Pontchartrain areas.

The purpose of these meetings is to keep the public informed on the progress being made by the Corps. The next two meetings will begin at 7:00 p.m. at the following locations:



June 12

Orleans East Bank Projects

University of New Orleans
Lindy Boggs Conference Center
Lakeshore Drive @ Elysian Fields
New Orleans, LA

June 13

Harvey/Westwego Projects

Westwego City Council Chambers
419 Avenue A
Westwego, LA

Contact Information

New Orleans District

(504) 862-2201

Task Force Hope

(504) 862-1836

Hurricane Protection Office

(504) 862-2126

Louisiana Recovery Field Office

(504) 681-2317

The *Status Report Newsletter* supports the information program for Task Force Hope and its stakeholders. It also serves as the primary tool for accurately transmitting the hurricane recovery work to stakeholders.

This is an online publication and open to public distribution.

This issue and past issues can be found at:
www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps

Comments and questions may be sent to the

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Status Report Newsletter

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Pump Capacity Report

17th Street Canal.....approx. 5,200 cfs
London Ave. Canal...approx. 2,800 cfs
Orleans Ave. Canal....approx. 2,200 cfs

As of June 12, 2007

Note: The Status Report Newsletter will give regular reports on the pump capacity of the three temporary outfall canals under construction. For more details, please visit:

www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps

