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Mississippi Valley Division
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Open Channels

Regional Interdependence Business Model

by Leo Phillips
Acting Director, Regional Business

Regional *What* Model?

Many times we each get so engrossed in pursuing initiatives that we forget that no one else is aware of what's being done. I fear that we did that with the strategic direction of the Mississippi Valley Division. It's ironic that probably the most important thing that should be communicated has been most withheld – the concept of the "*Regional Interdependence Business Model*."

In summary up front, the Regional Interdependence Business Model (RIBM) is the plan for our future method of operating in the Mississippi Valley Division. It is based on the concept of being able to bring to bear the full resources of the region (all six districts and the Mississippi Valley Division) on any service needed by our customers. A premise of the model is that this region will have six districts providing full service to customers within their geographic boundaries. In cases in which the volume of need for a certain type expertise is insufficient in any one district to support that function in-residence, the district has available all the resources of the other five districts and MVD to address the need.

History

How did we come to decide to deploy this RIBM? It was certainly not a flippant decision made in a vacuum.

In depth, earnest thought by a lot of folks went into it. The atmosphere created originally by the USACE 2012 initiative prompted the leadership of MVD to consider alternatives to our business model, or concept of operating, in 2004. The Senior Leaders Conference (SLC) held in New Orleans in November 2004 set the stage for the change. As a result of that conference, Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division, tasked the region's leadership to develop three alternative courses of action for a Regional Business Center business model. This tasking became known as SLC Task #3 (there were a total of five major tasks that resulted from the 2004 SLC.) Also from that same SLC came Task #4 to develop an implementation plan for whichever business model was to be chosen.

Over the course of the next three months, the Regional Management Board (RMB) pursued SLC Task #3 with vigor. On 7 March 2005, the Regional Command Council (RCC) approved a recommendation of the RMB for the "Regional Interdependence" business model. Other alternatives considered ranged from regional functional directors for each functional group, to complete regional organization with commanders serving as business line managers. The decision on the RIBM was unanimous. The chosen model included these basic provisions:

- **Organized around customers and project delivery**
- **Technical competence is maintained regionally IF "core" staffing cannot be maintained in one or more districts based on workload**
- **The PM resides in geographic district & manages project funds**
- **District functional chiefs provide resources from within district or region and are responsible for quality control**
- **Functional boards coordinate regional resources**
- **Support organizations structured for regional efficiencies**
- **Geographic District Commander responsible to the customer**
- **Bottom Line: Bring the resources of the entire region to bear on project delivery**

(see RIBM, next page)

-RIBM-

Once this milestone decision was made on March 7, 2005, the development of a plan to implement this decision began. On May 17, 2005 the RCC approved the implementation plan and SLC Task #4 was complete.

That, of course, started the real work to execute the implementation plan for this new way of operating. The implementation plan consisted of these six goal areas:

Goal 1 Manage the workforce regionally
Goal 2 Execute projects regionally
Goal 3 Manage support functions regionally
Goal 4 Institutionalize the regional interdependence business model
Goal 5 Align MVD HQ with the model
Goal 6 Measure success

After a good start gained toward execution of the plan in Summer 2005, we all know that the worst natural disaster to hit this nation occurred in the form of Hurricane Katrina. Our efforts toward implementation were not derailed but were delayed as the entire region mobilized to address this immediate need.

We can now measure time by Before Katrina (BK) and After Katrina (AK). BK we launched many actions toward becoming regional. A method was refined and implemented to directly relate the size of our workforce to the amount of income to the region. Functional Groups began more earnest coordination of staffing needs and proceeded to attempt standardization of processes and methods across districts. Functional groups also worked toward identifying a "core workforce" that would be the base staffing necessary to maintain technical competence but remain nimble and agile for the future. Project Managers began to open their eyes to assets in other districts to magnify their ability to execute projects. Regional overhead rates helped us to think more regionally and facilitate more workload sharing. We gathered steam.

Katrina hit and while we did use the progress to that point to augment our ability to respond, our progress toward implementation of the new business model slowed.

AK, at another milestone RCC/RMB meeting in Destin, FL, on Feb. 2, 2006, we regained steam. The RMB began to refocus on the Task #4 Implementation plan.

Are we regional yet?

Since Feb 2006, steady progress has been made toward implementation of the RIBM.

We continue to work through our functional groups to budget regionally, regionally coordinate staffing levels, share workload regionally, and measure our progress as a region.

Central to the continued move toward regionalization and under the auspices of the implementation plan goals 1 and 2, is a new phrase beginning to buzz – "regional proponency." This is a regionalization of sub-functions (like structural engineering capability, for example) that holds to these rules:

§ Every district within the region will maintain all functional groups, (engineering, construction, planning, project management, real estate, and contracting)

§ Some sub-functions within the districts will be regionalized and provided by regional functional proponents.

(see RIBM, page 4)

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Division Engineer
Brig. Gen. Robert Crear

Editor
Karen Buehler
Public Affairs Specialist

Chief, Public Affairs
Maggie Menzies

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Send articles to:
Editor, Public Affairs Office,
U.S. Army Engineer Division,
Mississippi Valley
P.O. Box 80,
Vicksburg, MS, 39181-0080
or email to:
karen.buehler@mvd02.usace.army.mil

Generally Speaking

by Brig. Gen. Robert Crear
Commander
Mississippi Valley Division

Upon Their Shoulders

I'd like to start a series of historical vignettes. Knowledge is power and here is a bit of trivia for your situational awareness.

Did you know...

That an original member of the MRC became the 23rd President of the United States? Benjamin Harrison served as a member of the MRC from 1879 through 1881. While a member, Harrison earned a reputation of one who was greatly concerned with the legality of federal involvement in flood control. Flood control advocates in Congress even attempted to have him removed from the commission. Harrison was elected U.S. President in 1888 and served one term from 1889-1893. Oddly enough, his legacy as President stands in stark contrast to his legacy on the MRC. Harrison signed substantial appropriations for internal improvements. During his presidency, Congress, for the first time except in war, appropriated more than $1 billion for its annual expenditure, including a healthy sum for improving the nation's rivers and harbors.

That two members of the MRC helped design the modern New Orleans drainage system? In 1893 Benjamin Harrod (MRC from1879-1904) and Henry Richardson (MRC from 1904-1909) were named to the New Orleans Drainage Advisory Board. The board drafted the original plans for the city's drainage system. Harrod also served as Chief Engineer for the Drainage Commission from 1895-1902. He is also credited with designing the confederate monument in Greenwood Cemetery and for designing the plans and layout of Metairie Cemetery.

That a member of the MRC was sentenced to death? Henry Flad served as a member from 1890-1898. He was born and educated in Germany and served as a combat engineer for the Parliamentary Army during the German Republican Revolution in 1848. After the uprising was crushed, Flad received a death sentence for his role, but he fled to the safety in the United States. As a member of the MRC he pioneered the design and construction of the MRC dredging fleet.

That two original members of the MRC squared off against each other during the siege of Vicksburg? Benjamin Harrod served as the division engineer under Confederate General M.L. Smith and oversaw the preparation of fortifications at Vicksburg. Cyrus Comstock was Ulysses S. Grant's chief engineer and aide-de-camp. Harrod was later taken prison after Grant's successful siege of the Confederate stronghold.

That an MRC President made engineering history by helping to raise the *U.S.S. Maine*? In 1898 the battle *Maine* was sunk in Havana Harbor, Cuba. The loss of the ship and the 260 American servicemen on board served as a catalyst for the Spanish-American War. In 1910, Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to raise the *Maine*. Major Harley B. Ferguson, who served as MRC president from 1932-1939, was a member of the 3-man Corps of Engineers team that successfully raised the *Maine*—a truly difficult and precedent-setting engineering fete.

That the first MRC president was a genius at destroying things? Quincy A. Gillmore graduated at the top of the West Point class of 1849 and eventually earned the reputation as the preeminent 19th century authority on cement materials. During the civil war Gillmore used his knowledge of concrete, engineering and artillery to destroy several confederate fortifications; the most memorable being the former Union stronghold, Fort Sumter. Perhaps more notable was his rapid reduction of the defenses at Fort Pulaski near Savannah, which was considered by many combat engineers to be impregnable.

That President Rutherford B. Hayes had hoped to appoint James B. Eads as the first MRC president? The congressmen most responsible for drafting the original bill for the creation of the MRC envisioned their creation as a vehicle to implement Eads' ideas. One version of the bill called for the MRC membership to consist of three Corps of Engineers officers and two civilians, with the president being one of the civilians. The *St. Louis Republican* even reported that the bill was "based on the well grounded opinion that Capt. Eads will be selected president of the commission." The Senate, while respecting Eads engineering talents, remained adamant that the work authorized remain somewhat under the control of the Corps of Engineers and insisted on a military member as president. A compromise was reach that insured a Corps of Engineers officer would be president, but added a third civilian member. To prevent the possibilities of a tie vote, the compromise added a seventh member from the Coast & Geodetic Survey. Hayes hands were tied and he appointed MG Quincy Gillmore as MRC president.

How Waterproof, Louisiana, got its name? During one of the Mississippi River's great floods, the people of one rural community read a newspaper report indicating that everything in the region was inundated "except one waterproof knoll." When the flood subsided, the community relocated to that knoll and took the town took the name Waterproof. Years later, the name of the town led to the embarrassment of a reporter covering yet another flood when he reported a local tragedy under the headline "Four Waterproof People Drown."

That rice farming in Louisiana was major cause of levee breaks in the 18th and 19th century? Today most of Louisiana's rice production is carried out on irrigated lands in the southwestern part of the state, but some early rice plantations were located on the banks of the Mississippi River. Rice planters built flumes that pierced the levee system in order to transport river water into their rice paddies. After repeated levee breaks at or near the flumes, local levee boards pressed the State Board of Engineers to institute strict laws dictating specifications for the construction of flumes. By 1884, the cutting the levees for rice flumes was prohibited by state law.

-RIBM-

Engineering:

Architecture	MVR
Mechanical	MVP
Electrical	MVR
Curation	MVS

Planning:

Plan Formulation:

Major Rehab	MVR
Storm Damage Reduction	MVN
Water Supply	MVM
Rec Planning	MVR
System Nav	MVS

Economics:

Major Rehab	MVR
Storm Damage Reduction	MVN
Navigation	MVN
Regional Economics	MVP
Social Science Analysis	MVP
Flood Damage Reduction	MVN
Cost Allocation	MVN

Real Estate:

Business & Farm Relocations
MVP
Cabin Lease Management
MVR
In-lease Office Space
MVP
Agreements w/ FERC Licenses
MVP
Railroad Relocation
MVP
FUSRAP
MVS
Timber Sales
MVK
Real Property Accountability
MVR

Still other sub-functions will be appropriate for regionalization. Continued progress in this vein will be crucial to our success.

Not yet completed is the task to determine the optimum point of regionalization of support functions (Goal 3), in a manner similar to the regional proponency being achieved in the functional groups. It is a struggle to determine how to gain efficiency, effectiveness and excellence through regionalization while maintaining responsiveness for each district's needs.

Conclusion

While many of the goals and objectives of SLC Task #4 implementation plan are complete, such completion does not make us magically regional. It merely puts in place the organizational framework and initial processes for us to *become* regional.

Certainly we operate more regionally now that we did two years ago but we have a long way to go. It is clearly not easy to drag ourselves from our traditional comfort zones but the survival of our Corps requires us to apply our unfettered brain power to it. Let's do the best we collectively can to shed the shackles of resistance to change and become the innovative, relevant, ready, responsive and reliable organization we have in us!

MVD Day of Caring - 2006

Donnie Cool assembles one of the Salvation Army Angel Tree toys. Mississippi Valley Division employees have worked with the program for the past ten years, readying the distribution for children and nursing home residents in the Vicksburg area.

Larry Banks and Les Waguespack replace skid strips on the ramp at Jacobs Ladder Learning Center. Volunteers spent the day doing needed repairs around the center.

Iraq: Honored to be a part of history

By Joanne Dishmon-Gibbs

June 3, 2004, is a day I will never forget. It is the day I learned that my son, Darrin, would be deployed to Iraq. I experienced several months of heart-wrenching crying. The thought of my son being in such a violent country broke my heart. Needless to say, Darrin was never unnerved about the idea of serving his country. It's a mommy thing, I thought! Keep in mind, mothers cry when the kids get their shots, scrape a knee, go to the prom, go on a first date--we just cry for any event in our child's life.

Darrin served his tour, arrived back home safely and returned to college. He returned a very, very mature and responsible individual. The tour to Iraq made a drastic change in his life. Seeing him, I thought "if my son can do it, so can I" and there started my quest to get a tour in Iraq. With the assistance of a dear friend, Eddie Miller, who has served in Iraq, I am here and experiencing one of the most proud moments in my life. It is a proud moment because of the vast impact we are making in the lives of others.

I am currently serving as database manager for the USACE Gulf Region Central District (GRC) — USAID Project Office (UPO) which provides construction management support to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Iraq Infrastructure Reconstruction Program. The total value of USAID infrastructure construction in Iraq is approximately $2.8 billion. UPO is co-located with USAID in the International Zone of Baghdad, Iraq. As database manager, I am responsible for the proper maintenance and archiving of data relating to the infrastructure contracts issued.

This is a history making event for this country and I am honored to be a part of that history. The Iraqi people are a very grateful and kind people. Each day I am in awe at the number of Iraqi people who risk their lives and the lives of family members by working with the Americans to improve the infrastructure and quality of life in this country. I have made lasting friendships with many of the Iraqi people. When the day comes when I return home, leaving these friends will be most difficult. I see lots of Iraqi children; and anyone who knows me knows that every child, everywhere, owns a piece of my heart. I love kids! I try to keep something of value on me at all times to give to them. Not only have I made many Iraqi friends, I have developed friendships with people from all around the world. Everyday I interact with people from all parts of the United States, Rwanda, Thailand, Guatemala, Russia, Peru, and the list goes on and on. The people that I have met have been such a blessing and joy in my life.

I have been to basic training, so living conditions were not an issue for me. A tent or whatever would have been ok. Yet in the back of my mind, I was curious about the entire venture I was about to undertake. I thought I was in for a rude awakening. The living quarters are excellent. My biggest challenge is to avoid overeating. There is lots and lots of food everywhere….hamburgers, hot dogs, lobster, prime rib…all you can eat. Then there are the desserts….cheese cake, red velvet cake, apple cobbler….all you can eat.

Joanne Dishmon-Gibbs views her deployment to Iraq an "opportunity."

The most difficult part about coming was leaving my daughter, Dorrian, who is a sophomore at Mississippi State University. She's there alone as my son deployed to Kuwait on his second tour supporting the Global War on Terrorism, and one week prior to my arrival in Baghdad. This time I did not cry, you see, not only did Darrin have a life changing experience while in Iraq; I had one while he was there as well. I learned that if I truly trust in God, like I profess, I must surrender All to Him. All includes Darrin; so this time there were no tears, only praise. Both of us leaving Dorrian was difficult and a lot for her to handle; however, like her brother, she too is a trooper. She loves, understands and supports our decision. Modern technology has kept us in constant contact with each other.

Life is full of chances. I see coming to Iraq as an opportunity. I am here in Baghdad loving every minute of it, and invite you to consider stepping forward and being part of this life-changing experience.

Inter-agency Habitat Project Improves Environment

By Mark Kane

The Mississippi River Pool 11 Islands Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project, located on the Mississippi nearly seven miles upstream of Lock and Dam 11 in Dubuque, Iowa, is already making a positive impact on the environment and the wildlife impacted in its area. The project, completed this year, is a cooperative effort among the Corps, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the departments of Natural Resources in Iowa and Wisconsin.

An aerial view of Mud Lake and one of the Pool 11 Islands made to create the backwater habitat.

The project was created to benefit migratory waterfowl and fish by encouraging aquatic vegetation growth, providing habitat, and reducing wind fetch and sedimentation.

It was completed in two stages; Sunfish Lake, stage 1, completed in 2004 and located in Grant County, Wis., and Mud Lake, stage 2, completed this year and located in Dubuque County, Iowa.

Photo by Mark Kane

Marv Hubbell talks about the significance of the Pool 11 Islands project and how the numerous projects like it on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers have a positive impact on the river environment. Tim Yager looks on shortly before driving on to see more of the Mud Lake project during that day's media tour of the project.

Both "lakes" are actually backwaters formed by the completed Pool 11 Islands.

Backwater dredging in these areas increase diversity and fish habitat. This will improve the environment for animals and also citizens who enjoy fishing, hunting or visiting the river.

While improving things for wildlife is one of the most visual, the positive impact of the project goes even further.

"There's lots of benefits beyond fish and wildlife, there's carbon storage that's occurring on this floodplain," said Tim Yager, ecosystem biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The trees are actually capturing carbon dioxide and storing it, there's improvements in water quality that are occurring out here.

"This backwater is probably capturing nutrients that would otherwise end up down in the Gulf of Mexico creating a large dead zone down there … there's all kinds of benefits to this ecosystem if you want to call it that. We tend to focus on the fish and wildlife benefits because that's what the public enjoys."

The Pool 11 Islands HREP is part of the Environmental Management Program. Under the EMP, the Corps is planning, designing and building a multitude of environmental enhancement projects that restore and create spawning and feeding habitats for fish and wildlife in backwaters and side channels of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

(see Habitat, next page)

-Habitat-

"From a program standpoint this represents one of many projects up and down the river that have had a total impact of around 80,000 acres of habitat that we've helped to improve as a result of many projects just like this," said Marv Hubbell, EMP manager, Programs and Project Management. "This is a great example, the latest example, of one of those program projects that are happening in both the lower part of the river, as well as the upper part of the river."

"Yeah, each project in and of itself doesn't have a big picture change to the river environment, but cumulatively these projects up and down the river are making a difference," said Jeff Janvrin, Mississippi River Habitat Specialist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "You're seeing a return (an increase in numbers) of waterfowl, fisheries, turtles, deer, mink, anything you want to look at, to these areas."

Those kinds of accomplishments have put the focus on the Environmental Management Program, which recently passed a major milestone.

"We just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the program, which is remarkable for a program to continue on for that kind of time," said Hubbell. "That was just celebrated up in LaCrosse, Wis., on Aug. 23. Hopefully we'll be able to continue for another 20 years. But it's the partnership really between the states of Iowa, Wisconsin, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who have been really instrumental in helping to pull all this together. It's another example of how working cooperatively you can do these kinds of projects."

Photo by Mark Kane

Jeff Janvrin talks about the importance of the balance of the project and how it was created for both fisheries and waterfowl.

The importance of that cooperation has been underscored by many individuals involved in the project.

"The partnership is really the key to seeing these projects come to a successful conclusion," said Yager. "Certainly our agencies could not accomplish alone what we can accomplish together. From a fish and wildlife standpoint, we don't have the funding that the Corps has to accomplish these projects. The state, similarly, doesn't have the funding to accomplish what's needed out here, but we all share some responsibility for making sure the river is in a healthy, productive condition.

"The Corps, obviously, brings the engineering, design and program management leadership that we as partners need. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the state agencies, bring biological expertise. The challenge is to marry up what the biologists would like to see with what the engineers can design to accomplish that.

That's where the expertise of the Corps, in terms of program management, really comes in. Because they can provide that oversight that coordinates between the engineers and the biologists."

Beyond coordination and expertise, the agencies involved in the project have had the challenge of making the project work in as many ways as possible with as little management as possible.

"This is a balanced project. We're balancing as many species as we can in here, and if we designed it solely for fisheries we could compromise our waterfowl objective," said Janvrin. "We try to get as big of a bang for the buck as we can and that means we have to balance them."

"Another nice feature about this project is that it's fairly self-managing," said Hubbell. "It doesn't take a huge amount of cost as far as maintaining it."

Environmental Management Project Celebrates 20 Years

By Justine Barati, Public Affairs

Since being authorized under the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, the Environmental Management Program has completed more than 40 projects that have restored more than 75,000 acres of backwater habitat. These accomplishments were celebrated at a dockside recognition ceremony in La Crosse, Wis., on Aug. 23.

Speakers at the ceremony included Rep. Ron Kind, Dick Larson from Rep. Gil Gutknecht's office, Col. Robert Sinkler, District commander, Kevin Szcodronski, director of parks and preserves for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, as well as speakers from the Wisconsin DNR, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minn. DNR, the Missouri Department of Conservation, the National Audubon Society and the Upper River Services.

One of a series of postcards created to recognized the Environmental Management Program, this card showcases the logo created for its anniversary. As part of the 20th anniversary of the EMP, the District created a series of postcards focusing on the project as a whole, as well as some of the individual projects. Angie Freyermuth, Programs and Project Management, designed and created the postcards, which have been distributed to all the agencies involved in the EMP.

The EMP is a federal-state partnership designed to restore, protect, and monitor the natural resources of the Upper Mississippi River System. For 20 years, the program has made a positive effort toward understanding and restoring large rivers. The EMP also provides decision makers with information about the river system through monitoring the river's health and researching the river's ecology.

The EMP involves two elements: Long Term Resource Monitoring and Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Projects.

The Long Term Resource Monitoring portion of the EMP is lead by the U.S. Geological Survey and has provided decision makers with information about the river system by monitoring the river's health and researching the river's ecology.

"In fact, the Long Term Resource Monitoring Program established the first comprehensive large river system natural resource monitoring network in the world," said Marv Hubbell, Programs and Project Management. Hubbell is the EMP program manager for all three upper districts of MVD.

Research studies focus on answering specific questions about the Upper Mississippi River System and its ecology, including habitat requirements of important species such as paddlefish and sturgeon. Monitoring information also helps resource managers address a wide range of river issues.

"For example, invasive Asian carp were detected by monitoring the fish community," said Hubbell.

"Because of the EMP, there is now a wealth of data, including aerial photographs, maps, scientific reports, and water depths available. This information helps river managers make important decisions about where and how to distribute resources," said Sinkler during the ceremony.

The second component of the program is the creation of the Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Projects.

(see EMP, next page)

These are designed to benefit fish, waterfowl and other wildlife by restoring lost habitat or protecting existing habitat. Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Projects have provided the foundation for large river habitat restoration efforts on the Upper Mississippi River System.

"Prior to this program, there was not a coordinated or systemic approach to the planning and implementation of habitat restoration efforts on this river, or any other large river system in the world," said Sinkler.

Under the leadership of the Corps, the projects are planned and designed by teams of individuals from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Corps and the natural resource or conservation agencies from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin. Private citizens and organizations also play an important role in this planning process.

"Completed projects are monitored to measure their performance and to improve future project designs," said Hubbell. "Many new techniques for restoring large rivers have been developed through the EMP."

Projects use a variety of tools to restore or protect fish and wildlife habitat, including island building, backwater dredging, shoreline improvements, structures to regulate water flow and water level management.

"An example of backwater river improvements can be found in the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge's Island 42 project near Weaver, Minn.," said Sinkler. "This project involved installing two huge gated culverts and creating a channel hundreds of feet long to provide dissolved oxygen in the backwater. Seven acres were also dredged to create deeper wintertime fish habitat. This was the first EMP habitat project completed.

Since its completion, native grasses planted along the channel have expanded the area's plant life for the benefit of a wide variety of wildlife. The project has also reestablished an historic wintertime fishery," said Sinkler.

"Fish and wildlife response to these projects has been excellent," said Hubbell. "Sampling at several project areas has shown the number of adult bluegill and other fish species has increased one hundred fold. The use by waterfowl and other bird species has also greatly increased in the project areas.

"Although a lot has been accomplished during the last 20 years, there is still more to be done," said Hubbell. "While we have improved nearly 80,000 acres of habitat, that represents only about three percent of the floodplain of the Upper Mississippi River System. We have another 54,000 acres of habitat that are scheduled for improvement in the future."

Lewis adapts engineering to Guatemalan rain forest

Corby Lewis, formerly an engineer in Hydraulics Section, Engineering and Construction Division, volunteered for a two-year tour of duty with the Peace Corps in Guatemala. He and his wife, Kari, arrived in Salacuim in mid-April and began work after three months of training in language, culture and technical skills.

by Corby Lewis

Just before we arrived at our site for the first time, the director of our counterpart organization, called the Proyecto Lachuá that works in and around the Laguna Lachuá National Park, played a joke on us. He said, "Just a couple of more hours, guys."

In the context of a 10-hour car trip from the capital city, the last two hours of which was over mountainous, potholed-road without passing even a single community with electricity to light our way, it was a good joke.

Corby and Kari Lewis visited the Mayan ruins site of Iximché in February, where Alvarado and the Spaniards set up the first capital city of Guatemala in 1524.

(see Lewis, next page)

-Lewis-

We're both assigned to work with our counterpart organization in and around the national park.

We were in the rich tropical rain forest in the wettest part of Guatemala, with interesting species, such as howler monkeys, jaguars and 318 species of birds.

Kari and I were Spanish beginners when we arrived in country in January, but within three or four months, we were able to use our newly found language skills to be productive at work and navigate through everyday life. Language has been particularly challenging as the local Mayan people speak in their native language, Q'eqchi'.

We're working in the general areas of eco-tourism development, alternative income generation, conservation and environmental education in Alta Verapaz department of Guatemala. We also have secondary projects, such as working with local youth groups on leadership and project development skills and scholarship programs.

St. Paul District employee receives national Hard Hat of the Year award

by Russell Williams

Headquarters U.S. Army Corps Engineers recently selected Devils Lake, N.D., resident and Corps of Engineers' St. Paul District employee Lowell Hanson as its 2006 Hard Hat of the Year award recipient.

The Hard Hat of the Year award is given out annually by the Corps of Engineers to recognize excellence in construction quality management by its construction field personnel throughout the Corps of Engineers. Hanson received his award in San Diego, Calif., Aug. 7. This award followed Hanson's selection as the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division Hard Hat of the Year earlier in the year.

Hanson is a Corps construction representative currently working on the Corps' Devils Lake, N.D., levee raise project and the Grand Forks, N.D./East Grand Forks, Minn., flood control project. He received this award for providing outstanding technical experience, construction management and team-building skills during the past year's construction on both these projects. His accomplishments there include maintaining excellent quality while maintaining a safe environment projected to be completed ahead of schedule.

Hanson has been a federal employee for more than 31 years, working for the Corps of Engineers for the past 20 of those years. In 2005, he volunteered to deploy to Baton Rouge, La., to support Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts, where he supported the temporary housing mission by serving as a construction representative in building Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer parks.

"Hanson is one of the most respected construction representatives in the St. Paul District," said Craig Johnson, his supervisor and Corps' Grand Forks resident engineer.

"Throughout the projects to protect Devils Lake, Hanson has been the Corps' greatest asset and a committed benefactor to the community."

This is the second time in the last five years that a North Dakota resident and St. Paul District construction representative has received this award.

Potter Dredges Up History on Ohio River

by Russell Elliott

When the crew of the St. Louis District's Dredge Potter was sent to the Ohio River at the end of August to assist the Louisville District with an emergency dredging project, nobody knew they also had a date with history.

Sometime after midnight, Thursday, Sept. 7, as Potter was digging through shoaling sand near Mound City, Ill., about seven miles above the Ohio-Mississippi River confluence, evidence of a bygone era started to emerge. Vibrations from below and noises of metallic objects passing through the vessel's mighty turbine pump indicated they were digging into something besides the typical alluvial sand of the Ohio River's bottom.

As the dust pan, the tool that actually scoops dredge material from the river's bottom, was raised, flood lights on the vessel showed chunks of wood and metal on its leading edge.

With work halted, Potter crewmembers carefully observed the materials to discover their identity. Very soon, they realized that what they were seeing were hints of a perhaps fateful day more than a century earlier.

Boards fastened together were brought aboard by Kevin Burton and Bob Slack. The experienced river men quickly identified them as perhaps sections of the hull of a long-lost river vessel.

Burton and Tom Hannon also found part of a barrel or keg that was partially crushed as the mighty steel dust pan was raised. When they touched it the smell of gunpowder was easily detected.

Two military artillery rounds were part of the trove raised at the Civil War-era site. The larger round (L) still contained gun powder and was rendered safe by Illinois State law enforcement explosives experts.

Then a more ominous shape emerged. Brady Beckman reached out and secured a fist-sized metal object that had characteristics of part of an artillery projectile. Michael Hopkins found an even larger, similarly shaped item, nearly a half foot in diameter and a foot long, weighing some 45 pounds.

Beckman, Hopkins and Burton, accompanied by Bob Vaughn, Steve Jackson, Ed Fox, Jim Thorn and Jeff Klein, were also involved in recovering other objects, including pieces of wood and metal fragments. One item was a large iron gear.

Red Meso stood by, taking digital photos to record the moment and to enable Captain Jim Pearce to be able to send messages and images to the St. Louis and Louisville districts' headquarters to get guidance and support.

Louisville District dredging inspector Gerald Thornberry issued an initial opinion that the material lifted from the bottom included ordnance – artillery rounds. Burst fragments perhaps told of the cause of the vessel's sinking. He further identified one metal object as a probable Union projectile from the Civil War era.

After communications between Dredge Potter and the two districts, Dr. Terry Norris, an archaeologist from the St. Louis District, was dispatched southward to the southern tip of Illinois to go aboard Potter to make a more definitive analysis of the objects and materials.

It's a Civil War-era vessel

After returning from Mound City, Norris confirmed the identities of the two projectiles and their probable origin.

(see Potter, next page)

This section of a civil-war era vessel that has not seen the light of day for more than 145 years was dredged from the floor of the Ohio River near Mound City, Ill. on Sept. 7. The submerged vessel was found while Dredge Potter was working there to restore the nine-foot channel after a grounding about seven miles up the Ohio. This large piece was returned to the river bottom at an accurately noted location to preserve it for later study.

The larger one he confirmed as what is called a Brooks round. It measured 6.5 inches in diameter and was 10 inches long. Weighing 45 pounds, it still contained its charge of river-soaked gun powder. Norris said that both sides in the war often used identical guns, and this round was likely manufactured in the confederacy and later captured in a battle. "It wasn't unusual for this to happen, for ammunition to be captured and then put into the magazines of the new owner," he said.

The smaller one was for what was called a Parrot Gun. It bore a brass fuse, prominently stamped with the word "ord," (for ordnance), an anchor (possibly intended for naval use) and the date 1862. Norris said he assumed that based on the finer manufacturing, it was probably produced in a Union armory somewhere.

Dr. Norris went on to tell how the vessel's remains and munitions might have come to rest on the bottom of the Ohio River at that location.

"James B. Eads, the man who would later build the Eads Bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Louis, built a series of iron-clad warships at Mound City, Ill. The shallow-draft vessels were used in the Mississippi Valley Western Rivers Campaign to cut the Confederacy in half at the Mississippi River.

"What we have is possibly a provisioning vessel delivering munitions and other items to these vessels," he said.

Norris continued, "Hundreds of vessels have been lost in the rivers of America, but usually when a vessel such as this goes down someone exerts a great effort to salvage its cargo. Perhaps this one was destroyed in an explosion though and they decided it was too risky to try to salvage whatever might be left. It appears though, that much remains."

Dredge Potter's crew carefully recorded the position of their work, using accurate GPS data. They also documented the location of the disposal area where material was being ejected at the time, in case historians may wish to later visit that area at low water.

The precise locations are being withheld because of the possible historical significance of the discovery, but suffice to say, it is on the Kentucky side of the river and Kentucky State Historical Preservation Office personnel are very interested in the find.

One artillery round was live

Soon after it was noted that one of the rounds might still contain gun power and that there might be other such items in the area, another call went out to St. Louis and Louisville.

Hank Counts, an unexploded ordnance specialist from the St. Louis Ordnance and Technical Branch, was dispatched to bring his knowledge and experience to bear. Counts, a former Army Explosives Ordnance Disposal Technician, arrived and first assessed safety aspects of the situation.

"I want to start by commending the crew first for recognizing a potential safety issue and then responding correctly. They did what I would have directed if I had been there," he added.

(see Potter, next page)

-Potter-

Counts secured the munitions and immediately coordinated with Illinois law enforcement explosives authorities.

After consulting together, and taking advantage of Counts' knowledge of the specific munitions round and techniques for demilitarizing it, the team pierced the round with explosives. It cracked it into several pieces, but they were all recovered.

"Safety was first," Counts related, "but everyone was mindful that we were working with a piece of history, part of our nation's heritage. We wanted to save as much as possible – but the primary mission was to do so safely," he said.

Counts remained on Dredge Potter into the weekend in case any similar items turned up, but no more were found.

A large section of the vessel's hull was photographed and then returned to the river bottom. It was too large to safely bring ashore and its location is known very precisely.

Smaller items, including the two identified projectiles, were brought back to St. Louis for documentation and future archiving.

Dr. Terry Norris is one of the only people in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who gets a big grin on his face when the rivers of the region are especially low. It was just one of these situations that opened this window on the past. Responding to channel maintenance after low water caused a barge tow to ground on the Ohio, turned out to be an adventure into the 19th century for the crew of St. Louis' Dredge Potter.

"We were down there working with a neighboring district and division to help resolve a navigation issue. We'll work together to see where we go in the future with this historical find," Norris concluded.

"Ord, 1862" and the anchor identify the smaller projectile as probably being manufactured by a Union armory for naval use.

And the crew of Dredge Potter is not likely to soon forget their role in this discovery.

Stemler Award Débuts

by Nicole Dalrymple

Most people have heard of the Oscar, the Pulitzer and the Nobel Peace Prize. Now a new award is named after one of St. Louis District's very own.

The 'Stemler Award' made its début at the annual Inland Waterway Conference in Memphis, Tenn., March 14. At the awards ceremony Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley jokingly told Joan Stemler, the award's namesake, that most people have to die in order to have an award named after them.

As district water control manager, Stemler has monitored and managed a challenging four-year cycle of low-water events, during which dozens of new record lows were set.

The River Industry Action Committee (RIAC), a coalition of tow companies and navigation interests, wanted to honor her not only by giving her an award, but by naming it after her.

"Joan does a tremendous job," said Sammy Dickey, RIAC chairman. "She is very dedicated and meticulous and has gone above and beyond to learn about the importance of dependable forecasts to navigation.

"During periods of low water, fluctuations in the river stage can be devastating to navigation," Dickey continued.

Joan Stemler and the award named after her.

(see Stemler, next page)

-Stemler-

"When the river is high, a foot or two fluctuation does not impact industry, but once the river is at zero feet on the St. Louis gage, even the slight shifts can have million dollar implications."

Industry has come to rely on and trust Stemler's river forecasts.

"Joan has a record of forecasting unprecedented, accurate river stages," Dickey said. "Her work, and that of her section, allows the towing industry to load barges consistently, without fear of having overloaded barges in the system."

Low-water conditions often require industry to lighten loads but industry also wants to load as heavily as possible. The slightest change in water levels can mean thousands of dollars in lost cargo.

According to Lynn Muench, with American Waterways Operators, industry loses approximately 17 tons of commodities per inch, per barge, when they start lightening their loads.

"We appreciate Joan's efforts into understanding the industry and the tireless work she puts into getting gage readings and ensuring forecasts are as accurate as possible," Dickey continued. "She exemplifies what going the extra mile means and represents the best in civil service."

During low-water periods that kind of service can mean getting up every two hours all night to monitor gage readings and working weekends and holidays. A long string of sleepless nights and high-stress decisions preceded the honor of the Stemler Award.

Low water is the quiet event, Stemler explained, contrasting it to the zoo-like media atmosphere that surrounds floods. "Droughts are much more work [for water control] but get little attention."

Stemler, who admits she was initially dumbfounded during the award presentation, is truly touched by the sentiment and intent behind the award.

"The award was a real surprise," she said. "When Sammy was reading the citation, I thought he was joking. Over the last six years, the district has built a relationship of trust with the navigation industry. Folks like Sammy and Raymond [Hopkins, former RIAC head] have become friends, and they have come to trust and depend on us. This recognition means a great deal to me."

Fortunately for her, the awarding of the Stemler Award almost coincided with the end of low water, March 12. Since then she's been able to unwind, saying with visible relief that it's nice to take cold medicine and not worry about whether it's drowse free.

With this season of low water over it's hard to tell what next year will be like but it is clear that the established cooperative partnership between industry, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Corps will ensure future responses will be weathered well.

RIAC will bestow the Stemler Award on an annual basis at the Inland Waterway Conference to a Corps employee who has made a significant contribution to navigation over a career or within a single year. A separate award, the Ice Breaker, has been created to recognize superb U.S. Coast Guard employees.

Perkl conducts archaeology education

by Peter Verstegen

Brad Perkl, archaeologist in project management, conducted presentations on archaeology and the Corps' mission for the nine-foot navigation channel and locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi at sites along Pool 1 and Upper Pool 2, Oct. 11. He teamed with two community educators from the National Park Service.

Wilderness Inquiry sponsored the Mississippi River field trip. Participants paddled 24-foot voyager canoes in pools 1 and 2. "This was one of the field trips as part of the North American Association for Environmental Education 35th annual conference," said Perkl.

Conference members, park service staff, Wilderness Inquiry staff and the Center for Global Environmental Education at Hamline University, St. Paul, participated.

Brad Perkl (top left), project management, discusses archaeology at the St. Paul Yacht Cub in Pool 1 just north of the Lake Street Bridge on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

He's in a hurry to help residents get on with their lives after they 'benefit' from disaster

By Dave Harris, Public Affairs
Louisiana Recovery Field Office

A lesser person would, by now, be exhausted. But Gerald Townsell keeps at it – singing, calling, observing, reporting, talking.

"I'm a talker," he admits. But check his schedule and one sees that he walks the talk.

As quality assurance field supervisor in New Orleans' west bank, Gerald firmly but politely redirects a crew away from an easy debris pick-up and has them focus on the more unsightly mess 50 yards away in the public right-of-way.

During a break in his seven-day-a-week schedule, he takes a quick call from his pastor at the Church of God in Christ where he is chairman of the Board of Trustees. It's a grounds maintenance challenge. Next month he goes to his church's leadership conference in Orlando, Fla., on his own nickel – make that his own 20,000 nickels, an annual trek somewhere in the country he's repeated at least six times.

Back to making sure QAs are checking licenses and paperwork. Someone's truck has leaking equipment. Shut 'em down - temporarily.

Next free moment, probably late at night, get ready to play Santa at Memphis' adopted school, Ford Elementary. Decide what to sing at the Christmas party.

Before that, a demo crew knocks a utility line down. Fill out another report.

Check the load ticket tally. More calls. Send in a report on 30-60-90-day planning. Finish the "this-week-next-week" report. Jot down an idea for after-duty preparation of a Bible lesson. Talk to Kenner. Talk to the resident engineer, Kevin Blair, about next week's demolition schedule.

"Gerald likes being in charge," Blair says. "He runs the west bank. Everything runs smoothly. I hear about big problems, and there aren't many of those, and so I don't hear much from him."

Someone asks Gerald, "I understand you also sing in the choir."

"No more," he says. "I did." He sighs. "It was getting a bit too much."

Oh, he still sings. Just not in the choir. Gerald is an operatic singer who studied at the Settlement Music School, Queen Village in Philadelphia, what locals call "South Philly." More recently he sang male lead in *Porgy and Bess* and in "An Evening with George Gershwin."

At church he and his trustees take people in and find them a place to stay, between overseeing grounds-keeping and church-building, with its checks, inspections, walk-throughs and financial draws for the contractors – "you name it."

He helped establish GED – General Educational Development – programs through his church.

Gerald Townsell

When home working for Memphis District, one moment Gerald orders 600,000 gallons of fuel for Memphis waterborne vessels after negotiating a 10-cent-per gallon discount. Next moment, he gets a call from a competitor.

"You didn't order the fuel from me!"

"I got it for 10 cents a gallon cheaper," Gerald replies. "That's $60,000! I'm saving the government a lot of money."

Whether at home or deployed, he's just as busy. Just as driven. Gerald is maintenance mechanic supervisor, Yards and Docks unit, Plant Section, Physical Support Branch.

▶ He's been the Black Employees program manager since 1999.

▶ He's in charge of all fueling for Memphis District vessels.

(see Gerald, next page)

Gerald Townsell scrutinizes debris pickup from the public right-of-way.

▶ He oversees the maintenance shop pulling wheels and shafts from bulldozers, front-end loaders and all manner of equipment.

▶ He's responsible for cleaning up and turning over the Jean Lafitte disposal site to Waste Management.

▶He runs safety meetings and conducts on-site assessments. Why? "To make it a little easier on contractors."

▶He checks and double-checks buildings slated for demolition marks them and has them tested for asbestos-containing material.

A man on a mission – many missions, with skills crafted over 35 years working for the federal government.

"As a young kid of 14, I was a short-order cook at the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia," he says. "I swabbed floors and helped patients carry their trays. I washed pots and helped make salads."

Gerald quickly points out the benefits of such hard work for a young person, and swinging his elbows, he passionately demonstrates how he learned to properly maneuver a mop.

Multitasking and keeping so many plates in the air, he has no patience for foot-dragging, especially here in Louisiana.

"I tell people you need to work as hard and as fast as you can to help people get their lives together," he says. "I manage, the best I can, to work through every loophole to help people get on with their lives. We have to help them past the bottlenecks. It's like basketball. Five players are trying to stop you, but your job is to make a basket.

"The people of Louisiana are really brave," he says. "Near Jean Lafitte, I had bug spray and the mosquitoes were overwhelming. But even though the residents were beating them off, they acted like nothing was happening - like the mosquitoes were part of the family."

Gerald claims a rapport with contractors he oversees.

"I listen to their concerns," he says. "They're happy working for the Corps. I tell them to save money, that there's not much time to have a party."

He says that most contractors are local. "They're down-home people. I like the way they talk. I listen to them and it makes me feel good."

The rapport pays off. "It makes it easy to tell them, 'Fix the boards on the side of your truck.' I tell them we're all in this together in helping people move forward with their lives."

Drive through New Orleans and the west bank and you cringe at the wind-blown and flooded homes and businesses. You hesitate taking pictures and hope you don't add to the sparse residents' already profound humiliation. Many think that all hope for a tolerable future is gone.

But Gerald, the hard-working man of faith, is visionary. Just when you're feeling your sorriest for the historic place and people, Gerald utters an alternative view, exuding a never-say-die buoyancy.

"New Orleans will benefit from this disaster, because good happens from every bad thing that happens," he says.

He tells of a New Orleans woman who moved to Seattle and is making five times more money than she ever did.

"She is so much better off, and it took the disaster to push her to do something for herself instead of being stuck in the mud," he explains. "Something significant must happen to change someone's mind sometimes.

"New Orleans will be 10 times better than it ever was," he says with evangelistic fervor.

"No doubt in my mind."

Cool heads prevail in launching contract to remove perilous saltwater-damaged trees

By Dave Harris, Public Affairs
Louisiana Recovery Field Office

New Orleans faced yet more developing lethal threats. Ignoring them would be criminal – these are killers.

Last year, Katrina's immensely powerful, marauding raw force fashioned unfathomable surges of saltwater from the Gulf Coast to New Orleans where it mixed with Lake Pontchartrain's spilled brackish water, inundating the city and ultimately invading, attacking and, using an insidious dose of saline solution, slowly polluted the lifeblood, debilitating and ultimately ravishing thousands of trees, robbing them of every ounce of strength and starving the last glimmer of life from each tree's statuesque but depleted physique, reducing it to a frail carcass.

The spent hulks transformed into latent, monstrous kinetic weapons, poised to wreak havoc on unsuspecting and innocent people and property.

FEMA's experts marked the trees and asked the Corps to interdict the potential mayhem. No time for studies, seminars or debates. The looming doom must be stopped. Yesterday.

Everywhere, chainsaws and their precision operators stood by, but years of unsurpassed contractual successes and a few occasional hitches had over the years inspired the Corps and lawmakers to stitch together a labyrinth of regulations and laws to meet squarely such challenges, doing it right the first time, having little wiggle room now for do-overs.

Workers tug on a line for all their worth to guide a potential killer tree to a safe landing.

(see Trees, next page)

-Trees-

Rife with opportunity for fraud, waste and abuse – not to mention the cherished American right to protest, the undertaking called for contracting specialists like LA-RFO's Carl Jones to balance the scales between timeliness and air-tight safeguards.

He provided a satchel of soothing assurances to leaders straining to lean forward in the saddle. Understandably, they fervently yearned to fell the monsters before the monsters collided with a citizen or Citroen. While visions of impending horror haunted leaders, Carl and his posse made sure to address every nuance, dot every "i" and cross the last "t."

It's not just price that determines who gets a contract. The bidder must demonstrate financial capability, the proper skills and staffing to pull off the crucial task correctly, timely and cost-effectively – better, faster, cheaper.

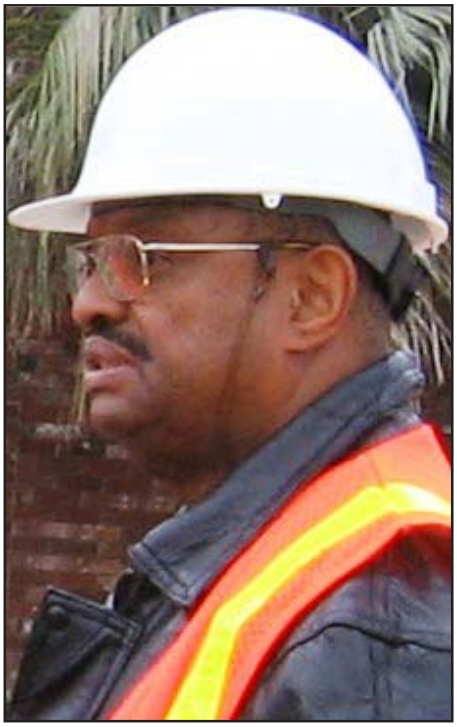
The contract is a masterful work of art when all the pieces fit together. Carl and company arm-wrestled the package to the ground.

"This is a rock-bottom price," Carl said.

In spite of hosts of employees, politicians and leaders chomping at the bit, Carl was settled and unflappable.

"Everybody just needs to sit down and say, "Let's see how to make this work.' Normally, it all works out," he said.

Everyone's passion to begin the work was at fever-pitch.



Carl Jones

The trees started falling almost before the ink was dry as the sound of chainsaws pierced the morning calm and crews tugged on ropes slung over the trees to guide the behemoths to a safe landing.

Carl drove out to see the fruits of his labor. Now that the breathlessly awaited work had begun, he had a moment to reflect on the flurry of actions leading up to the "go" signal.

In the midst of the morning's buzz, a Corps supervisor stopped one of the start-up four crews for a moment.

"You need to measure the circumference," he told the workers.

"The markings indicate the measurement."

"You need to verify them with your tape measure."

The contractor had told Carl he'd ramp up to seven crews in the afternoon.

The new contract unleashed crews and equipment commissioned to fell and scoop up dead trees in parks, parking strips and other locations in the public right of way - ROW. Another contract already was removing lifeless trees from personal property.

Even though swiftness was essential in starting the preventive task in the ROW and ramping the momentum up to full speed, Carl harbors a secret to win the cooperation of the many parties needed to successfully close the deal. He said all along it was necessary to see things in perspective.

"Stop and smell the roses. Everybody's right. Nobody's wrong. Let's find an approach that works for everybody."

photo by Shannon Bauer

The M.V. Mississippi locked through Lock and Dam 9 near Lynxville, Wis., Aug. 9 at 10:30 p.m. Personnel from operations division staff lock vessels day and night throughout the year. The M.V. Mississippi was in the St.Paul District for a low-water inspection trip and Mississippi River Commission public meetings. The tow is based in Memphis District.

Aided by an angel, disabled vet escapes rising water

By Dave Harris, Public Affairs, Louisiana Recovery Field Office

In the span of a morning, the giant jaws of an excavator chomp and devour a lifetime of deeply rooted, indelible memories that are permanently etched into the soft soul and rugged stamina of the articulate 89-year-old World War II veteran who is watching the home he built shudder and collapse with each powerful blow.

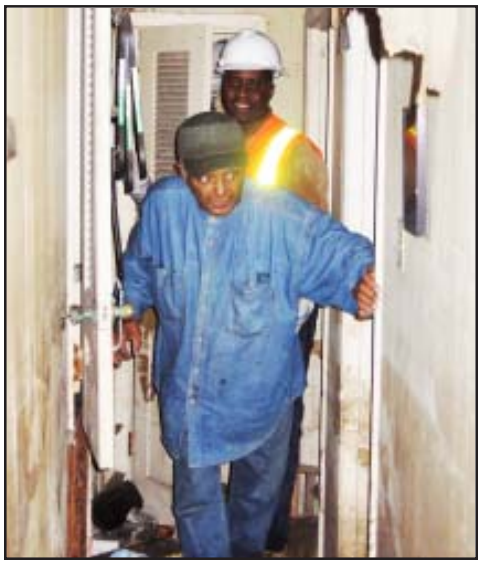
An hour earlier, volunteers had gathered to help the disabled vet, Junius V. Draper, technical sergeant, U.S. Air Force, retired. They were to help him find what he called his "goodies" from the flooded house he had built in the 1980s.

What kind of goodies?

"There was a set of silverware my wife had gotten one piece at a time by saving up Green Stamps," he said. His wife, Elaine, had died in 2000. "There was a little black horse about this big. My wife said, 'Look what I have for you.' That horse doesn't mean anything to anyone else, but that's when I understood what love was all about. You have to look for love. It won't jump on your shoulder."

And there were tiny World War II replicas of jeeps in a glass case, along with a larger toy jeep. A wooden pig. Pictures. Glass polar bears. A diamond-studded cross worth $3,000.

Days earlier Junius' daughter looked for the cross without telling him. She found it, discolored from salt water. Junius said he had been upset with her for not telling him.



Junius V. Draper pursues his short-lived hope to find treasures in the hurricane-destroyed home he had built. He is escorted by Maj. Eugene Speed.

And yet he acknowledged, "Even though most of these little things came from Wal-Mart, your life is wrapped up in those things."

That day volunteers were ready literally to turn the house upside down to find the goodies. Within five minutes they found only some water-streaked photos.

Suddenly, Junius shouted, "Call off the search!"

Why now? The search had barely started.

"They don't have time with all these bulldozers standing by," he said.

Oh, but there was still time. The volunteers had arranged, at no cost to the government, for contract crews to work around the search efforts. And a small glitch had extended the time – the demolition had been listed as "non-RACM," a property involving no regulated asbestos-containing material.

Junius V. Draper, Tech. Sgt., U.S. Air Force, retired, said, "The captain goes down with the ship," but he couldn't bear to watch the demolition of his home.

(see Junius, next page)

World War II vet Junius V. Draper describes memorable "goodies" he abandoned in his home early the morning of demolition. Shortly, he found peace in closure.

But the checklist lived up to its intended purpose and a verification step alerted the crew that the house was, in fact, RACM. A RACM crew was nearby and seamlessly switched places with the original crew, using the same excavator. The maneuver paralleled that of an airline crew taking over an aircraft, relieving the initial crew.

Yet, the search was done.

"It would be criminal to continue searching and holding up the show," he said. "It was a gallant effort. They can't bring out the goodies without taking out piles and piles of debris."

Junius had finally and suddenly reached closure.

"I am most thankful to you for bringing the suffering to an end," he told Corps people and volunteers. "I had to see that stuff and get them off my mind."

Now relaxed and satisfied, the veteran of the war in the Pacific, having served at Iwo Jima among other battlefields, told the poignant story of building his house and losing it after nearly losing his own life in the struggle.

"An angel put me here today," Junius said. "I stayed here during the hurricane. I tried to put my feet on the floor, but soon the water was above my mattress. A bag of clothes floated by. I grabbed a chair to break out a window. Five or 10 minutes later, the water was as high as my neck. I went under water, 'great swimmer' that I am. I turned the knob of the front door, and I couldn't open the door. The refrigerator fell and blocked the entrance to the garage. Someone later asked me, 'Were you afraid?' I was not afraid. If this don't work, you try something else. You don't get afraid; you're too busy."

Retired Tech. Sgt. Junius V. Draper shares a lighthearted memory with Majs. Eugene Speed and Kyiersty Tingley after calling off the search for mementos in his flood-ravished home.

About to drown, the water now to the ceiling, Junius said he grabbed the front doorknob again, even though he wasn't able to open it before and didn't think he had any better chance this time.

"I pulled on it and that angel I told you about opened it," he said. "I held onto the wrought iron on the porch. I had wanted to go on the roof before, but I didn't have the strength. And yet now, the water was as high as the gutter, and I floated up to the roof."

He paused to reflect, having abandoned his effort to recover mementos.

"Why should you be so fortunate?" he asked himself. "Why should I be so concerned with my goodies when others lost everything?"

Now at peace with himself and the past 16-month ordeal, his eyes grew bright.

"I'm a rich man," he declared. Gesturing, his hands waved across his knees. "I've had Social Security money stacked up this high." He also gets his Air Force pension.

"Not many dollars, but I'm rich otherwise. I have my hospitalization, food and clothing and anything else the Navy base has to offer."

Junius had put on a blue uniform in 1947 with the birth of the Air Force.

"The Army sold me to the Air Force with the furniture," he said with a laugh. He had been a clothing and equipment specialist.

His mind then flashed back to the aftermath of Katrina. He told of being rescued from his roof by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service boat and taken temporarily to a two-story structure in his neighborhood.

(see Junius, next page)

-Junius-

"They then took me to the Dome, but it was too crowded, and so they took me to the St. Claude Bridge. They considered me sick. I didn't feel sick, but they put me in an ambulance and took me to Baton Rouge."

In time, Junius' daughter sent him an airline ticket to Green Bay, Wis., where he stayed for awhile and ultimately bought a covered pickup truck and drove back to Louisiana.

"I'll never do that again," he said. "I almost died 50 times." He said he got lost about that many times.

Upon his return, he stayed in a shelter, and a year ago, he was assigned to a FEMA trailer.

"They had a welcoming committee. The trailer has a toilet, sofa, chairs, a kitchen table. They said, 'This is it.'"

He said someone recertifies his eligibility every three months. For now, it's home, and he rolls with the punches.

"I don't raise no cane," Junius said.

He bought a small trailer for his rig and drove it to the demolition with the hopes of using the truck and trailer to haul away his "goodies." No more. "I'm going to get rid of this rig when all this goes down."

Resigned to the fate of the home and contents that symbolized his family life, he looked away from the buckled structure.

A new crew had been summoned. The semi stood by to take delivery of the Draper treasury of goodies – along with plaster, beams, shingles and flooring. This semi was different, equipped with a plastic cover to contain any asbestos.

The heavy excavator jaws opened, ready to consume multiple generations of irreplaceable keepsakes, poised to deliver its first cruel, yet now a merciful blow to the vulnerable roof.

Whether literally or not, retired Tech. Sgt. Junius V. Draper mustered his courage and signaled his sister service, the Army Corps of Engineers, of what he wanted to do.

"A captain goes down with his ship."

Demolition or rebuild? Steps will 'wear you out'

By Dave Harris, Public Affairs
Louisiana Recovery Field Office

The power shovel ripped, pulled and smashed. What looked like a sturdy New Orleans brick home buckled and shook with every blow, the excavator making short work of finishing a demolition that Katrina started 15 months ago.

Randy and Marietta, dressed in neat office casual apparel, watched as heavy machinery leveled their once peaceful home. Men dressed in plastic and breathing through gas masks sorted through potentially hazardous household material, including white goods (leaky refrigerators) and asbestos. They took extra care to make sure to cap the gas line.

An excavator rips into a New Orleans home as it is being wetted down to minimize a dust-up during a home demolition.

(see Demo, next page)

-Demo-

When Katrina hit, Corps employee Michael Patrick worked for the Corps' New Orleans District. He now works 12-hour days with the Corps' Louisiana Recovery Field Office as the Environmental Subject Matter Expert.

Michael decided not to demolish his house, but he said the arduous process of rebuilding "will wear you out." Meanwhile, he lives in a hard-won FEMA trailer on his property. He said everything below the waterline must be replaced, but wiring and pipes above the waterline are old and out of code, making it prudent to replace both throughout the house. Besides, he said, "it's Catch-22; they won't put a new meter in my house until the house is replumbed."

Almost like the compressed span of time-lapse photography, Randy and Marietta watched as the demolition crew felled eaves and crumbled concrete slabs with the ease of King Kong, turning the family home into a mountain of rubble before it is hauled off. For the owners, the process of learning, deciding and conferring took more than a year, too long to get to "go"—a full knapsack of variables—a review process bound and determined to check and double-check ownership and right of entry.

"This was my nieces' college fund," Marietta said of the property. The couple, both engineers, had purchased another home in Kenner. Once the older property is stripped clean, Marietta and Randy said they hope to develop the land, short of rebuilding, and sell it when property values go up in the coming months or years.

Semis stand by as debris is scooped up for removal from a home demolition in New Orleans. Throughout the day, debris is carefully sorted; electronic components, construction debris, white goods and vegetative wastes get separate processing and destinations.

Leading up to demolition, Marietta said she was on the phone every day.

"I documented an average of nine calls a day," she said, referring to a satchel of private and public contacts. Ultimately, the insurance company paid off the mortgage, but little to nothing more. Other than the demolition itself, she and Randy moved forward needing no government help.

"Only people who had next to nothing got any help from the government," she said. "As a result, some of our neighbors now have more than they did before Katrina."

Could the demolition happen sooner than 14 months?

Yes, perhaps as soon as three to five months.

The key is for the owner to complete a right-of-entry—ROE—form as soon as possible. Review is ongoing as agencies refine the process.

But reasons for added days and weeks vary as much as why home buyers choose a particular style or neighborhood. At first, an evacuee is overwhelmed. Some haven't come back to face the challenges. Some may never return.

Squabbling with insurance companies, hoping for new government relief, job-hunting, lacking knowledge on how to go about the whole process, finding missing documents, clearing titles, encountering bumps in the road to understanding regarding how to access or fill out the paperwork or having trouble deciding whether to relocate or rebuild.

Some await financial help from the state's Road Home program in which homeowners of every income level suffering substantial property damage may be eligible for up to $150,000 in financial assistance. Owners who jumped the gun to have their homes demolished earlier may lose out, since their applications for Road Home sink to the bottom of the stack awaiting determination whether funding will last to cover these already-leveled, last-priority properties.

Once the owner decides on demolition, the long and the short of it is that the process has taken up to five months for multi-jurisdiction reviewers and inspectors.

The list includes property researchers, historic preservation actions and reviews, rechecking by the Demolition Support Group and ultimately to the Corps of Engineers for up to 21 closing days.

(see Demo, next page)

On the lookout for hazardous household wastes, workers don protective suits to sort white goods extracted from a New Orleans home before it was demolished as part of the Corps mission.

Up until the last minute, owners can change their minds, potentially further delaying the work.

Michael, single, told of indecision he experienced. Even before Katrina he thought of moving closer to his siblings in Chattanooga and Cleveland. But he slowly moves his rebuilding project forward while his 72-hour-a-week job helping people in similar circumstances keeps him busy and "puts my mind elsewhere."

He said he received a portion of the value of his personal property loss, estimated at $140,000 for just the first floor of his two story home. He had government-subsidized flood insurance that he had failed to update for inflation.

Others in his neighborhood rebuild using Small Business Administration low-interest loans, insurance claims and/or reserve savings.

Michael himself, focusing on his project only on a Sunday, said he became frustrated with poor communication following the storm, spreading mold, termite damage, subsequent water intrusion from Rita because of roof damage inflicted by Katrina, home-improvement rip-off contractors, skyrocketing cost of living and escalating estimates to raise the elevation of his home, no-show workers or inspectors and "if it hadn't been for my work with the Corps, I wouldn't know whom to contact."

In spite of it all, he said, "I'm in a better position than many of my fellow New Orleanians." He said during his weeks as an evacuee, the Corps continued to pay his salary under the Safe Haven program and provided additional support upon his return.

As some rebuild or demolish and others have yet to decide, no one knows when life will get back to normal in New Orleans. Yet, progress will continue as homeowners push and agencies pull and residents complete their ROE with the city at the earliest opportunity, all of which results in producing a synergy from lessons learned that homeowners and workers hope will ultimately refine and smooth some of the wrinkles and kinks.

Soldier's training pays off in life-or-death French Quarter encounter

by Dave Harris, Public Affairs
Louisiana Recovery Field Office

The firecracker sounds of multiple gunshots in the night infused Spec. Megan Wilinski with a blast of adrenalin. She bolted outside dressed in an Army t-shirt over sports garb and camo trousers; she spotted a wave of her cohorts zeroing in on the action.

"Someone's been shot!"

A bystander called for medics. A woman stood over a fallen victim.

"No one was doing anything," the chemical specialist said. Help was on the way, but no one was caring for the man who was going into shock.

Someone in the crowd asked her, "Do you know first aid?"

"I know what the Army taught me," Megan said, and flew into action.

Megan saw blood coming from the man's chest, instantly ripped off her own t-shirt and applied pressure to the wound.

Soldiers enlisting in the Army and Corps of Engineers Civilians expect to see action and hope to do their part in team efforts to bring about heroic outcomes, especially in Louisiana hurricane recovery operations.

(see Megan, next page)

-Megan-

After receiving the Army Achievement Medal Nov. 15, Spec. Megan Wilinski shows where the main gunshot wound was on the victim she helped. She kept pressure on the wound and talked to the victim to keep him alert.

But no one, Megan included, expects to be a hero outside one's apartment door adjacent to the New Orleans French Quarter, and there was no thought of that now. She thought only of her task at hand, she said.

"I was so calm," she recalled. "I told people what I needed; I didn't think of anything else—I was on auto-pilot. I thought only of getting the wound covered."

She asked for a knife to cut the victim's shirt off. A bartender arrived with the knife.

Another bartender responded with towels when Megan asked for another shirt and wrapped the victim's finger with towels; the finger was nearly severed and hanging, apparently from another gunshot wound. Megan found two more gunshot wounds on his arm.

"I had to keep him alert," she said. "I touched his face. I asked him his name and told him mine. He was going into shock and I told him, 'Keep talking to me.'"

"I'm not going nowhere," responded the victim, who had been working nearby as a dishwasher.

"The police arrived and cleared everyone out," Megan said. "I just kept talking and applying pressure to the wound."

Then paramedics arrived and took over, checking the man's vital signs. The persistent Soldier told them of her Army first aid training and assisted them in putting the man on a backboard. Shortly after, she learned of two more victims, one whose forehead was grazed with a bullet; another who ultimately died, apparently of blood lost from an arterial leg wound.

Megan's supervisor, 1st Sgt. Micchicco Thompson, learned of the life-saving incident at 8:30 p.m., about an hour afterward, and learned more about Megan's first aid training that she received two years ago when she was close to being mobilized.

"We got the training knowing at some point we may have to care for someone and be put in a stressful situation," she said. She practiced her training during refresher sessions at subsequent Reserve drills.

"I was so excited for her," the first sergeant said, and added that she wrote up a citation recognizing Megan for using her Army skills.

As for Megan, she recalled, "I was calm and clearheaded in the middle of the action, but when I got back to my apartment and realized how much blood I had all over me, I broke down—I lost it." A telephone conversation with one of her sergeants resulted in her regaining her composure.

The Soldier was nearing the end of her Louisiana tour, ready to return to her unit, the 360th Medical Company in Strongsville, Ohio. She has nearly completed a degree in psychology and wants to go to law school.

Before departing, she had to take care of some unfinished business.

Coming in contact with so much blood and noticing a small cut on her hand, she went to the nearby Navy base the next day for tests. The victim was tested, as well, where he was treated.

All tests came out negative, the specialist said.

She paused a moment to tell of her work in demolition quality assurance at the St. Charles Field Office, making sure power lines were dropped, air conditioning units removed, safety issues addressed, load tickets written and checklists followed.

"The best days are when people come and thank you for the demolition work you did for them," she said. "It makes you feel really good."

"The worst day…" she said with tears welling up, "…was when an older lady in her 60s showed me water-damaged pictures of memories in her parents' house—the house we were tearing down—a house where her mother was always cooking and keeping it so clean. She was upset, and it was so sad, but she knew it had to be done."

After telling her story, the specialist began processing out and returned to the scene of the crime and her apartment to pack it in.

She had her ticket home, but not without a knapsack jam-packed with heroic feats and adventures.

Memories she'll never forget.