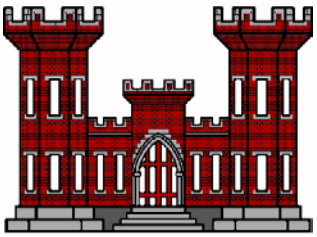

Remarks by Brigadier General Edwin J. Arnold, Jr., Commander, Mississippi Valley Division, at the Meeting of the Association of Levee Boards of Louisiana, New Orleans, Louisiana, 7 Dec 00

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the invitation to attend your annual meeting.

This is my first time around at this gathering; however, I had the good fortune of meeting a few of you during the low-water inspection trip this past August, and I look forward to broadening and strengthening these relationships as we gather here in New Orleans.

It is a rewarding experience for me to gather with some of our preeminent associates and allies here in the lower Mississippi Valley.

This morning, I plan to keep my remarks rather brief, as most of you will have the opportunity to hear my full discourse tomorrow. And, I might add, you really don't want to miss my remarks tomorrow!

I promise to inform and hopefully entertain!

However, my task at the moment is to be the set-up man for the district engineers who will shortly provide an overview of the Corps' flood control work in your state.

So, what I'd like to do is update you on the Mississippi River and MVD issues, and then talk briefly about 4 other issues where I need your understanding and support. And they are:

- **Hypoxia**
- **Coastal Wetlands Restoration**
- **Freshwater Diversion Projects**
- **Coast 2050**

First an update . . . Except for occasional brief periods, stages on the Mississippi have generally been below normal almost continuously since the summer of 1999. Early this year and in recent weeks along the Lower Mississippi River, stages hovered around and occasionally dipped below the Low Water Reference Plane.

New daily record low stages were observed throughout the year and this year's annual peak stages will be the lowest in over 40 years. Recent rains have improved the conditions on the Mississippi, but the river generally remains lower than normal for this time of year.

In the lower valley, raising and strengthening portions of the Mississippi River levee system have remained in the public spotlight. I want to highlight just a couple of the major levee projects that we're about to conclude.

First is the Louisiana State Penitentiary project. This project is a good example of our mainline Mississippi River levee construction.

I know that most of you are aware of the threatening conditions that existed at Angola Prison during the 1997 flood. This project has been high on the priority list of the state and is truly needed because of the threat of loss of human life and security factors.

Construction has been underway since September of 1999 and consists of improving 12.1 miles of levee constructed by the State of Louisiana, providing seepage relief berms or wells, and new drainage structures.

Favorable weather conditions and river stages have contributed to construction being ahead of schedule.

The last contract for levee enlargement will be for 4.8 miles downstream of Camp C and is scheduled for award in May 2001. Overall project completion is anticipated in late 2002 or early 2003.

Next is the West Bank Hurricane Protection project, which will provide Standard Project Hurricane Protection from storm surges from Lakes Cataouatche and Salvador, and from waterways leading to the Gulf. The project is a series of levees and floodwalls, and includes a sector floodgate in the Harvey Canal.

As most of you are aware, WRDA 1986 authorized the first increment for construction of this project, WRDA 1996 modified the project, adding the Lake Cataouatche area and authorizing the East of Harvey Canal HP Project, then WRDA 1999 combined the projects into the current one.

To update you on our status:

- **Plans and specifications continue; while construction is underway in other areas.**
- **Funding shortfall is coming.**
- **Project sponsors (LADOTD--construction, and West Jefferson Levee District--OMRR&R) would like beneficial completion of the first lifts by 2004. This would require capability funding through FY 2005.**

Current FY 2001 funding looks like this:

- **$16 million Capability**
- **$7.1 million Conference Report**
- **$4.1 million Carryover**
- **$4.8 million Shortfall**

MRL LAWSUIT

On the good news front, this past October, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued its decision in favor of the Corps on the appeal filed by the Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund, Inc., on November 3, 1999.

Earth Justice had appealed the September 1999 decision of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, which ruled in favor of the Corps in the lawsuit filed by Earth Justice in December 1998.

The District court found that the SEIS fully complied with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The original Earth Justice lawsuit had challenged the adequacy of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement -- or SEIS -- for the Corps' Mississippi River Mainline Levee Enlargement and Berm Construction Project.

The project consists of 1,610 miles of authorized levees and berms and associated seepage control measures along the Mississippi River in seven states.

In current Fiscal Year 2001, approximately $20 million dollars is scheduled to be expended for ongoing construction contracts on levee enlargements and seepage control measures in the Memphis, Vicksburg, and New Orleans districts. Scheduled expenditures of approximately $11 million dollars are anticipated for levee contracts to be awarded in Fiscal Year 2001.

FY 2001 PROGRAM

Moving to our current program , I am pleased to report that the FY 2001 appropriation for the Mississippi Valley Division totals ~~well~~ over one billion dollars.

Key appropriations include:

- **$25 million dollars for General Investigations,**
- **$249 million dollars for Construction, General,**
- **$365 million dollars for Operations & Maintenance, Gen.,**
- **$55 million dollars for FUSRAP, and**
- **$348 million dollars for the Mississippi River & Tributaries project.**

These appropriation numbers reflect the hard work of our sponsors, stakeholders, and members of our congressional delegations.

I add my personal "Thank You" for your continued support of Water Resources Development within the Mississippi Valley.

The two district engineers will discuss the details of major studies, construction, and operation and maintenance activities taking place in their respective districts.

HYPOXIA

Turning now to the hypoxia issue and the Gulf Dead Zone, as it is commonly called.

MVD continues to be very involved in the development of a Congressionally mandated long-term action plan to deal with nutrient enrichment and other hypoxia issues in the Gulf. I'm happy to report that the action plan has been finalized and was sent to the Office of Management and Budget in November by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The plan calls for the Corps to investigate ways we can retrofit existing projects to make them more efficient in removing nutrients from water before it reaches the Gulf.

We are just as involved in helping resolve some of the controversy surrounding the causes of the Dead Zone.

The Dead Zone is a problem that can only be addressed through the application of a Mississippi basin-wide approach to better nutrient management.

As a member of the Hypoxia Interagency Task Force, I have pledged the Corps' continuing support of efforts of the EPA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, and Department of Commerce -- as well as other state and federal agencies -- to find a solution to the hypoxia problem that will be compatible with the needs of coastal resource user groups, agricultural interests, and the public at large.

A major interagency Mississippi basin-wide budget initiative is also in the works to deal with the Gulf hypoxia issue.

MVD's input was sent to the Environmental Protection Agency last month (November).

This budget initiative calls for <u>new</u> funding to support the retrofit study I just mentioned, as well as the implementation effort.

Your participation with other interest groups upstream could be crucial in support of the need for increased basin-wide funding for this action.

<u>COASTAL WETLANDS RESTORATION</u>

Moving on to coastal wetlands restoration. Coastal wetlands are known to dampen or reduce the magnitude of surges associated with tropical storms and hurricanes.

This dampening effect can be as much as 1.5 feet of tidal elevation per mile of continuous wetland.

In many areas of the Louisiana coast, the broken condition of the wetlands, or complete lack of any remaining marsh brings the full effect of storm-driven waves directly to the hurricane protection levees.

This results in ever-increasing maintenance costs, the need for protective armoring, and higher levees -- as I'm sure you are all aware.

The focus of MVD's coastal restoration efforts is to put back in place some portion of those coastal wetlands which have been lost and maintain those which remain, not only for the flood control purposes mentioned above, but also for the environmental benefits these wetlands provide as habitat for fish and wildlife, as important recreational areas, and as natural nutrient processing areas that can benefit the Gulf by removing nutrients as Mississippi River waters move through them into the Gulf.

Our freshwater diversion projects play an integral part in the coastal restoration effort.

The effect these freshwater diversions have in stabilizing salinity within an estuary is an important component in maintaining the vitality and stability of existing wetlands.

In addition, the nutrients and fine sediments they provide are a key to repairing damaged and failing marshes and, as I mentioned earlier, the wetlands serve an important function in removing nutrients that contribute to creation of the Dead Zone.

In their largest scale, the mass introduction of sediment, they provide can work to rebuild areas of lost wetlands and return critical habitat and storm protection.

For example, Davis Pond, on the west bank above New Orleans, will be the second diversion project to come online.

When Davis Pond is completed, it will be able to divert more than 10,000 cubic feet of fresh water per second into the Barataria Basin. The project will preserve 33,000 acres of marsh and benefit another 777,000 acres over a 50-year period.

I'm sure most of you in this room know of the Coast 2050 effort. Put simply, it's a long-term strategic plan for the survival of Louisiana's coast.

The effort was initiated under the Coastal Planning Protection and Restoration Act and is now being elevated to a feasibility level plan through the Corps of Engineers.

The initial planning effort identified a potential 14 billion dollars worth of restoration projects. This planning effort is being further developed to ensure that all water resource related activities can continue to prosper.

Initial development of the Coast 2050 plan incorporated a broad base of local government and public involvement. This is a critical element to arriving at a successful multi-use plan for restoring and maintaining coastal Louisiana.

The involvement of organizations such as local levee boards is equally critical.

I chose these specific topics today for several reasons: First, I know they are of interest and importance to you; second, I want you to know they are equally important to me; and third, MVD can not accomplish what needs to be done in

any one of these areas without the help of organizations such as yours.

The successes the Corps has known stretch far back into history, and these successes are founded on the dynamic partnerships that exist among the Corps and organizations such as all of yours. May we continue to strengthen and expand that partnership.

Enjoy your stay in New Orleans, and our best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!