

House Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina

**Testimony of Major General Harold A. Cross
The Adjutant General of Mississippi**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Major General Harold Cross, the Adjutant General of Mississippi. I serve as the Commanding General of the Mississippi Air and Army National Guard and director of the Mississippi Military Department. I report directly to the Governor and, during state emergencies, receive tasking requests from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, a separate state agency.

The Mississippi Military Department works very closely with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. We are collocated in the same building and collaborate in the development of the Mississippi Emergency Management Plan which is closely aligned with the National Response Plan. However, the decision to activate and utilize the Mississippi National Guard during state emergencies rests solely with the Governor.

Specific missions tasked to the Mississippi National Guard for hurricane response include but are not limited to:

Search and Rescue

Law enforcement operations

Commodity distribution

Casualty evacuation

Debris removal from roads and along power grids

On August 26, 2005, as it became apparent that Hurricane Katrina was a clear threat to the State of Mississippi, Governor Haley Barbour issued Executive Order number 939 directing me to activate the appropriate forces of the Mississippi National Guard requisite to the assistance to state and local civil authorities. In response to this order, and in concert with the Mississippi Emergency Management Plan and the Mississippi National Guard Operations Plan, I ordered the following units to report to state active duty and to be in place by August 28 with their equipment.

223rd Engineer Battalion

890th Engineer Battalion

112th Military Police Battalion

1/204th Air Defense Artillery Battalion

Joint Operations Center Personnel.

These personnel and their equipment were in place on August 28th and pre-positioned at Camp Shelby and Camp McCain, with a small contingent (approximately 175 soldiers) positioned forward in the lower three counties of Mississippi.

In addition, on August 28th, as the storm strengthened, the advance detachments of the following units were activated and ordered to their readiness centers to prepare their units for mobilization by August 29.

114th Area Support Group

298th Maintenance Battalion
367th Maintenance Company
1387th Quartermaster Company
1687th Transportation Company
186th Air Refueling Wing
172nd Airlift Wing
255th Air Control Squadron
209th Civil Engineer Squadron
168th Engineer Group

Since approximately four thousand Mississippi soldiers and airmen were federally mobilized and deployed with the Global War on Terrorism, I felt it necessary to contact our surrounding states including Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida with pre-landfall requests for additional assistance as needed.

In summary, by August 29, the day of landfall, 3,088 Mississippi soldiers and airmen had been activated, all remaining forces were on alert, and request for assistance from other states had been identified.

During and immediately after landfall, National Guard search and rescue operations began on the Gulf Coast. As soon as the winds were safe for maneuver, the pre-positioned forces were ordered to converge on the Gulf Coast. My personal night ground reconnaissance on the 29th and aerial reconnaissance early the next morning clearly revealed a disaster of unprecedented proportion all along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi,

and significant damage as far as one hundred and fifty miles inland, creating a battle space in excess of 12,000 square miles.

After reporting this initial surveillance to Governor Barbour, I immediately directed my rear operations center to activate all remaining available Mississippi National Guardsmen and to execute the movement of pre-planned assistance from other states. In addition, I requested assistance through the National Guard Bureau from other states, up to division strength. Accordingly, the 4,533 Mississippi National Guard soldiers and airmen were ultimately augmented by 11,839 National Guard personnel from 36 states under EMAC agreements.

Our operations were initially impeded by lack of adequate communications with our own units and other state, local and federal officials. However, we positioned troops and made assignments in the most efficient manner as possible based on observations from aerial and ground reconnaissance.

By the end of the second day after landfall, my intelligence reports indicated that the previously assumed flow of food and water was severely restricted. Many pre-planned distribution points were inaccessible and many hundreds of people were stranded by flood waters, blocked roadways or lack of fuel for transportation. These desperate civilians were primarily observed by aerial reconnaissance in Hancock County. Upon the realization that food and water was not going to arrive by normal means in time, I ordered an immediate airlift of food and water utilizing our helicopters and our own rations and immediately requested through U. S. Northern Command and emergency airlift of military stocks of MRE's. Within a day, massive amounts of MRE's began arriving at Gulfport just in time to be disseminated to prevent starvation. Almost 1.7

million MRE's were flown in to my position thanks to the quick reaction of LTG Joe Inge of Northern Command. Our helicopter airlift was conducted over a five day period and reached as high as 350 sorties per day.

This is only one of many examples of National Guardsmen rising to the occasion and improvising as necessary in the wake of a disaster of this magnitude. The National Guard in Mississippi cleared over 4,000 miles of roadway, directly or indirectly assisted in over 600 rescues, airlifted 1.2 million MRE's , 1 million gallons of water and critical medicines to stranded people, saving untold numbers of lives. They conducted over 3,000 presence patrols resulting in law enforcement stability and assisted in 72 arrests ranging from looting to less serious violations. They distributed by ground and distribution points over 39 million pounds of ice, 5.4 million gallons of water, 2.7 million MRE's in 37 counties. Our aircraft logged over 1,995 hours and we maintained in excess of a 94 percent Operational Readiness rate on all equipment.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would be remiss if I did not mention to the United States Congress the name of Sgt. Joshua Russell, Detachment 1, Company A, 89th Engineers, who lost his life during the storm attempting to effect the rescue of an elderly couple. Sgt Russell so highly represents the dedication and commitment of our National Guard. He swore to defend this county against all enemies foreign and domestic. He died facing forward to the enemy, in this case a natural disaster, and his last moments on this earth were spent helping others at the risk of his own life. He is a true American hero.

Thank you and I would look forward to answering your questions.