

Hurricane Katrina: An Agent's Perspective

by Sr. Agent Joe Arnaud

Hurricane Katrina was the 11th named tropical storm of the 2005 hurricane season. I can remember watching the weather and hoping it was not going to strike the Gulf Coast.

On Saturday, Aug. 27, 2005, I remember like it was yesterday the call I received from Lt. Chuck Comeaux, the Region 9B supervisor. It went something like this: "Hey, Freddie, what are you doing?" I advised that I was buckling down hatches because this

looks like a bad one. Lt. Comeaux replied, "Yep, I'm getting out of Dodge."

After the jokes were made, we got down to the serious business of talking about making sure all of the equipment was fueled and safely secured out of harm's way.

I advised Lt. Comeaux that I would be staying in town due to my wife's job; she was unable to evacuate.

I can remember all day on Sunday, Aug. 28, watching the news out of New Orleans,

with Gov. Blanco and Mayor Nagin advising everyone to evacuate.

It was approximately 3 a.m. Monday, Aug. 29, when the weather really deteriorated.

I was in my house and the wind sounded like a freight train passing, and the rain sounded like golf balls being thrown against my house. This seemed to last for days.

Approximately 11 a.m., the weather began to calm. I went outside to take a look at what damage my house sustained.

As I was surveying the damage, a neighbor came to me and advised that the lower side of Bayou Des Allemands was beginning to flood, and the fire department was requesting help. I put on my uniform and began to assist. There were approximately 25 homes on the lower side of the bayou flooding.

That is when my rescue work began.

On Tuesday, Aug. 30, I remember turning on my state radio and hearing HQ 41





advising other Region 8 agents that he was launching his boat from St. Claude Bridge in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans.

I was contacted by other Region 9B agents, advising me to go to New Orleans and meet with Region 8 agents, so I did so.

I was familiar with the New Orleans area because that is where I grew up.

Upon arriving at the temporary command post, I was quickly met by Maj. Sandy Dares, who advised me to report to the Ninth Ward.

When I arrived at the St. Claude Bridge, it was a sight I could never have imagined. Hundreds of New Orleans residents stranded with nowhere to go. The water in the Ninth Ward was up to the roof of the houses. I, along with Region 8 and Region 9 agents, began removing people from their roofs. I encountered 1,000 people who needed help. Agents were working their hardest in an attempt to save everyone. We worked until dark, and the boats were getting low on fuel. At this time, we stopped the rescue so we could regroup and refuel.

Through the next two weeks after Hurricane Katrina, I observed several heartbreaking events. Elderly people who were stranded on rooftops, and refusing to be rescued because they did not want the residence they worked so hard for throughout their lives to be looted. Hundreds of mothers and fathers wading through the floodwaters while holding their children over their heads.

But I also observed the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) come together as a *team* to get the job *done*. I observed agents from the

entire state, many of whom I had met prior to this date, ready to work and to save as many lives as possible.

Every day when we reported to the command post, I observed agents perform above and beyond the call of duty, through adversity without a complaint. Several of the agents had lost everything they had ever worked for and had not seen their families in days. This did not stop them from completing the job we were out there to do. That job was to save lives.

There were so many memorable events that occurred during those two weeks after the storm that I can't list them all. I watched agents get in waist-deep water to carry women and children to a rescue vehicle...agents working in New Orleans and encountering gunfire while rescuing people... agents working 24 hours straight without stopping at all, not even for a meal.

Hurricane Katrina will be mentioned in history books. Let me tell you this, the LDWF saved thousands of lives, and that just proves that in the darkest hour, our department was there to accomplish the job we were sent to do, and the people saved were thankful for that.

LDWF employees—from Col. Vidrine to the new cadets who were attending the training academy—took the situation at hand and did what it took to get the mission accomplished.

This was a bad time for the state of Louisiana, but it gave our department a chance to show what it's made of, and how a well-oiled machine can perform faultlessly.

I am proud to be a LDWF Enforcement Division agent. ■