

Hurricane Rita: Close Encounter of the Bovine

by Sgt. David Liles

In the days following Hurricane Rita, we had the job of checking on homes in the rural areas that were hardest hit. Unlike Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita did not cause much human loss or immediate distress. But the one major problem with Hurricane Rita was that there was a 15-foot-plus storm surge that covered a vast area that is home to hundreds of thousands of cattle and deer. The animals were forced to swim in 15-foot-plus waves for almost 12 hours. What made the problem worse was that the cattle and deer that did survive could not drink the water once they got their feet on the ground. The end result was an overwhelming number of dead animals, and those that lived were all mad. This is a story of an encounter

that Sr. Agent Aaron Herpin and I had with one of the survivors of Hurricane Rita.

It had been about three days since the passing of the storm when our mission was to access the Little Chenier and East Creole areas to survey damage and to make sure that there weren't any residents still in need of assistance. Luckily, these people had all evacuated, and there was no human loss in these areas.

To paint a picture, Little Chenier Road had only a sheen of water over it in most places, and in some areas the road was even exposed. This road is elevated about 5 feet above the surrounding area. We were traveling along the side of the road by boat and surveying damage when we found one of the very few homes that made it through

the storm. The only problem was that the home was on the other side of the road, and we could not get the boat across the road. We decided to get out of the boat and try to walk to the house just to be sure nobody was in it. We walked up the road a piece, trying to find the driveway to walk on, but it was under the water and hard to see. When we did locate the driveway and tried to walk on it, we realized that the storm had removed the yard of this house, and the water was about 5 feet deep between the house and us.

We figured that we would find a place to get the boat to the other side of the road and return later to check this particular house. So we began walking back to the boat, which was about 100 yards from us. And it was at this

point that we discovered we had gotten ourselves into a little situation.

As we turned to walk back to the boat, we noticed a black cow standing in the very narrow road between the boat and us. When we began walking toward the cow, it began to paw the ground like a Mexican bull at the bullfights. I was pretty calm because I was with Sr. Agent Herpin. Aaron has worked with cows his whole life, and I was sure that anything unusual to happen would be second nature to him. So I asked, "Is this normal?"

The whole time we are facing the cow, it is getting madder and it's not leaving. At the time it was kind of funny. Aaron says to me, "No, this is not normal, and this is not good." He even deflates my confidence a little more by





saying that he is nervous. OK, now we have a mad cow situation on our hands. We then proceeded to try everything in the book to scare the cow away so we could get back to the boat. We tried throwing things, yelling, walking toward her, and a number of other things that I have forgotten. Well, none of them worked anyway. All we did was make the cow even madder than she was already.

We needed to get back to the boat, so I suggested that we try to walk past the cow...very slowly. Remember, there is only the road here. Just off the side of this very narrow road is a 5- or 6-foot drop into the water. We are dealing with about a 15-foot wide road, and the cow, who is getting progressively madder, is standing in the middle of it. I had my 870 shotgun, but it was loaded with low brass #8s to shoot the snakes

out of the trees.

On this day, the cattle farmers were not but a few miles from us trying to retrieve what was left of their herds, so I told Aaron I would really hate to shoot the cow. As we began to walk very slowly toward the cow, it was still pawing the ground and glaring at us like we were Spanish matadors. When we got about 20 feet from the cow, she began to get pretty tense. I stopped and told Aaron that I was now prepared to shoot this cow if I had to for our safety. He agreed that that might have to happen. All I could think about was that all I had was low brass #8s that probably would feel like a mosquito bite to this thing.

The moment of truth came when we got dead even with the cow. Now we were only about 10 feet or less from it, and all we had behind us was open water. We were already

walking in about a foot of water trying to create as much distance as we could, but it was not enough. As we got right next to the cow I looked at Aaron and said, "We're not gonna make it." I told Aaron I was going to try firing a shot right over its head, and maybe it would scare it off. He agreed that this might work. So I shot a round over the cow's head. *Bad idea!*

That cow started coming at us, and she was coming fast. I made a bad decision and took a step backward. So now I am falling into the 5 or 6 feet of water, and I have a very angry cow charging right at me. As I fell, I managed to rack another shell and shoot, and rack even another shell and shoot. When I

arose out of the water, the cow was running in the other direction, and we did the same—straight to the boat. When we got back into the boat, we decided to take a closer look at the cow to see if I needed to tell some cattle farmers that I was sorry for wounding their animal. Just as I suspected, either I did not hit the cow or the low brass shells didn't even hurt her. If I did hit her, it didn't even break the skin.

By then it didn't matter because the cow was gone and we were safely back in the boat. I was just a little wetter than I was at the beginning of the day. So we decided that for the rest of the day we would try our best to stay in the boat to complete our mission. ■

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