

September 9, 2005

## Police Begin Seizing Guns of Civilians

By **ALEX BERENSON** and **JOHN M. BRODER**

NEW ORLEANS, Sept. 8 - Local police officers began confiscating weapons from civilians in preparation for a forced evacuation of the last holdouts still living here, as President Bush steeled the nation for the grisly scenes of recovering the dead that will unfold in coming days.

Police officers and federal law enforcement agents scoured the city carrying assault rifles seeking residents who have holed up to avoid forcible eviction, as well as those who are still considering evacuating voluntarily to escape the city's putrid waters.

"Individuals are at risk of dying," said P. Edwin Compass III, the superintendent of the New Orleans police. "There's nothing more important than the preservation of human life."

Although it appeared Wednesday night that forced evacuations were beginning, on Thursday the authorities were still looking for those willing to leave voluntarily. The police said that the search was about 80 percent done, and that afterward they would begin enforcing Mayor C. Ray Nagin's order to remove residents by force.

Mr. Bush, in Washington, urged the nearly one million people displaced by the storm to contact federal agencies to apply for immediate aid. He praised the outpouring of private charity to the displaced, but said the costs of restoring lives would affect all Americans, as would the horror of the storm's carnage.

"The responsibility of caring for hundreds of thousands of citizens who no longer have homes is going to place many demands on our nation," the president said in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. "We have many difficult days ahead, especially as we recover those who did not survive the storm."

As Mr. Bush spoke, Vice President Dick Cheney was touring Mississippi and Louisiana, in part as an answer to the critics who have said that the administration responded too slowly and timidly to the epic disaster. At a stop in Gulfport, Miss., a heckler shouted an obscenity at the vice president. Mr. Cheney shrugged it off, saying it was the first such abuse he had heard.

Also on Thursday, Congress approved a \$51.8 billion package of storm aid, bringing the total to more than \$62 billion in a week. The government is now spending \$2 billion dollars a day to respond to the disaster.

The confirmed death toll in Louisiana remained at 83 on Thursday. Efforts to recover corpses are beginning, although only a handful of bodies have been recovered so far. Official estimates of the death toll in New Orleans are still vague, but 10,000 remains a common figure.

Mississippi officials said they had confirmed 196 dead as of Thursday, including 143 in coastal areas, although Gov. Haley Barbour said he expected the toll to rise.

"It would just be a guess, but the 200 or just over 300 we think is a credible and reliable figure," the governor said on NBC's "Today" show.

He also said electricity would be restored by Sunday to most homes and businesses in the state that could receive it.

No one would venture a prediction about when the lights would come back on in New Orleans.

The water continued to recede slowly in the city 10 days after Hurricane Katrina swept ashore and levees failed at several points, inundating the basin New Orleans sits in.

The Army Corps of Engineers has restored to operation 37 of the city's 174 permanent pumps, allowing them to drain 11,000 cubic feet of water per second from the basin. When all the pumps are working, they can remove 81,000 cubic feet of water per second, said Dan Hitchings of the engineering corps.

It will be months before the breadth of the devastation from the storm is known. But a report by the Louisiana fisheries department calculated the economic loss to the state's important seafood industry at as much as \$1.6 billion over the next 12 months.

Louisiana's insurance commissioner, J. Robert Wooley, said the state had barred insurance companies from canceling any homeowner's insurance policies in the days immediately before the storm hit and afterward.

"All cancellations will be voided," Mr. Wooley said.

Across New Orleans, active-duty soldiers, National Guard members and local law enforcement agencies from across the country continued door-to-door searches by patrol car, Humvee, helicopter and boat, urging remaining residents to leave.

Maj. Gen. James Ron Mason of the Kansas National Guard, who commands about 25,000 Guard troops in and around New Orleans, said his forces had rescued 687 residents by helicopter, boat and high-wheeled truck in the past 24 hours.

General Mason said Guard troops, although carrying M-16 rifles, would not use force to evict recalcitrant citizens. That, he said, was a job for the police, not members of the Guard.

"I don't believe that you will see National Guard soldiers actually physically forcing people to leave," General Mason said.

Mr. Compass, the police superintendent, said that after a week of near anarchy in the city, no civilians in New Orleans will be allowed to carry pistols, shotguns, or other firearms of any kind. "Only law enforcement are allowed to have weapons," he said.

That order apparently does not apply to the hundreds of security guards whom businesses and some wealthy individuals have hired to protect their property. The guards, who are civilians working for private security firms like Blackwater, are openly carrying M-16s and other assault rifles.

Mr. Compass said that he was aware of the private guards but that the police had no plans to make them give up their weapons.

New Orleans has turned into an armed camp, patrolled by thousands of local, state, and federal law enforcement officers, as well as National Guard troops and active-duty soldiers. While armed looters roamed unchecked last week, the city is now calm.

The city's slow recovery is continuing on other fronts as well, local officials said at a late morning news conference. Pumping stations are now operating across much of the city, and many taps and fire hydrants have water pressure. Tests have shown no evidence of cholera or other dangerous diseases in flooded areas.

With pumps running and the weather here remaining hot and dry, water has visibly receded across much of the city. Formerly flooded streets are now passable, although covered with leaves, tree branches and mud.

Still, many neighborhoods in the northern half of New Orleans remain under 10 feet of water, and Mr. Compass said Thursday that the city's plans for a forced evacuation remained in effect because of the danger of disease and fires.

Mr. Compass said he could not disclose when residents might be forced to leave en masse. The city's police department and federal law enforcement officers from agencies like United States Marshals Service will lead the evacuation, he said. Officers will search houses in both dry and flooded neighborhoods, and no one will be allowed to stay, he said.

Many of the residents still in the city said they did not understand why the city remained intent on forcing them out.

Alex Berenson reported from New Orleans for this article, and John M. Broder from Baton Rouge, La. Reporting was contributed by Sewell Chan from New Orleans, Jeremy Alford and Shaila Dewan from Baton Rouge and Ralph Blumenthal from Houston.

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