



7th DAY OF HELL

A week of horror ends with more evacuations and uncertainty



By Ron Thibodeaux and Gordon Russell
Staff writers

In a city in dire need of some divine intervention from the most catastrophic week in its history, the first post-Katrina Sunday in New Orleans was infused with the sounds of military helicopters and sporadic gunfire instead of lilting hymns and Gospel readings.

On the seventh day of this disaster of biblical proportions, the last evacuees from the fetid conditions of the Superdome and the Convention Center rested with New Orleans in the rearview mirror of the buses taking them to clean, safe havens far away.

In the city they finally left behind, churches were empty, bells did not peal, Sunday services were not held and the Saints, the football version, were said to be pondering their own evacuation, possibly a permanent one, to San Antonio, Texas.

Entergy workers made their first foray into New Orleans to begin the gargantuan task of assessing the damage to the city's electrical system. Their arrival was a glimmer of encouragement in the vista of despair that confronts those charged with rebuilding the city.

Meanwhile, in adjacent Jefferson Parish, authorities braced for a Labor Day invasion of evacuees expected to return for a first look at their homes.

Search and rescue operations continued and during the late afternoon, helicopters using Interstate 10 as a landing pad were pulling people from rooftops in Mid-City and other parts of town.

Law enforcement agencies fielded about 1,000 distress 911 calls Saturday from people still trapped in attics of buildings surrounded by water, State Police said Sunday.

For the city's police officers in particular, Sunday was the first day to get something like a breather after working around the clock for the past eight days.

"Today is the first day you will see a smile on some of the officers' faces," said NOPD Capt. Marlon Defillo, who was taking a break on the neutral ground of Loyola Avenue with Detective William Charbonnet. "This has been a tremendous challenge for members of the police department, but they've held their ground. They've given their hearts and souls."

New Orleans Police officers sent up a cheer at one point Sunday at a report that their colleagues had engaged in a shootout with an armed group on the Danziger Bridge in eastern New Orleans, with several of the suspected marauders - but none of the police officers - being hit. Deputy Police Chief W.J. Riley said police shot eight people, killing five or six of them.

STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX BRANDON

Agents with the U.S. Marshal's Service examine a makeshift grave Sunday at Jackson Avenue and Magazine Street in New Orleans. The inscription says, 'Here lies Vera. God help us.'

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'God sent us to get you'

Rescuers pluck residents from foul waters

By Michael Perlstein
Staff writer

Five Blackhawk helicopters flew in formation overhead. A Chinook plucked a trapped resident from a balcony. But 74-year-old Gloria Galway wasn't budging from her second-floor apartment in the B.W. Cooper public housing complex, despite six feet

of water lapping at her building and a rescue boat ready to take her in.

"I got food, water, my two dogs and my Bible," Galway told the rescue team. "God will take care of me."

After pleading with Galway for five minutes, Hamilton "Ham" Peterson said, "I'm going in."

He trudged through the water, climbed to Galway's apartment and told her, "God sent us to get you."

Galway emerged with her dogs, purse and cane, joining hundreds of other New Orleans residents who were ferried from the homes and apartments Sunday, hemmed in for six days by

disease infested water. The unprecedented search-and-rescue operation took on an increased urgency as police, soldiers, game wardens, and other volunteers met with occasional resistance and even gunfire. But most of the time, they found grateful victims.

An Army soldier said it looked and felt like war, except it is being fought from a flotilla of boats with drivers and volunteers from around the country.

Thrown together in the back of an Army Humvee at the operation's Poydras Street staging area, Peterson, a federal railroad inspector from Washington, D.C., Jenny Krall, a Charlotte, N.C. firefighter, and Texas game war-

den Luett McMahan, were jolted just before the Claiborne Avenue boat launch by a powerful front-end collision. Army driver Jerry Lance had just plowed into a car that was blocking traffic, pushing it 100 feet toward the water.

A group of cops and soldiers cleared the obstruction once and for all by flipping it to the side of the road.

From there, teams were divided into airboats, flat boats, Army pontoons and skiffs to fan out across the Uptown neighborhood. Each boat had a game warden and a driver, a police sharpshooter and one or two rescuers.

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Multiple feet of floodwater remained in the 9th Ward in New Orleans on Sunday, making it particularly burdensome for Roosevelt Kyles to retrieve medicine he needs for his diabetes. It was the only thing he took from his home.

STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER