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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2005

HURRICANE EDITION

DAY 19 DEVELOPMENTS

The official death toll in metropolitan New Orleans: **579**



Drying sediment of sludge may contain petroleum, fecal matter, **See A-2**

A contingent of U.S. senators, led by Louisiana's Mary Landrieu and David Vitter, vows to rebuild New Orleans, **See A-2**

Lack of policy to save pets doomed many in New Orleans homes, **See A-3**

Battered emergency communications complex to get new gear, **See A-5**

Trailers promised for many homeless Slidell workers, **See Metro**

Housing shortage likely to raise prices in key areas, **See B-8**



14 DAYS WITHOUT RAIN

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and some Army Corps of Engineers officials say the lack of rain has helped the city drain more quickly, but corps Maj. George Stejic said showers would help wash away filthy floodwater residue. Parts of New Orleans received about a quarter-inch of rain late Friday.

DEVASTATION, DEATH HAUNT THE LOWER 9TH WARD



STAFF PHOTO BY ELLIS LUCIA

Homes off North Claiborne Avenue in the Lower 9th Ward are vivid illustrations of the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. The emptiness – the only sounds the faint howls of animals and the roar of helicopters – underscored the nearly complete depopulation of the neighborhoods.

Bush plan could be New Deal for N.O.

Programs combat 'legacy of inequality'

By **Bruce Alpert**
Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — As his aides released details of plans to restore Gulf Coast communities crippled by Hurricane Katrina, President Bush said Friday that he hopes the programs will generate new opportunities for those who have faced years of poverty and inequity.

The Bush plan, revealed Thursday in a nationally televised speech from Jackson Square in New Orleans, includes a Gulf Opportunity Zone to foster job creation through tax breaks and small business loans; worker recovery accounts of as much as \$5,000 to pay for job training and child care; an urban homesteading program that would give low-income residents the chance to buy into 4,000 single-family homes in return for "sweat equity"; and federal aid that would provide as much as \$7,500 for each dislocated Gulf Coast student taken in by public or private schools.

The latter would allow Bush to create, on a temporary basis, the kind of large-scale school voucher program he has been unable to pass through Congress during his first term.

And despite urging from some, Bush on Friday ruled out raising taxes for the massive reconstruction effort, which aides said could cost \$200 billion or more. The scope of the Gulf recovery plan surprised some observers.

See **BUSH, A-8**

AFTER THE WATER, UTTER EMPTINESS

By **Brian Thevenot**
Staff writer

Staff Sgt. Robert Andrade and his two-Humvee patrol rolled past a Lower 9th Ward house Monday when one of the soldiers noticed a dog chained up in front of a house. They figured someone had to have secured the chain, so they approached the house and yelled inside.

"Anybody in there?"

No response.

On Tuesday they rolled again past the St. Claude Avenue home, now dry several days after Hurricane Katrina had turned the thoroughfare into a 15-foot canal and a death trap.

No dog. They called into the house

again, now nearly certain that the dog's owners had pulled him inside. They called again. No answer. So they left a bottle of water on the porch.

On Wednesday, the water was gone. On Thursday, they left two MREs and a bottle of water, and the next day those were gone as well.

After three days of feeding a ghost in a dead village, surrounded by hungry dogs standing menacingly atop imploded houses, that was the closest Andrade's patrol came to seeing any sign of life. The utter emptiness – the only sounds the faint howls of animals and the roar of helicopters – underscored the nearly complete depopulation of massive swaths of the city and the Herculean, perhaps impossible, task of rebuilding.

All veterans of a recent tour in Baghdad, the soldiers got so bored they took a picture of a dog defecating on a roof, laughing as they pulled the image onto a laptop computer.

When some subjects came up, they didn't joke.

"It's not the ghosts that scare me, it's the nightmares," Staff Sgt. William Thompson said. "That's the bad stuff, the stuff that keeps you up at night."

Asked if he had seen bodies, he closed his eyes, rubbed his temples for several seconds, and said, "Yes. I don't think they'll ever get an accurate count of the dead."

Down the street from the soldiers,

See **NINTH, A-9**

Body count will likely jump in hard-hit areas

Flooding likely caught many by surprise

By **Michael Perlstein**
Staff writer

Tentative optimism that New Orleans' death toll from Hurricane Katrina might be far lower than first projected gave way to somber reality over 36 hours as search and rescue squads turned up bodies by the dozen in the hardest hit areas of the city.

By midafternoon Friday, the black triangles used to designate human remains were multiplying on an emergency command center map. Federal Emergency Management Agency rescue squad liaison Charles Hood said a spike in discoveries Friday started to take an emotional toll on rescue workers.

"Our squad members are getting access to trauma and grief counselors," Hood said. "It's becoming a very difficult task."

The state is in charge of releasing Katrina's official death total, which stood at 579 Friday night. Hood said the periodic reports from his seven 80-person

squads indicate the casualty count is going to jump in the coming days, but declined to speculate on what the number would reach. One squad alone located and marked more than a dozen houses containing bodies Friday.

"Parts of the city have become a target-rich environment for human remains," Hood said. "We're just now getting into the areas that experienced the most rapid inundation."

Large chunks of the city, including parts of Gentilly, the Desire-Florida area and Upper 9th Ward, have revealed telltale signs that the two breaches of

See **DEATHS, A-10**

2,560

Louisiana children have been reported missing

691

of those have been reunited with family as of Friday

The Katrina Missing Persons Hotline is (888) 544-5475

1,900 La. kids still separated from parents

Mary Swerczek and Allen Powell II
Staff writers

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, some families were forced to enact the most gut-wrenching of escape strategies: separating children from parents to get everyone out of harm's way.

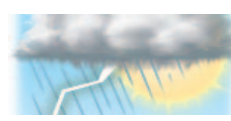
"The circumstances were so dire" that at some crowded evacuation points, parents were told to "pass all of the babies forward," said Nancy McBride, national safety director for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "Things were in such a state of confusion trying to get people to safety."

See **MISSING, A-11**



CONTINUOUS UPDATES COMPLETE KATRINA COVERAGE
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POSSIBLE STORM
HIGH **91** | LOW **76**

