

Naval Aviation Responds to Hurricane Katrina

By Curtis A. Utz

Hurricane Katrina smashed into the United States' Gulf Coast on 29 August 2005, devastating parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Military response to the massive natural disaster included Navy and Naval Aviation assets from across the country, which again demonstrated their inherent capabilities and flexibility to support a civil crisis.

On the afternoon of the storm, NAS JRB New Orleans' emergency management team quickly moved into action to clear the runways and repair the control tower. Within four hours, flight operations began when the first Coast Guard HH-65 landed at the JRB to start relief operations. The Coast Guard had also prepositioned rescue helos to Shreveport, La., and other aviation assets in staging areas near the threatened area in advance of the storm. By 5 September, the Coast Guard had 43 helicopters and 8 fixed wing aircraft conducting operations in the region.

Other area Navy stations became critical to relief efforts. NAS Pensacola, Fla., was the base for over 30 Navy and Marine aircraft involved in the operation. NAS Meridian, Miss., served as a major distribution center for supply trucks being sent to the Gulf Coast with water, MREs, ice, and other vital supplies. The air station also received and housed over 1,000 evacuees.





PHAN Jeremy L. Grisham

Bataan (LHD 5) was already operating in the region as the storm approached. She steamed westward to embark four MH-53s from HM-15 based at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas, which joined two MH-60s from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 28 already on board. Late in the afternoon of 30 August these helos began search and rescue operations in the vicinity of New Orleans.

The Navy soon sent assets from the Norfolk, Va., area, including three amphibious ships: *Iwo Jima* (LHD 7), *Shreveport* (LSD 46), and *Tortuga* (LSD 46). On 4 September, *Iwo Jima* moored pierside in downtown New

Above, a search and rescue swimmer assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 prepares to assist in the rescue of a survivor in Louisiana on 31 August. Facing page, USCG PO2 Scott D. Rady gives the signal to hoist up a pregnant woman from her apartment in New Orleans on 30 August.

Orleans and became a hub for military and civilian helicopter activity in the heart of the city. The amphib became the HQ for Joint Task Force Katrina led by Army Lt. Gen Russell Honore.

Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) also deployed to the area along with

Whidbey Island (LSD 41) on 1 September. *Truman* embarked elements of 13 Navy helicopter squadrons and by deploying close to the disaster area, shortened the mission time for operations that had previously been flown from Pensacola. The carrier also provided support to NAS JRB New Orleans in the form of aviation

continued on page 13



PO2 NyxoLyno Cangemi



PH3 Eric S. Garst

Top, USCG PO2 Shawn Beaty looks for survivors amidst the devastation in New Orleans on 30 August. Above, Navy aviation boatswain's mates board an MH-53 Sea Dragon on *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) on 4 September to fly ashore and assist in fueling and directing aircraft at NAS JRB New Orleans.



Right, AD2 Kirk Crabb of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 15 helps a survivor walk to a Navy MH-53E that will take her to a medical processing area at the New Orleans International Airport. Below, a CH-46E Sea Knight of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 departs NAS JRB New Orleans to conduct search and rescue operations. Aircraft visible on the tarmac—Coast Guard C-130s, Air Force C-135s, and helicopters from the Navy, Marines, Army, and National Guard—illustrate the scope of the relief operations.

boatswain's mates and cooks to keep that vital station in operation.

The demand for aircraft, particularly helicopters, led to the deployment of aircraft from across the services and the country. Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron Light (HSL) 43, HSL-47, and HSL-49, and HSC-21 arrived from NAS North Island, Calif., with their MH-60 Seahawks. Three Marine squadrons from MCAS New River, N.C., sent six CH-53E Super Stallions and two CH-46E Sea Knights, and Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 772, a reserve squadron from Willow Grove, Pa., sent four more Super Stallions. The Army's III Corps and two Air Force rescue wings contributed over 30 helos as well. Naval Aviation units also provided key logistical support; Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 57 and VR-58 moved in Seabees and HSL crewmen; evacuated hundreds of citizens; and transported tons of supplies. At the height of operations, the various elements of the Department of Defense had more than 350 helicopters and over 70 fixed wing aircraft involved in Katrina relief efforts.



PHAN Pedro A. Rodriguez

The readiness of Naval Aviation assets, both active and reserve, to respond to a disaster of this magnitude is reflected in the accompanying images. Naval Aviation assets continue to provide vital assistance to the areas of the Gulf Coast ravaged by Hurricane Katrina and also by Hurricane Rita, which made landfall in the region on 24 September. ✈

Curtis A. Utz is the head of the Naval Aviation History Office of the Naval Historical Center.

