

## **New Orleans in Anarchy with Fights, Rapes**

By ALLEN G. BREED, Associated Press Writer

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NEW ORLEANS - New Orleans descended into anarchy Thursday as corpses lay abandoned in street medians, fights and fires broke out, cops turned in their badges and the governor declared war on looters who have made the city a menacing landscape of disorder and fear.

"They have M-16s and they're locked and loaded," Gov. Kathleen Blanco said of 300 National Guard troops who landed in New Orleans fresh from duty in Iraq. "These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so, and I expect they will."

Four days after Hurricane Katrina roared in with a devastating blow that inflicted potentially thousands of deaths, the fear, anger and violence mounted Thursday.

"I'm not sure I'm going to get out of here alive," said Canadian tourist Larry Mitzel, who handed a reporter his business card in case he goes missing. "I'm scared of riots. I'm scared of the locals. We might get caught in the crossfire."

The chaos deepened despite the promise of 1,400 National Guardsmen a day to stop the looting, plans for a \$10 billion recovery bill in Congress and a government relief effort President Bush called the biggest in U.S. history.

New Orleans' top emergency management official called that effort a "national disgrace" and questioned when reinforcements would actually reach the increasingly lawless city.

About 15,000 to 20,000 people who had taken shelter at New Orleans convention center grew ever more hostile after waiting for buses for days amid the filth and the dead. Police Chief Eddie Compass said there was such a crush around a squad of 88 officers that they retreated when they went in to check out reports of assaults.

"We have individuals who are getting raped, we have individuals who are getting beaten," Compass said. "Tourists are walking in that direction and they are getting preyed upon."

Col. Henry Whitehorn, chief of the Louisiana State Police, said he heard of numerous instances of New Orleans police officers \* many of whom from flooded areas \* turning in their badges.

"They indicated that they had lost everything and didn't feel that it was worth them going back to take fire from looters and losing their lives," Whitehorn said.

A military helicopter tried to land at the convention center several times to drop off food and water. But the rushing crowd forced the choppers to back off. Troopers then tossed the supplies to the crowd from 10 feet off the ground and flew away.

In hopes of defusing the situation at the convention center, Mayor Ray Nagin gave the refugees permission to march across a bridge to the city's unflooded west bank for whatever relief they could find. But the bedlam made that difficult.

"This is a desperate SOS," Nagin said in a statement. "Right now we are out of resources at the convention center and don't anticipate enough buses."

At least seven bodies were scattered outside the convention center, a makeshift staging area for those rescued from rooftops, attics and highways. The sidewalks were packed with people without food, water or medical care, and with no sign of law enforcement.

An old man in a chaise lounge lay dead in a grassy median as hungry babies wailed around him. Around the corner, an elderly woman lay dead in her wheelchair, covered up by a blanket, and another body lay beside her wrapped in a sheet.

"I don't treat my dog like that," 47-year-old Daniel Edwards said as he pointed at the woman in the wheelchair.

"You can do everything for other countries, but you can't do nothing for your own people," he added. "You can go overseas with the military, but you can't get them down here."

The street outside the center, above the floodwaters, smelled of urine and feces, and was choked with dirty diapers, old bottles and garbage.

"They've been teasing us with buses for four days," Edwards said. "They're telling us they're going to come get us one day, and then they don't show up."

Every so often, an armored state police vehicle cruised in front of the convention center with four or five officers in riot gear with automatic weapons. But there was no sign of help from the National Guard.

At one point the crowd began to chant "We want help! We want help!" Later, a woman, screaming, went on the front steps of the convention center and led the crowd in reciting the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd ..."

"We are out here like pure animals," the Issac Clark said.

"We've got people dying out here \* two babies have died, a woman died, a man died," said Helen Cheek. "We haven't had no food, we haven't had no water, we haven't had nothing. They just brought us here and dropped us."

Tourist Debbie Durso of Washington, Mich., said she asked a police officer for assistance and his response was, "Go to hell \* it's every man for himself."

"This is just insanity," she said. "We have no food, no water ... all these trucks and buses go by and they do nothing but wave."

FEMA director Michael Brown said the agency just learned about the situation at the convention center Thursday and quickly scrambled to provide food, water and medical care and remove the corpses.

Speaking on CNN's "Larry King Live," Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said the evacuation of New Orleans should be completed by the end of the weekend.

At the hot and stinking Superdome, where 30,000 were being evacuated by bus to the Houston Astrodome, fistfights and fires erupted amid a seething sea of tense, suffering people who waited in a lines that stretched a half-mile to board yellow school buses.

After a traffic jam kept buses from arriving for nearly four hours, a near-riot broke out in the scramble to get on the buses that finally did show up, with a group of refugees breaking through a line of heavily armed National Guardsmen.

One military policeman was shot in the leg as he and a man scuffled for the MP's rifle, police Capt. Ernie Demmo said. The man was arrested.

Some of those among the mostly poor crowd had been in the dome for four days without air conditioning, working toilets or a place to bathe. An ambulance service airlifting the sick and injured out of the Superdome suspended flights as too dangerous after it was reported that a bullet was fired at a military helicopter.

"If they're just taking us anywhere, just anywhere, I say praise God," said refugee John Phillip. "Nothing could be worse than what we've been through."

By Thursday evening, 11 hours after the military began evacuating the Superdome, the arena held 10,000 more people than it did at dawn. National Guard Capt. John Pollard said evacuees from around the city poured into the Superdome and swelled the crowd to about 30,000 because they believed the arena was the best place to get a ride out of town.

As he watched a line snaking for blocks through ankle-deep waters, New Orleans' emergency operations chief Terry Ebbert blamed the inadequate response on the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"This is not a FEMA operation. I haven't seen a single FEMA guy," he said. He added: "We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims, but we can't bail out the city of New Orleans."

FEMA officials said some operations had to be suspended in areas where gunfire has broken out, but are working overtime to feed people and restore order.

A day after Nagin took 1,500 police officers off search-and-rescue duty to try to restore order in the streets, there were continued reports of looting, shootings, gunfire and carjackings \* and not all the crimes were driven by greed.

When some hospitals try to airlift patients, Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Cheri Ben-Iesan said, "there are people just taking potshots at police and at helicopters, telling them, 'You better come get my family.'"

Outside a looted Rite-Aid drugstore, some people were anxious to show they needed what they were taking. A gray-haired man who would not give his name pulled up his T-shirt to show a surgery scar and explained that he needs pads for incontinence.

"I'm a Christian. I feel bad going in there," he said.

Earl Baker carried toothpaste, toothbrushes and deodorant. "Look, I'm only getting necessities," he said. "All of this is personal hygiene. I ain't getting nothing to get drunk or high with."

Several thousand storm victims had arrived in Houston by Thursday night, and they quickly got hot meals, showers and some much-needed rest.

Audree Lee, 37, was thrilled after getting a shower and hearing her teenage daughter's voice on the telephone for the first time since the storm. Lee had relatives take her daughter to Alabama so she would be safe.

"I just cried. She cried. We cried together," Lee said. "She asked me about her dog. They wouldn't let me take her dog with me. ... I know the dog is gone now."

While floodwaters in the city appeared to stabilize, efforts continued to plug three breaches that had opened up in the levee system that protects this below-sea-level city.

Helicopters dropped sandbags into the breach and pilings were being pounded into the mouth of the canal Thursday to close its connection to Lake Pontchartrain, state Transportation Secretary Johnny Bradberry said. The next step called for using about 250 concrete road barriers to seal the gap.

In Washington, the White House said Bush will tour the devastated Gulf Coast region on Friday and has asked his father, former President George H.W. Bush, and former President Clinton to lead a private fund-raising campaign for victims.

The president urged a crackdown on the lawlessness.

"I think there ought to be zero tolerance of people breaking the law during an emergency such as this \* whether it be looting, or price gouging at the gasoline pump, or taking advantage of charitable giving or insurance fraud," Bush said. "And I've made that clear to our attorney general. The citizens ought to be working together."

Donald Dudley, a 55-year-old New Orleans seafood merchant, complained that when he and other hungry refugees broke into the kitchen of the convention center and tried to prepare food, the National Guard chased them away.

"They pulled guns and told us we had to leave that kitchen or they would blow our damn brains out," he said. "We don't want their help. Give us some vehicles and we'll get ourselves out of here!"