

October/November 2005



Boots on the Ground: No Ivory Tower Here

1,087,200	Number of meals-ready-to-eat that the Texas Forest Service Lone Star Incident Management Team distributed in Hammond, La., after Hurricane Katrina
13,000	Number of rescues Texas Task Force 1 was involved with in New Orleans
1,700	Number of students at Texas A&M at Galveston, for whom plans were made to integrate into the student body at Texas A&M following Hurricane Rita if necessary
650	Number of special-needs patients brought to Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, which was turned into the largest human hospital in Central Texas on Sept. 23
481	Number of hurricane-affected students who are enrolled in A&M System institutions
450	Number of National Guard troops who stayed at Texas A&M's Student Recreation Center Sept. 23 and 24
77	Number of hurricane-affected students who are now enrolled at Prairie View A&M
40	Number of officers and crew on the <i>USNS Sirius</i> , the training ship at Texas A&M at Galveston, who are working 18+ hour days to house, feed and provide laundry and other services for 250 officials involved in recovery efforts in New Orleans
6	Number of athletic teams from Tulane that are now housed at Texas A&M

Testifying early in the recent legislative session, the head of one of our Aggie agencies answered a question by saying there's no substitute for boots on the ground.

After Katrina and Rita, I know what he means. The A&M System responded with lots of boots on the ground, and I couldn't have been prouder.

I said as much to the first contingent of urban search and rescue specialists of Texas Task Force 1 returning from New Orleans. The task force is under the jurisdiction of our Texas Engineering Extension Service. They had 121 people near New Orleans waiting for Katrina, including 41 water rescue specialists. They participated in the rescue of thousands of stranded people.

I told the bone-tired returnees that chancellors write memos and letters, conduct meetings, make speeches, move paper from the inbox to the outbox, and make an occasional decision.

While chancellors may do some good in an indirect way, their work can't be as satisfying as what these heroes had been doing daily for almost two weeks, and that I was proud to be associated with them.

They gave me the obligatory cap and T-shirt, which I assumed I would wear a few hours later to meet the second contingent returning from the front. When the time came, I decided I couldn't wear them because I hadn't earned them. Maybe later, but not that day.

Me and Bobby McKee

TEEX Director Lanny Smith had kept my Blackberry informed of their activities a couple of times a day. His detailed briefings made me feel like a team member vicariously engaged in a historic event.

I must confess, it's neat getting what amounts to military-style briefings on my Blackberry from a former colonel, even if I do have to translate military time into wristwatch time on my fingers.



From left to right: Richard Adams, dean of Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, Nurse Walker-Marable with the U.S. Public Health Service and Chancellor McTeer at the Large Animal Hospital.



Texas Task Force 1 Director Bob McKee (right) toured Homeland Security Secretary Michael

Bob McKee, the sergeant-style leader of the returning group, also returned bone tired. Yet the next day, he and his local comrades visited to meet evacuees housed comfortably at Reed Arena. I joined them for that visit.

What struck me most was that by then Bob had already gotten a fresh Aggie haircut—high and tight.

The General Goes to School

Texas A&M's Reed Arena was quite a sight. People were sitting on the edge of their beds—yes, real beds, not cots—telling their stories. Arrangements for their arrival had been made in record time by Texas A&M's Corps of Cadets under the leadership of Lieutenant General John Van Alstyne, Corps commandant.

My most memorable moment came when the general announced over the loud speaker, or bull horn, that the kiddos were going to school tomorrow morning so they had better “get their heads right.”

I noticed a few nods of parental appreciation for the general's help. I later mentioned it to Bob Gates, president of Texas A&M, and he said all kids needed a general like ours in their lives. Indeed.

Truck Stop Days

From about age five, I spent most of my home time at Doyal's Truck Stop on Highway 411 in north Georgia. Doyal was my dad. In the early days, before Interstate 75 missed us by 18 miles, it was almost always, in my dad's words “covered up” with 18 wheelers.

My truck stop days came back to me when I accompanied Jim Hull, head of the Texas Forest Service, and Elsa Murano, vice chancellor and dean of agriculture, to Hammond, Louisiana, where large parking areas were “covered up” with 18 wheelers full of water, ice and prepackaged food.

About 70 employees of the Texas Forest Service were in charge of the logistics and distribution of these items. They had set up headquarters in an empty store. I was proud to be told by the ranking member of the Pennsylvania National Guard that they were learning a lot from our guys.

I was happy to hear it, but not surprised. They were, of course, fighting a two-front war—against flooding in New Orleans and the coastal area, and forest fires in dry East Texas.

A Different Species of Patients

The entrepreneurial prize, however, goes to Texas A&M's Vet School, in cooperation with the Health Science Center, who turned its state-of-the-art large animal hospital into a hospital for human evacuees from Houston hospitals and nursing homes.

Chertoff (left) through New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath.



Texas Forest Service Director Jim Hull and Chancellor McTeer view maps in Hammond, La., showing the commodity distribution sites across southeast Louisiana.

My best memory of that was of a vet medicine professor in farm boots, a western belt and hospital scrubs describing, but not complaining about, his unpleasant duties as a voluntary nurse to human hospital patients in this state-of-the-art large animal hospital.

Aggie Navy to the Rescue

While our agencies were getting their boots muddy, our universities were helping out in their own way. All offered to take in students from the hurricane-affected areas with the details left until later.

Texas A&M in College Station got the most—over 350 students and six sports teams from Tulane. Prairie View took in almost 80, and the others had fewer responses.

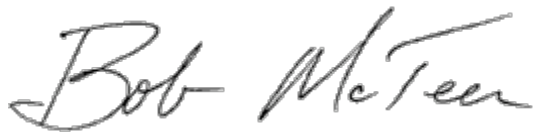
Our “Aggie Navy” even got into the act. The *USNS Sirius*, the training ship at Texas A&M at Galveston, is housing about 250 workers who are who are involved in recovery efforts in New Orleans—far more than any other such ship. The 40 or so officers are working 18+ hour days to house, feed and provide laundry and other services for these workers.

All and all, it was a great month to be chancellor, and to associate with our “boots on the ground.” I’m looking for Bobby McKee’s barber.

A footnote: Shortly after the first bombing in the London subways and bus in July, the chief of the London Fire Brigade appeared on camera—I happened to be watching CNN—and mentioned that his guys had benefited greatly from training in urban search and rescue from Texas A&M.

We invited some of them back to College Station, hoping to recognize them at our September Board of Regents meeting. That meeting was postponed because of Hurricane Rita, but I ended up sitting with a couple of them at the football game, played primarily for students and locals.

We sawed varsity’s horns off in a British accent.



© 2007 The Texas A&M University System

[Visit Dr.
McTeer's
website](#)
