

Military arrives in New Orleans

► **HELP**, from News 1

backs of open-top trucks, their rifles pointing skyward.

The military convoy was followed by dozens of air-conditioned tour buses, which broke off and went to the Louisiana Superdome, where thousands of storm refugees were massed outside, waiting to be evacuated, after suffering through the heat, the filth and the overpowering stench inside the stadium.

National Guardsmen carrying rifles and wearing camouflage gear also arrived outside the Superdome, walking in a long line past a vast crowd of bedraggled people fanning themselves miserably in the heat.

The soldiers' arrival-in-force came amid blistering criticism from the mayor and others who said the federal government had bungled the relief effort and let people die in the streets for lack of food, water or medicine.

On Thursday, at the Convention Center, corpses lay abandoned outside the building, and many storm refugees complained bitterly that they had been forsaken by the government. And at the Superdome, fights and fires broke out

and storm victims battled for seats on the buses taking them to the Houston Astro-dome.

"The people of our city are holding on by a thread," Mayor Ray Nagin warned in a statement to CNN. "Time has run out. Can we survive another night? And who can we depend on? Only God knows."

In Washington, President Bush admitted "the results are not acceptable" and pledged to bolster the relief efforts. He visited the stricken Gulf Coast later in the day, and pledged in Mobile, Ala.: "What is not working right, we're going to make it right."

Lt. Gen. Steven Blum of the National Guard said 7,000 National Guardsmen arriving in Louisiana today would be dedicated to restoring order in New Orleans. He said half of them had just returned from assignments overseas and are "highly proficient in the use of lethal force." He pledged to "put down" the violence "in a quick and efficient manner."

"But they are coming here to save Louisiana citizens. The only thing we are attacking is the effects of this hurricane," he said. Blum said that a huge airlift of supplies was landing today and that it signaled "the cavalry is and will continue to

arrive."

As he left the White House for his visit to the devastated area, Bush said 600 newly arrived military police officers would be sent to the convention center to secure the site so that food and medicine could get there.

How to help

The American Red Cross's Bay Area and San Joaquin County chapters are accepting financial donations to help hurricane victims with food, emergency supplies and home cleanup kits. The Red Cross also is recruiting volunteers to help with future local, regional and national emergencies.

To contact the Red Cross to provide assistance for Hurricane Katrina, or to obtain information on volunteers or other programs, call (888) 443-5722. Anyone wishing to volunteer for the San Joaquin County chapter can call (209) 466-6971.

Financial contributions can be sent to the American Red Cross, 85 Second St., eighth floor, San Francisco, 94105, with "disaster relief fund" in the note section of the check.

My city is gone

THE shock of what's happening to New Orleans is too much for me to get my head around right now. The devastation Hurricane Katrina caused there is the kind of waking nightmare you could only understand abstractly before — a "worst-case scenario" for the city — but one that seemed only hypothetical until now. No one really could have imagined the streets covered with water and the survivors in chaos. It feels crushing.

For decades, I've been a lover of the Crescent City, from its music and cuisine to its architecture, history and often laissez-faire approach to life.

I lived there for the past two Octobers, but I fell in love with the city, embarrassingly enough, while attending Northwestern University in the late '80s, when I saw the Dennis Quaid movie "The Big Easy" (a nickname the locals hold in the same regard Bay Area natives have for "Frisco; there's nothing particularly easy about life there).

Having grown up in Chicago's bland suburbia, I found New Orleans — the northernmost Caribbean city, as some people consider it — irresistibly exotic and seductive.

I read book after book about the city, learning about crawfish etouffee, nearby Cajun music, the area's French colonial founding and the 19th century Haitian refugees who brought voodoo with them and helped create the music we know today as jazz.

When I first visited, I was heartbroken to find not a charming seaport fantasy but a modern metropolis, though I grew to love the city's many novel idiosyncrasies as well as its unique history.

For more than 10 years, whenever I've visited, I've stayed at a guesthouse at 906 Mazant St., at the corner of Burgundy (pronounced BURGUNDY) Street in the Bywater neighborhood, in the city's Ninth Ward. I learned about the place by chance when I took a bus from Austin, Texas, and found it on a listing of cheap lodgings at the city's Greyhound station.

A few blocks away, at the corner of Dauphine and Lesseps streets, is Vaughn's Lounge, a neighborhood bar that on Thursday nights has been home for many years to trumpeter and singer Kermit Ruffins and his Barbecue Swingers, who play music you can't help dancing to. The owner would cook up a pot of red beans and rice for the audience to enjoy, gratis, during the show's intermission. Most folks would gather out front on wooden bleachers and around upended telephone cable spools to reenergize and enjoy the warm night air.

That's the kind of place New Orleans is: Go out to see music, and wind up with a little something extra, what the natives call lagniappe (LA-nyahp).

Just a few minutes from the French Quarter, Bywater is a historic district, but the area is considered a ghetto. Down the street from the guesthouse, a corner store would serve fried shrimp and oyster dinners for about \$7 and, for a time, beer and liquor through its revolving, bulletproof window — all night long.

The impoverished residents of Bywater, like many elsewhere in the city, are far from tourists, lacking the disposable income to party into the night as visitors do, and they



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have few options for employment. For years the local industry has depended on offshore oil refining and tourism, which don't provide nearly enough jobs to support a metro population of 1.1 million.

So the city, which the 2000 Census said is 67 percent black and has a median housing value of \$87,300, has a siege mentality, with shutters covering windows and fear of crime (shootings, stabings, theft, robberies, carjackings and drug-dealing) that grips the disenfranchised population and kept people stubbornly locked in their homes. Now you see them clinging to their rooftops, pleading for rescue — and, in desperation, resorting to gang-style thuggery to survive.

Last time I was there, I spent a few nights catching up with my friend Ron, with whom I drove out to San Francisco in 1993 to start a new life. He wound up studying medicine at Tulane University and works as a doctor in the city; he decided to ride out Katrina with friends in the Quarter. When I called his number Thursday, his phone just rang; I found out through his parents that he evacuated to Houston.

The same day I learned that my friends Jeffrey and Andrea, who used to run the guesthouse, also are OK in Texas, but they have friends stranded in New Orleans who say they're starving. The couple plan to drive back to the city with supplies to try to rescue them.

The closest analogy I can think of to what's happening there, besides Bangladesh's deadly monsoons and San Francisco's 1906 earthquake, is Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 1975, when Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army forced the entire population to abandon the city.

It all feels like losing a loved one, and I'm going through stages of grief — disbelief that the long-dreaded disaster really is happening, anger that the levees weren't patched Monday as Mayor Ray Nagin said they should have been, sorrow for the misery of those still trapped there, and hopelessness at the thousands of lives taken by the flooding.

I wish I could help, but all I can do right now is feel.

And pray, I guess. I don't have a religious bone in my body, but this week I've asked every deity I could think of — God, Satan, Buddha, Allah, Siva, Dionysos, the Great Spirit, Jesus Christ almighty — to save these people, spare the city, give everyone a chance to preserve the humanity of New Orleans.

The only good thing that can come of this is that the rebuilding effort will renew the local economy and help alleviate the entrenched financial gulf between the city's haves and have-nots. But that's months away. Right now, I've lost my spiritual home.

My city is gone.

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DAVE MARTIN — Associated Press

THOUSANDS OF NEW ORLEANS RESIDENTS gather Thursday at an evacuation staging area along Interstate 10 in Metarie, La.

Gunshots scare off rescue helicopters

► **HEALTH**, from News 1

have tried to use any inside pressure we can. We are turning to you. Please help us," said Dr. Norman McSwain, chief of trauma surgery at Charity Hospital, the larger of two public hospitals.

Charity Hospital is across the street from Tulane University Medical Center, a private facility that has almost completed evacuating more than 1,000 patients and family members, he said.

No such public resources are available for Charity, which has about 250 patients, or University Hospital several blocks away, which has about 110 patients. Tulane's heliport is available if patients from the public hospitals could be brought there, McSwain said.

"We need coordinated help from the government," he said.

Late Thursday afternoon, the U.S. Surgeon General's office told the AP that five private helicopters had been secured to start taking patients out of Charity Hospital. Efforts to get more information from Charity or University hospitals late in the day were unsuccessful because phone lines previously reachable were jammed.

Earlier, McSwain described horrific conditions in his hospital.

"There is no food in Charity Hospital. They're eating fruit bowl punch and that's all they've got to eat. There's minimal water," McSwain said.

"Most of their power is out. Much of the hospital is dark. The ICU (intensive care unit) is on the 12th floor, so the phy-

sicians and nurses are having to walk up floors to see the patients."

Dr. Lee Hamm, chairman of medicine at Tulane University, said he took a canoe from there to the two public hospitals, where he also works, to check conditions.

"The physicians and nurses are doing an incredible job, but there are patients laying on stretchers on the floor, the halls were dark, the stairwells are dark. Of course, there's no elevators. There's no communication with the outside world," he said.

"We're afraid that somehow these two hospitals have been left off . . . that somehow somebody has either forgotten it or ignored it or something, because there is no evidence anything is being done."

Hamm said there was relief Wednesday as word traveled throughout University Hospital that the National Guard was coming to evacuate them, but the rescue never materialized.

"You can imagine how demoralizing that was," he said.

Throughout New Orleans, the death, destruction and depravity deepened even as the hurricane waters leveled off.

"Hospitals are trying to evacuate," said Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Cheri Ben-Ilesan, spokesman at the city emergency operations center. "At every one of them, there are reports that as the helicopters come in, people are shooting at them. There are people just taking pot shots at police and at helicopters, telling them, 'You better come get my family.'"

Richard Zuschlag, president of Aca-

dian Ambulance Service Inc., described the chaos at a suburban hospital.

"We tried to airlift supplies into Kenner Memorial Hospital late last evening and were confronted by an unruly crowd with guns, and the pilots refused to land," he said.

"My medics were crying, screaming for help. When we tried to land at Kenner, my pilots got scared because 100 people were on the helipad and some of them had guns. He was frightened and would not land."

Zuschlag said 65 patients brought to the roof of another city hospital, Touro Infirmary, for evacuation Wednesday night spent the night there. The hospital's generator and backup generator had failed, and doctors decided it was safer to keep everyone on the roof than carry fragile patients back downstairs.

"The hospital was so hot that with no rain or anything, they were better off in the fresh air on the roof," he said.

In Houston, 60 doctors and nurses worked in a makeshift clinic in a hangar at Ellington Field, quickly examining evacuees Gulf Coast cities before sending them to hospitals or releasing them to family members.

"We've seen patients who've recently had transplants, were on ventilators, had serious infections, nursing home patients, patients with pneumonia, patients who've not had kidney dialysis for a week," said Dr. J. Kalavar, director of the patient reception team at Ellington. "Everyone of them is anxious and exhausted."

holds far less sway.

Once the hurricane hit, relief trickled into the Gulf Coast. Even Federal Emergency Management Agency director Michael Brown, whose agency is in charge of disaster response, pronounced the initial results unacceptable.

The hurricane was the first major test of FEMA since it became part of the Homeland Security Department, a massive new bureaucracy that many feared would make the well-respected FEMA another sluggish federal agency.

Looting soon broke out as local police stood by. Some police didn't want to stop people from getting badly needed

food and water. Thousands of National Guard troops were ordered to the Gulf Coast, but their ranks have been drastically thinned by the war in Iraq.

On top of all this, Katrina is one of the worst natural disasters ever to hit the United States. The best leaders running the most efficient agencies would have been sharply challenged.

"Look at all they've had to deal with," former President Clinton told CNN shortly after joining former President Bush on a fundraising campaign for hurricane relief. "I'm telling you, nobody every thought it would happen like this."

War in Iraq has thinned the ranks of the National Guard

► **BLAME**, from News 1

and declared victory. And the public didn't exactly demand tax increases to pay for flood-control and hurricane-protection projects.

Just last year, the Army Corps of Engineers sought \$105 million for hurricane and flood programs in New Orleans. The White House slashed the request to about \$40 million. Congress finally approved \$42.2 million, less than half of the agency's request.

Yet the lawmakers and Bush agreed to a \$286.4 billion pork-laden highway bill that included more than 6,000 pet proj-

ects for lawmakers. Congress spent money on dust control for Arkansas roads, a warehouse on the Erie Canal and a \$231 million bridge to a small, uninhabited Alaskan island.

How could Washington spend \$231 million on a bridge to nowhere — and not find \$42 million for hurricane and flood projects in New Orleans? It's a matter of power and politics.

Alaska is represented by Republican Rep. Don Young, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, and Republican Sen. Ted Stevens, a senior member of the all-important Senate Appropriations Committee. Louisiana's delegation

County disaster guide

In the event of a local disaster, San Mateo County officials want the public to know about the Pocket Guide to Emergency Preparedness.

The guide, available at city halls and libraries throughout the county, offers advice on how to plan for and respond to natural and manmade disasters.

The guide is also available on the Web at www.smhealth.org.