

Interviewee: Sloan, Mark
Interview: August 14, 2006

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Mark Sloan
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes
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Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

EV: This is Ernesto Valdes. I am with Mr. Mark Sloan who is the Homeland Security and Special Projects director with Harris County, Texas. We are in his offices located at 2318 Atascosita Road in Humble, Texas 77396. The date of the interview is August 14, 2006. Would you give me your complete name, please?

MS: Mark Sloan.

EV: And can you tell us where you were born?

MS: Chicago, Illinois.

EV: When were you born?

MS: March 27, 1962.

EV: Did you get your education in Chicago?

MS: No, Arizona.

EV: Where in Arizona?

MS: University of Arizona, Tucson.

EV: Did you move from Chicago, live in Arizona and went to school there or did you go there specifically to go to school?

MS: Just to go to school.

EV: Did you have any military service?

MS: No.

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EV: What did you major in when you were in college?

MS: Business administration.

EV: What background to move into this volunteer type of work that you are doing now?

MS: Prior to, just business management, managing employees. It was nothing specific that put me in the role that I ended up in during the Katrina operations.

EV: What were you in before?

MS: I work for the Harris County Judge Robert Eckels in Homeland Security Special Projects and after 911, the Citizen Corps Initiative was created that engages the community to become more aware, better prepared for natural hazards but also the new term that we all learned which was "terrorism."

EV: Was your Citizen Corps part of the National Citizen Corps? Was that the Houston chapter of it? The Harris County chapter?

MS: Yes. The National Citizen Corps creates councils throughout the country and those councils are locally driven from cities to counties and in parts of Texas, multiple county areas.

EV: Are they funded by federal dollars or by the county?

MS: Yes. Federal funds come through the Department of Homeland Security to help support the councils and the five programs that are part of the Citizen Corps.

EV: And you work directly under the county judge?

MS: Correct.

EV: And you take orders from him?

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MS: Yes. I report directly to Doug Adkinson who is the deputy chief of staff.

EV: Can you tell me when was the first time that you realized you were going to get involved in the Katrina relief effort?

MS: After the hurricane impacted Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, there were discussions in the judge's office about what we might be able to do to help. The judge was in communication with the governor's office discussing ways that Harris County would be able to support the State in any way that we could. That was over the weekend, the last weekend of August, last year.

EV: Did the judge know [Judge Eckels] kind of ahead of time or is he like pre-thinking that we would help New Orleans? I have heard from the other interviews that the governor called in everybody together and said, "We've got to do something." And I am going to try and find out whether the judge was already thinking on his own in that direction or did he receive notice from the governor?.

MS: I think you would have to ask the judge specifically. I think the judge was very cognizant of what was happening and as prepared as we try to be in the planning, anything that we could do to help, I am sure that he was already considering but I think the conversations were directly between the governor and the judge.

EV: You had a fairly new organization then, I suspect. You came in after 9/11 so you didn't . . .

MS: Correct. The Citizen Corps was created post-9/11 and in Harris County, Judge Eckels put this program together, a partnership of the cities, the 34 jurisdictions within Harris County – all of our local law enforcement agencies,

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our fire departments, EMS, our nonprofit agencies, our faith-based community, our business partners, and brought them together to discuss how we will prepare, plan and respond to a disaster if and when we are impacted again. That council meets on a quarterly basis to discuss those issues specifically. Each partner brings different assets, and resources to the table in all aspects of disaster recovery, preparations and planning.

EV: Is this part of the VOAD?

MS: No. The VOAD is Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster and those agencies are primarily your nonprofit groups. They have been around for a very long time and function together. You also have your Homeland Security or first response groups and they discuss the same issues. What the Citizen Corps actually does is bring all of these partners together so that we can coordinate our efforts better in a time of emergency.

EV: What model did you follow? I mean, when they dropped this monkey on your back, you had to have had some kind of . . . did you have any kind of preconceived plan or model that you follow in disasters?

MS: Well, the basic plan includes volunteers and the coordination of those volunteers. Since Tropical Storm Allison, since the events of 9/11, the county has always looked at better planning, better preparation, and better partnerships to be able to respond. We know that citizens will respond in a disaster. We watched the hurricanes in Florida and how people would go out and try to assist. But there was not a real coordinated effort of those spontaneous -- citizen volunteers and a

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lot of times, people got hurt. People put themselves in positions they shouldn't have been in.

Under the Citizen Coordination issue, we were able to train citizens in incident command, in the National Incident Management system – understanding their own capabilities so that they could become a resource and an asset to our local responders, to the county, to a city, so that we can tap upon them in a time of emergency. I don't think that a plan existed to utilize 60,000 volunteers to build a mega-shelter the size of Katrina Relief, as we called it, Reliant City, and do that in a very short period of time. We learned a great deal but I don't think that there was a specific plan that we had in mind.

Under the Citizen Corps, we were not a volunteer management agency. What we were was a resource center for the nonprofits to pull from if they needed additional resources. We found out during Katrina that with over 100 agencies, that there wasn't one nonprofit agency that could coordinate the size and the scope of that disaster. The Red Cross was tasked with managing the shelter. The United Way, the Salvation Army organized the faith-based communities when people came in, each organization had their own volunteer groups and couldn't manage all of the volunteer requests that were coming in. That is when the Judge tapped on the Harris County Citizen Corps to take over the volunteer coordination for the entire operation at the Astrodome.

EV: In the case of an emergency, I suspect that you all have got . . . I am trying to read between the lines . . . if you all have different reactions to different types of emergencies, Katrina will be probably once in a lifetime . . .

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MS: We hope.

EV: We hope. Global warming may change all that for us but if you have, say . . . I mean, like Allison certainly was not as traumatic as Katrina, at least . . . you know what I am saying.

MS: There is never going to be two disasters that are the same, and there are going to be various magnitudes in which it impacts our community. What we are teaching citizens to do is to be able to take care of themselves, their family, and their property first. We know that they are going to step out into the street after a disaster - whatever the size, whatever the magnitude that it is, and if they take care of those three principals first, they'll survive the event. And with the training we provide, they know how to coordinate themselves within their communities to be able to assist those that are in need. An event such as Katrina, which happened 300 miles to the east is where we needed to pull upon our resources, we were able to send out emails and make phone calls and ask them to come and help. So, it is not necessarily the size of Katrina - it could be a simple apartment fire in a neighborhood, and they know how to coordinate themselves to help save their families and protect their property.

EV: Speaking in terms of a playbook, you have different responses, do you not, depending on the type of storm you hit?

MS: Emergency? Correct. Yes. That is in the basic plan for the county on how volunteers coordinate with the local agencies.

EV: I suspect also that there probably will be some modifications going on ever since Katrina hit -- maybe we should do this time or how could we cut this

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short and call in the folks or did you guys hit the nail on the head the first time around?

MS: No, we didn't hit it on the head the first time around. What we established was what we considered to be the most effective way in order to coordinate and organize ourselves in order to meet the mission which was to take care of the citizens that came to us from the Gulf Coast that were impacted by Katrina.

Whatever it was, whatever we needed and however we needed to accomplish it was our mission, and that is the way we went. We did have lessons learned when we were able to sit back, analyze what was accomplished, all of the great things that this community and Houston and the region and this country were able to do, , in the relief effort at the Astrodome, we did learn a great deal of things. We learned how to make things more efficient the next time. Is it going to be perfect the next time? No, because, again, no two storms are going to be the same.

EV: When you realized that you had this obligation put in your lap, what was your priority? What did you start out with first?

MS: Looking for help. The judge allowed two of his staff to assist in developing a volunteer check-in process. I actually received a phone call after being at the Dome for about 30 hours. I had gone home to get some rest and found out that the entire volunteer coordinating effort was going to be transferred over to the Citizen Corps. We had Laurie Shah and Candy Kasserman allocated to coordinate and put together the plan. I was on the phone to talking to them about where we were going to go and how we were going to do what was needed.

That was under the direction of the incident commander, Joe Leonard along with

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Bob Royal, Mike Montgomery and the Judge. We were allocated space where we could set up a volunteer check-in process. When we put the request out for volunteers to find out how many could help through an email, in the first 24 hours, over 8,000 volunteers showed up. And we had a struggle in coordinating and distributing the volunteers - creating a process in which the agencies which ended up being over 100 on site when they put and processed the request that they needed 500 volunteers, they had to place an order. We had to know where to send volunteers because we had such a large geographical area at the Astrodome and Reliant Park to send volunteers. We needed to have a process. We sat down and I put a command structure in place with specific tasks and obligations of those individuals so that we could run it like a business and take orders and distribute our supplies and our resources, which were the volunteers of the community and around the region. And after the first about 6 hours, we were able to have a process in place and work pretty efficiently. We tried to get the information to all of the agencies as quickly as possible so that they understood how to ask and request volunteers.

EV: Is it correct to say that immediately under the judge and, I guess, the mayor, there were other entities or individuals like Dr. Mattox who was delegated to take care of the medical thing and then somebody to take care of the food. I understand the Texas Baptist man did the feeding I think at Reliant.

MS: No, they did it at the GRB.

EV: Were you one of the generals . . ."O.K., Maddox, you take care of this and you take care of that...."

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MS: No. At the Astrodome, we established the National Incident Management System, ICS. We had an incident commander and we had specific individuals that were tasked with medical, the operations, logistics, and security. We had specific individuals that were charged in taking the role of command for those branches. My job fell under the volunteer unit which is part of operations and that was where I was tasked. It didn't matter your rank or where you fell - if you were asked to fill those positions, people stepped up. We had donations management and all of our volunteer agencies fell under that voluntary unit. Shelter management was the Red Cross. They were tasked with that specifically. So, we had each group or an individual filling those roles on a 24/7 basis. When Joe Leonard was off duty, Bob Royal was the incident commander. Everybody knew where we were going to go, what we were going to do. That was the unique part of this entire operation. When we came together on August 31, at 7 a.m. at TranStar for our briefing on what we were about to take on and what we were going to do, the Governor's Division of Emergency Management, Jack Colley, said that Harris County was going to be the lead agency on taking care of 23,000 to 25,000 individuals that are currently sheltered at the Superdome.

They will begin arriving tomorrow morning, which was September 1. We had to now establish a facility to house the 23,000 to 25,000 individuals. We were also told that they would all be of the special needs population - to be prepared for that - to be able to take care of the medical needs of 23,000 to 25,000. We were told that we had to prepare a place for them to sleep and also be

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able to coordinate showers, laundry, and all of the additional things that needed to take place in order for someone to come and stay for a short period of time.

EV: Was this done pretty much with or without the knowledge or permission or whatever of the mayor of New Orleans and the governor? I mean, you didn't say, 'Look we can help you out, or anything? We're going in and picking up these people?

MS: Well, we were coordinating with numerous agencies and I know that, again, when I said "we," it was that the Judge who was in communication with Governor Perry. The Governor was in communication with the Governor of Louisiana. And there was direct communication amongst the states so that they understood what was going to be accomplished, if I remember correctly, FEMA allocated buses that were being utilized. I remember over 1,350 came through in that 21-day period.

EV: Buses?

MS: Yes.

EV: And you say those were FEMA buses or did they commandeer some from school districts?

MS: Well, I know there was supposed to be a coordinated effort between where the buses came from. We know that they came from other areas like school buses, to private buses, to anybody that needed help ended up showing up.

EV: Something like Dunkirk.

MS: Everybody started showing up. I know that there was a discussion that was specific from the governor's office, that it was going to be only those that

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were from the Superdome because we had over 100,000 people in hotels and if the word got out there was a shelter, we might have filled the shelter with local evacuees before we were able to help those that were in desperate need.

EV: You told me you initially started out with two systems.

MS: Yes.

EV: Did that increase over the 3 weeks or so . . .

MS: Yes, because I was able to tap into our pre-trained community emergency response team members to fill specific roles and volunteers that came in from other parts of the country that filled specific needs and roles within our organization. We had Volunteer Houston coordinating all company business and group volunteers. For instance, Shell Oil called and said, "We would like to send 50 volunteers every 3 hours over." Volunteer Houston was tasked with coordinating those efforts to establish corporate volunteers. We had our medical reserve corps coordinator in charge of all medical personnel that were coming in to volunteer and processing them through.

Then, we had 6 to 8 individuals just volunteers that coordinated the volunteer check-in location, volunteers monitored the elevators and escalators to help get people to the right location, we had volunteers, in the parking lot making sure that the volunteers knew where to park. We had volunteer coordinators at the faith-based table so they were sent to the Salvation Army so that they could be processed and checked in to be able to get access to the floor, and at any given time, we would have anywhere between 12 and 25 members of the Citizen Corps coordinating the effort for the volunteers.

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EV: I kind of went through the internet on the volunteer thing and I saw that it had the various tests you could take online. Is that the training that these people went through, part of it?

MS: Some of the training is online, such as the incident command system, the national response plan, or the National Incident Management System, but there is hands-on training that we give to our medical reserve corps personnel, such as the CPR or AED training. The CERT team members, which is the Community Emergency Response Team members, will go through a 8-week, 24-hour class to learn how to take care of themselves or their family and properly but also to be able to respond. The training includes small fire suppression – search and rescue, disaster medical triage, psychology, terrorism awareness, and understanding, how to communicate in ICS. They get this training in a basic course that is sponsored through FEMA and DHS.

EV: What exactly is TranStar?

MS: TranStar is a facility that is a partnership between Harris County, City of Houston, State Department of Public Safety, TexDot and Metro, and that facility is off Old Katy Road. That is where, during Rita, command was established where the mayor and the judge were doing all their press conferences -.that is where all of the pictures, the cameras that everybody sees on the news, that is where that all came from.

EV: In the middle of all this, did you have any place you had to go squirrel yourself away and keep a clear head or talk to somebody to make sure . . . I knew

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you had regular meetings with the mayor or the county judge but, I mean, just to go clear your head for a minute?

MS: We tried to establish a schedule so that everybody could have 8 hours to go and decompress, relax. We had on-site facilities to sleep at Reliant – a dark room with probably 30 to 40 cots so you could go in there and sleep if you needed to, get some rest or just be able to go home. For a lot of us, the daily activities didn't change. We still went to work, we still went to school, and our community still functioned. We were not directly hit by the storm. But the activities that went on within Reliant Park and the George R. Brown were completely different than anything else that was happening in the rest of the region. So, we were able to actually get off, go home, get some sleep, say hello to your family and get some sleep and try to come back. Of course, the event didn't stop. It didn't take a pause. So, you'd still get a phone call at 2 o'clock in the morning and end up coming back. So, for those 21 days, there was little sleep and little time to get back to your normal life.

EV: Well, I guess even in the immensity of that type of situation, your wheels are still turning when you go home, I would think.

MS: It would be like going to a good movie or concert – you just can't turn it off. You want to be able to talk about it and discuss what is happening, and we did that amongst ourselves. We were able to go sit in the hallway, have a sandwich, talk about what was going on, and get through it.

EV: Other than the buses, were there any other forms of transportation? I know the Coast Guard brought some.

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MS: I know that some were flown in. I know that some people drove personal vehicles. We were trying to limit the personal vehicles but if they came and needed assistance and they were without a place to stay, I know that we tried to take care of as many people as possible. I did hear that over 65,000 ended coming through our check-in location. They may not have all stayed at the Astrodome but they were triaged and given some food, some water, new clothes and then processed and sent to other locations. It might have been Dallas, San Antonio or Austin to another shelter.

EV: What was the toughest part of all this of what you had to do? Not the emotional, human part but the structural part of what you were doing?

MS: The toughest part was actually allowing everyone to do their jobs. To know that failure was not an option and we all wanted to do our best. The hardest part was just walking away and saying, they can do this, and allow these individuals to do their jobs and do them well, and they did. But the hardest part is actually saying that I can walk away.

EV: Was that part of your business training that wouldn't let you get away without some reservation?

MS: Maybe. It is personal upbringing, I guess, is to make sure if you are going to do a job, you do it right and you take it to its finish. And there are a lot of people out there that do the same things. The hardest part for me was to not worry about those things and to be able to let everyone know that was working with us either as a volunteer or as an employee of an agency or jurisdiction that failure wasn't an option, success was what we were going to do, and it didn't

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matter what we faced – we’d overcome it because there is no other option. If everyone understood that, then whatever problem existed or change that was coming down the pipe, we adapted to it and were able to do it.

One message I got from the judge’s [County Judge Bill Eckels] office and I don’t know if it came from the judge directly – “Just be the voice of calm.” You don’t need to get all excited about what is happening. If everybody remains calm, the perception that we gave off to the volunteers was that everything is running smoothly and fine. That is really what we wanted to do was to change the image of the negativity that was actually out in the public about Katrina and let them know what was going on and that we can make a difference.

EV: Without mentioning any names unless you want to, were there any prima donnas, so to speak, that were involved in this that you all had to calm down or ignore or neutralize or something?

MS: From our . . .

EV: . . .from the whole spectrum of the rescue operation.

MS: No, because we all knew each other by face and by name. We had met through the Citizen Corps, through our Homeland Security Taskforce meetings, through our VOAD meetings. We knew who we were, what we were doing and what we were bringing to the table. That is something that the Judge has stressed all along, this is not about one group, one agency – it is a partnership. It is the planning and practicing from our disasters and our practiced events that make us successful. And no, there was nobody that was a prima donna or somebody that thought that they . . . everybody understood who was in charge. Everybody knew

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that the Judge was going to make the decisions for Reliant and the mayor was in charge of what was happening at the GRB. But there were incident commanders in place – Joe Leonard, Bob Royall. We all knew who we were. We drew it up on the board. You knew who to go to.

EV: Were there any particular things that surprised you?

MS: At the time, no.

EV: In retrospect?

MS: In retrospect, when you sit back and actually watch what occurred in 24 hours, it is mind boggling – the coordination, the building of a city with all of the things that needed to be in place and have those resources and people available is amazing.

EV: Yes, I suspect it is pretty much like a military operation in terms of . . . not in your chain of command but in having the facilities there for the troops to do their job.

MS: Yes, but, you know, fire service has been utilizing this process. The National Response Plan, NIMS and ICS, they are not new. It is just we now all speak the same language. We communicate and talk at a level that we understand what we are asking for and what we need. We practice that on a regular daily basis such as a hazardous material incident where we might have a constable or sheriff who has met EMS or a local volunteer fire department. We are all on the same page now. We know who we are and we know what we can contribute. And yes, it might be very similar to the branches within the military but we knew what we had to do and we understood our roles and our responsibilities and we

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were allowed as we were doing within the volunteer unit from command to go out and do your job and you were expected to do your job. You were expected to be part of the mission – the overall mission – regardless whether you were part of the medical branch to the volunteer unit or security – we all had the same goal and objective.

EV: If it is possible to explain, what was your typical day like? If you had to write down, this is how I started my day and what I did during the day.

MS: I would usually be there at 4 a.m., park, and it could be a variety of different things. During the day, we would have three incident command briefings - 8 a.m., 1 p.m. and 8 p.m. – and we would discuss where we were at, where we were going, what we need to do from each agency that was participating. They were allowed to do this briefing. We tried to accomplish it in less than 45 minutes each day. We understood any changes or things that came down for a command. We knew the number of citizens from Louisiana that we had within the shelter. We had updates on volunteers' needs, parking situations, the security – whatever it might have been.

And then, after those meetings, I would go down to the volunteer unit, find out the current status, be able to follow up on current volunteer needs. I would be able to talk to the different agencies on what they anticipated in volunteers – it might be Aramark, our food service provider where on the first few days, they needed 500 volunteers to man the food distribution areas to be able to get resources from point A to B. It might have been with the Reliant Park in

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establishing and setting up new fencing and barricades, or unloading trucks that were coming in with supplies and resources.

From that point, I would be back to the volunteer unit and find out what additional resources we might need, what problems that may exist. I also wanted to make sure we had enough volunteers to run the check in location and if not, be able to tap out into our pool of volunteers, find out if they could come in. I would work with the Joint Information Center, which is called the JIC and find out where they might need additional volunteer support such as telephone service or escorts, which our CERT team members were trained to do for the media. We would work with the JIC in terms of any of the celebrities that might be coming on to make sure that they had a volunteer or security personnel to escort them. So, the days would change. And then every now and then, you'd take a break and you might go down on the floor and meet some of the people you were trying to help.

EV: Did you do that?

MS: Yes.

EV: Really? They probably didn't know who you were though, right?

MS: No.

EV: That probably made it a little bit easier to speak to them.

MS: They didn't know who we were but they knew that we were there to help. And we'd get a thank you and things of that nature. I didn't do it as often as I probably would have liked to and the first time I went down on the Dome floor, it was not what I expected.

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EV: What were you expecting?

MS: I ran into a 4 or 5-year-old young boy that was sitting on his cot and I asked him if he came in last night and he said yes, and I said, "Well, welcome to Houston." I asked him where his parents were. I said, "Where is your mom and dad?" He said, "My dad is getting breakfast." I said, "Fantastic. That is great." I said, "Well, welcome to Houston." I asked him again, "Where is your mom at?" He said, "Well, my dad reached for her but she went under the water."

So, the first person I run into, actually stopped and said something to was not what I anticipated in response because all of the things and all of the activity and the adrenaline to do something great, the first thing I heard was failure and I didn't go back on the floor for about 4 days. I was not prepared for that type of answer or response because there were people out there that had lost loved ones, that had lost everything they owned and that was the first time that it hit me square between the eyes - that these lives that we are doing so many great things for, and yet there is still a great loss out there.

EV: When you all got together on these meetings on a daily basis, was anybody recording these meetings or taking notes or did you all keep a progression?

MS: Yes. They didn't record the meetings but there were notes that were taken so that we can coordinate because we have, incident command structure, documentation becomes critical for our after action report. Those were still being put together and finalized from all of the units, all of the branches that were under the command structure at Reliant - that after action report was being

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accumulated, put together, tabulated, and then re-referenced from so that we don't have discrepancies in numbers or something of that nature.

EV: Is that going to be for the general public?

MS: Yes, that will be a public document – the same as the Arlington County, Virginia After Action Report from 911 and the Pentagon. .

EV: Yes, I'd like to get a copy of that. Who do I contact?

MS: I imagine that once we have everything put together and finalized, it will be some time in the fall is what I have been told - as long as we don't have a storm.

EV: Yes. Cross your fingers on that one. Aside from this young boy did you have any other memorable events besides of the hands-on type of work?

MS: A lot of people asking to use your cell phone, if they could try to call their loved ones because they got separated on two different buses. They'd ask, "Can you help me make this phone call. I will give you the number if you will call them," and I just let them use my cell phone if it was available. The JIC [Joint Information Center] asked one time after my first trip back to the floor after meeting with the young boy, was to escort Mrs. Texas. So, I escorted her around and we ran into two young men who were on the floor – probably in their late teens, early 20s, and they came up and said that they had stolen a boat. I didn't know what to think at that moment. Mrs. Texas said, "What do you mean you stole a boat?" "We were trying to make our way to the bridge in Louisiana and we found a boat and we took it and we picked people up and brought them to the bridge before it sank. And she asked, "How many people do you think you

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helped,” and they said, “Maybe 100.” That day, I was wearing a fire marshal shirt I was given to change into and they asked if they could actually . . . they said, “Well, after doing these things, we want to be firemen. We think we want to be firemen. We know what we want to be. We enjoyed rescuing and helping people.” I got them some contact information for Texas A&M for their fire academy and the schools. I don’t know whether they did it or not. So, that was a fun and positive story.

EV: It would be interesting to follow that up and see if they did it or not.

MS: I didn’t even get their names. As we moved through, so many people would come up and they are talking to Mrs. Texas or meeting other celebrities that were there that came through.

I remember an event with Koby Bryant and the NBA stars and little kids running around and wanted to get his autograph. I was able to pick this little 4-year-old up because there was so much media and so many adults were there trying to get an autograph. This young man wasn’t able to find his way in. Luckily, I was wearing our Incident Command badge and able to get him an autograph and a basketball and things like that. So, that was good.

EV: Did you keep your own personal diary of anything or did you write down your reflections of your feelings, sensations, thoughts?

MS: I didn’t write down the feelings. I wrote down notes of things that I want to remember to do and change if we ever did this again but I didn’t write down personal thoughts or anxieties of anything of that nature. I just basically was taking . . . I’d jot a note that remember that if you send an email and ask for

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something, that you need to make sure that you are prepared to get what you ask for. Because that first morning when I sent out an email, the Red Cross had been tasked with the volunteer unit, all the volunteer activities, we decided that we would ask the Citizen Corps how many volunteers would be available because, again, everybody was still going to work, going to school, doing their thing. I sent out an email, "Can you help, and if you can, let me know." Well, I received 1,000 emails an hour saying, yes, we will and it was edited and forwarded to thousands more and it took out my email system because it overloaded my inbox. So, the first lesson learned – you get what you ask for. Be more specific in things you want. But over 60,000 volunteers showed up in that 21-day period.

EV: What aspects of this tragedy itself and your participation in it, and then what you observed of other people participating, like the volunteers . . . this is probably not a fair question, but what thread or incident from your experience do you think really bears historical significance other than that this was a huge tragedy? Let me backtrack a little bit and then supplement that question while you are mulling it over. The *New York Times* wrote an article saying that of all the cities in the United States that were prepared to help Katrina victims, it was Houston. It was kind of a retrospective, I thought, when I read it. I will probably have to go back and read it again but it is a question you can only really answer afterwards. You would be hard to answer it before the events.

You don't know how anything is going to react. I mean, so I guess what the question is the preparation that you all had made in anticipation of an event

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apparently was pretty good and you had to be proud of that kind of forward thinking.

MS: You've got a lot of different things coming up. One, did I think that the community would respond the way it did? I didn't know for sure. Again, it didn't happen to us directly. What I did know is that ever since I've met Judge Eckels prior to Tropical Storm Allison and the years prior, he's preached planning, practicing and partnership and that we will be prepared. During Allison, we saw the partnerships come together and work together.

A lot of the people that responded during Katrina were the same group of individuals coordinating at the local level within the citizenry to say, you can receive training, you can become engaged and involved to help was a little bit different than our normal volunteer agencies. We didn't know what the response was going to be but we knew that our community is very well-prepared for whatever we may face.

End of Side A, Tape 1
Start of Side B, Tape 2

MS: And how well prepared is our community? If we were to take a survey prior to Katrina, we would probably have 30% to 50% of the people say, "Yes, I know what I am supposed to do. Yes, I might be ready to do something. I probably have water. I have a communication plan." Today, we know that that is different because people are paying attention. People hear the messages in May when we start to talk about hurricane season, on making a plan and preparing a kit. We know because our numbers have doubled in the Citizen Corps with

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people taking the training since Katrina. We know because of the membership of our corporate sponsors and partnerships have increased three-fold. So, our community is well prepared.

The most significant thing I think was the way you put it at the beginning, the first question – what makes this different or greater than an aspect of our response, was in terms of a prepared community. When I was briefing on Capitol Hill and talking to various groups, one of the individuals in the Department of Homeland Security who happened to be in Europe during the event couldn't believe the negative response that he was seeing globally to New Orleans and the things that were going on. He basically came back and said that the activities that took place in Houston changed the view of America globally. So, the citizens, the agencies and the partnerships that exist worked. When you hear that from someone that is a few thousand miles away or you have volunteers who see what is going on and fly in from Austria, Spain, Ireland, England, Mexico, Canada to help, it gets a little bit overwhelming when you sit back and look at it after the fact.

We had the consulates from Houston come in and say, "What can we do to help? We'll bring them in. We'll get people to come in." It was a positive proactive rather than a negative reactive type response.

EV: Now, I saw somewhere on the internet something like 35 or 50 countries offered help. Have you seen that list?

MS: I think a lot of that list was for the Gulf Coast region in terms of assistance. What I was able to track in volunteers within the volunteer unit were

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the countries that I just mentioned. People actually came up and said, “I’m from England,” “I’m from Ireland” or ...”Spain.”

EV: Are you talking about people physically left their country to come to help?

MS: Yes.

EV: My goodness!

MS: Mexico, Canada, and Australia – they came in and said, “I’m here to volunteer. I am taking my vacation for 10 days. What do you need me to do?”

EV: Wow!

MS: There were people that came to help from across the country. I would probably say that most of the states, somebody volunteered and just came over. I met a guy from Los Angeles who drove his truck down, filled it with water, bottles of water, drove over here, said, “I’m here to volunteer and I’ve got a truckload of water. Where do you want it?”

EV: FEMA, of course, has been very controversial in all of this. What is your take on their participation?

MS: I didn’t deal directly with FEMA. In the volunteer area, the issues that we had were when FEMA hired contractors. They were giving them access through the volunteer check-in location and they set up tables for hiring. It became an issue between those that were giving from their heart and their time to individuals that were coming there to find a job. That became a little bit difficult. Trying to coordinate with them was difficult, because people would go to the volunteer area for information. They’d want to know what FEMA was going to do, what kind of assistance would be available, and we couldn’t get representation from FEMA at

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the volunteer unit. The other areas, in terms of how FEMA worked with the state versus how the Judge was working through the state with FEMA, I would defer to the Judge to answer those specific questions.

EV: I have run into two different sides on it. One was particularly vehement about them, about FEMA's participation, while the other was more benevolent, so it was just interesting to hear the various reactions from people who were on the top echelon like you were.

MS: From my perspective, I think that FEMA needed to have individuals in place that were capable of making decisions locally rather than to wait and have to find out what Washington was going to do, what they needed them to do. From what I saw, they weren't able to make those decisions without having to go back and make decisions in Washington which just adds time and delays to what was happening.

I think, from my perspective, communication from the local level back to Washington, that's FEMA to FEMA agent needs to improve. But from my personal perspective and understanding emergency management and how things work, there has never been a storm the size of Katrina with the devastation that took place and there are learning opportunities. Unfortunately, there is loss of life and unfortunately, there are things that we can always look back and say, you know, we woulda' coulda', shoulda' of done. But if you look at some of the areas that were equally to more devastated, there is dramatic progress that is made and there are procedures in place and things, and I don't think that all of the Gulf Coast follow those same procedures in order to get the assistance they needed.

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EV: I understand they going to revamp FEMA, or they've already changed, it didn't they?

MS: I think it is in the works. I don't know if anything specifically has come down from Congress or anything has changed. I know that they are working on that. They have a new leader now and director.

EV: One of the ideas that I saw in one of those studies, programs I think was they were intending on taking FEMA out from under National Security and reestablishing it as an independent. Do you think that that is a smart thing to do or do you think there is going to be an issue of overlapping jurisdiction? Do we need to have FEMA . . .

MS: Under Department of Homeland Security?

EV: Yes, that, for one . . . the thing is I am hoping the federal government can . . . any federal agency that comes into a state, they tend to start pulling rank, especially if they have money invested in it.

MS: It is not an easy answer. For instance, the Judge is the director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for Harris County, so that is the Department of Homeland Security for the county and that includes our Department of Emergency Management which is, all practical purposes, FEMA for our local level. We also have our sheriffs and constables and our funding streams that come through. It can be coordinated through one group but you have to establish a plan, you have to create the partnerships, you have to understand what each agency is capable of doing which the Judge has said we are going to do. And plan and practice those things. DHS is relatively new. You

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could see communication issues between the Secretary and FEMA. And we obviously learn from it. Now, whether or not it stays with DHS or moves to an existing separate agency outside of that umbrella, I couldn't answer whether or not it would be better or worse because we are going to need to do what we have to do regardless of where it falls. That response, that capability from both the local level to the state to the federal agencies, it will be in existence. It may just be a new name.

EV: Well, because disasters generally hit without much of a warning . . . a hurricane, you kind of have a warning but earthquakes don't . . . and I can think of any number of things – the Texas City Disaster, something like that – it would seem to me that the first responders should be able to maintain the priority of command over FEMA or any government agency until such time . . . there should be kind of a fading period from the locals giving up some command until the government takes over. Maybe that is what is in the works now. But we don't see that as citizens reading the paper, watching the evening news.

MS: Well, the command is really not supposed to be removed from the local level. You manage it at the local level. You are asking for assistance. And our local agencies ask the state for assistance. So, if a city – Baytown, Deer Park or another agency needs assistance, they go to the county and say, "We need resources. This is what we need. Can you help us?" And then the county will help support those cities, jurisdictions that need assistance. When our resources are depleted or no longer available, we now go to the state and the state then supplies us resources that we can use to assist. And if the response consumes our

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state resources, the state asked the federal government for assistance. Now, based on the size and the impact, we may already pre-deploy those resources and assets and the state had those assets for Rita already at the Astrodome on the floor to be able to help us in a time of need because we can pre-plan and pre-establish what those needs are. We never were going to convert command to the federal government. That is not the intent because we know what we have here locally and know what we are capable of doing, what our resources and assets are and what we have to do is partner and coordinate better with what they are going to do. Certain areas of the Gulf Coast, I don't think that they understood the procedures on how to get the resources they needed in place.

EV: Well, the whole spectrum of the rescue thing – getting folks jobs, housing, then and all of a sudden, FEMA shows up and starts handing out credit cards of \$2,000. There was some resentment about that because some claimed that it kind of messed up their program, like getting guys jobs. They should have used that \$2,000 to help them as a transitory funds after they secured employment and not come up midway through the crisis and say, O.K., here's \$2,000 to spend as you wish.” And so, that type of naive thinking on the part of the government, I think. But that is just my opinion.

MS: Well, the Red Cross gives out \$300 vouchers. Then, FEMA gives out support in various funding streams. That is a lesson learned, that these people needed assistance immediately. They lost everything they owned. They are now in other cities throughout the United States. It wasn't just Houston. It was from Seattle to Florida to New York City – people now had nothing and there was a

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need to be able to do something quickly and they were able to give out \$2,000 credit card vouchers for them to go kickstart their lives, get something going. And 98% probably did that. And the stories in the media of, you know, we went out and bought a plasma screen TV, you sit back and go why did we allow this to happen? You can always sit back and say you shoulda', woulda', coulda', and again, they changed that process now, you are going to have to submit receipts and be reimbursed for your funds. There are a lot of things that are in the works. When Washington came out while we were operating at the Reliant Park and said that tomorrow at Reliant Park, we are going to be giving out \$2,000 vouchers, we had to put a stop to it from command because we had over 150,000 in the region and they would start driving there. They didn't understand the local perspective and there was no communication. If they had understood that if we are going to do it within the Reliant Park, we could manage that. But not for the 200,000 people that we are going to drive over and want to know how to get theirs because it caused an incredible traffic jam and it put risk to our own responders as well as the citizens that we were trying to take care of.

EV: What happens in a situation, if some of these counties . . . many years ago, I guess, there was a tornado that hit some small Texas town south of Pecos, Texas, there the county was like nothing but barbed wire fences and a couple of jack rabbits, but it hit this one little town . . . do you all take that into consideration in terms of like Dallas, Fort Worth and El Paso might react to that? What happens to these folks in terms of disaster?

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MS: Well, we have mutual aid agreements within the region from Galveston, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Waller that can coordinate our efforts. We let the state know what resources that we have available to us. If something happened outside of a jurisdiction and the state is looking for resources and the Judge says, "If they need our help, we've got these resources because we have mutual aid agreements not only between the 34 jurisdictions in Harris County but the HGAC region and can respond" . . . our hazardous material guys will run . . . you know, they've gone almost all the way to Waco to help.

EV: Have you been to west Texas?

MS: No.

EV: O.K., you can go to west Texas and drive 200 miles and not see anything. I mean, small towns, huge ranches, Mesa oil fields and stuff that that is what hit this one little town. It just hit. I think most of them were farmers and some worked in the oil fields or something. I guess my question is when a small county way out . . . I understand along the eastern part of Texas . . .

MS: If it depletes their resources, they can ask the state and say, "We need some resources," and they have a lot of resources available at the state level to deploy, to help them. You know, like the wild fires. Where do we find the extra firemen and the people to go out there to help? And they call the governor's Division of Emergency Management and talk to Jack Colley and say, "Jack, we are declaring a local emergency. We need help." And they'll go through their disaster districts because the state is broken up into disaster districts. And those disaster districts then will get the resources and find them. And then, there is

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state-to-state mutual aid that we have also. So, if we need something from Nebraska or Arkansas or New Mexico that they have, the states can do those things.

EV: Do the Border States have that thing? Like, do we have some kind of agreement with Canada and Mexico if something happens? Or in the Americas – some of the little islands out there that we have a mutual aid thing?

MS: That, I don't know.

EV: Is there anything that you think I should have asked you or anticipate me asking you that I didn't that should go into the . . .

MS: We covered a great deal. Off the top of my head, no I can't think of anything. We talked about the use of volunteers and how they can find out information but no, I can't think of anything right now.

EV: I was talking to one of the guys from the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston and he and Dr. Day from U of H Business School came up with this . . . it is always there . . . I wish I could remember this guy's name but he was the . . . a list of priorities that you have like Dr. Mattox reemphasized it . . . when you have a tragedy or disaster, there is a certain pattern that they expect, doctors anyway, in terms of injuries, illnesses, needs, emotional needs and everything and that pattern is consistent with every disaster and that is how they design their relief. And you answered it. You kind of have the same thing – you know there is a tragedy, you need to probably get water to people, take care of the medical scene and then somewhere along the line, we started thinking are you O.K., how do you feel, we are going to get you through this thing and we are here to help.

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MS: The physiological and the psychological impact, yes.

EV: I mean, I find that very interesting that they can put this thing almost into a formula as to how many guys . . . what are your needs going to be in any given disaster. The one thing that Dr. Mattox said that they wanted to do was instill hope. As soon as he got out there, he wanted to let them know they were there and start the process of giving them hope. I am sure you knew they had doctors getting on every bus and they were just eyeballing everybody to make sure . . .

MS: Right, they went through basic triage.

EV: That was . . .

MS: Fantastic.

EV: Anyway, thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

MS: Not a problem. I am glad to do it.

