



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**America's Cities
New Orleans**

New Orleans, Before and After Report One, Before Katrina

September 1, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This report is about a restaurant and museum in New Orleans. I am not reporting from New Orleans but from the luxury of my apartment in Falls Church, Virginia---while I watch the stark television images of the devastation wrought by Katrina.

Reporterette (Holly) and I visited New Orleans last year. We stayed in the French Quarter and I had intended to send you a humorous story about the characters we met that week. There is no point in composing parody during this tragic time on the Gulf Coast. But watching TV today reminded me of our trip to this city.

A Fine and Very Funky Town

There are a few cities in America that I would recommend you put on your list of places to visit before you kick the bucket. New Orleans is one of them. As will be mentioned shortly, it is not the gaudy, raucous place it once was, but it's still a load of fun. The downtown is a great walking area. Scores of shops, bistros, and cafes line several streets.

While in New Orleans, Reporterette and I visited many fine antique and art shops. We had lunch at the famous Antoine's Restaurant, noted for its oysters. A treat for the palate: Raw oysters on the half-shell, with a small squeeze of lemon, maybe a touch of Tabasco. I knew about Antoine's oysters. I had eaten them in the past and looked forward to dining on one of my favorite foods.

However, Antoine's no longer serves raw oysters, which were once their prime offering. In place of raw oysters, they offered four different cooked renditions. According to our waiter, "We just can't take a chance anymore with raw oysters."

Reporter, "Can't you obtain them from an oyster farm?"

"Uh...well, oyster farms are also having problems... ."

After thinking about his statement, I responded, "OK, we'll take the chicken dish." (And who knows about those chicken farms?)

I had stayed in New Orleans several times before this last visit, but the trips were for business purposes. Now that I am retired and business is a distant memory, last year's visit was for fun. And it was evident this part of town had undergone big changes from the past. Gone were most of the dives and strip joints. The French Quarter was still raucous, but its gaudy exuberance had been toned-down. I'm big on exuberance, so the make-over was a bit sad. The place had been "Disneyed." It had lost many of the traits that made it unique. Similar transmogrifications are taking place in other parts of America.

Anyway, in the next report, we'll visit a museum in New Orleans that is dedicated to the World War II D-Day invasion.

New Orleans Report Two, Before Katrina

September 1, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Let's continue the report on my visit to New Orleans last year.

The National D-Day Museum

One of my favorite places in New Orleans is (was?) the National D-Day Museum that opened a couple years ago. Figure 1 shows the outside of the building. The author, Stephen Ambrose, was instrumental in getting this museum off the ground. So was the movie star, Tom Hanks. Many of the exhibits featured the Amphibious Navy---those sailors who handled the beach assaults during the war (in contrast to the Air Navy or the Submarine Navy). I spent almost three years in the "Amphibs," so I had a keen interest in the displays.



Figure 1. The National D-Day Museum.

I sometimes talk to my friends and relatives about the amphibious ships and boats we used in Vietnam. They were the same crafts used in the World War II beach landings in the Atlantic and Pacific campaigns. (Don't

worry about the full names of these crafts.) They are known as the LCVP, the LCM, and the LST---all part of history and my memories.

The LCVP (ok, Landing Craft, Vehicle, and Personnel) is also known as the Higgins boat. The boat is nicknamed after Andrew Higgins, the man who invented it and whose factories around New Orleans built thousands of them in a few months. They changed amphibious warfare as it was practiced before WWII, because they broke the dangerous gridlock and bottlenecks of ship-to-shore off-loading operations.

The National D-Day Museum displayed an LCVP, shown in Figure 2. As I viewed this boat, I thought of my times riding in the LCVPs. I also thought about the extraordinary capacity of America to gear-up quickly and efficiently to produce these vital instruments of war. Here was an icon on display. Higgins' and the defense industry's ability to build LCVPs and other landing craft in such a short time had a great deal to do with the success of D-Day and other WWII campaigns. The design is one of brilliant and practical simplicity. It's almost all empty space, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 2. The famous LCVP (the Higgins boat).



Figure 3. Practical simplicity.

This arrangement allowed Marines to climb down rope ladders from a ship's deck into the large well of the boat. If they fell, they would usually fall into the boat and avoid drowning or being crushed between the ship and the boat. The large space could hold a lot of men (depending on their gear). The flat bottom accommodated itself to beaches. The waterproof bow gate allowed the Marines to disembark relatively easy.

As you know, I try to avoid bringing up unpleasant subjects in these reports. We've enough negative narratives and images in our media already. But I must say, as I thought about New Orleans this week, and as my thoughts drifted back to the fine story of Higgins and the LCVP, I could not help but wonder if our country has lost some of the Higgins' can-do spirit; not to mention the rapid response of the defense establishment to a dire need. I wonder because I keep reading and hearing about the lack of proper armament for our vehicles in Iraq. I have listened to several Congressional hearings about the inability of DOD and DOD contractors to build the armament. They blame one another for the problem.

Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, head of the Department of Defense, has said, *You go to war with what you have*. Budgets are budgets. If a country always had everything it needed for a war before it actually went to war, it would not be fighting a lot. My Blue friends say that is precisely the point. A bloated defense establishment is more prone to go to war than say, a scaled-down French kind of defense establishment. My Red friends think this philosophy leads to appeasement. Anyway, I think both Blues and Reds would agree that there is at least a minimum level of readiness that must be met before placing troops in harm's way.

During my time in the Amphibs, we operated with many rules of war. The most important rule was Secure the ground on which the troops are operating. This requires flooding the combat zone with warriors and armament. Simply stated, you can't secure the ground without troops...unless you win the hearts and minds of the enemy with propaganda leaflets and Hershey bars.

Yet I read that our leaders claim we do not need any more troops in Iraq. They say that any more "boots on the ground" would simply alienate the natives. Alienate the natives!? Those "natives" who are killing our men and women? In the meantime, our warriors often must fight while riding in ill-armored armory because we can't secure the ground in the first place. A vicious cycle.

I suspect my war training and war experiences are antiquated. I don't pretend to know the answers to my concerns. I've a lot of smart people reading these reports. Please send me your answers. From my naïve perspective, I think we need more Andrew Higgins and fewer

accountants in the Pentagon. (And I promise I'll keep my views on the war itself out of these reports. Here, I'm simply reporting on a logistical aspect of this war.)

New Orleans Report Three, After Katrina

September 1, 2005

Hello from Your On the Street Reporter. Mimicking some of the modern reporters, I am reporting about the streets of New Orleans from the streets of Falls Church, Virginia. Let's wrap-up this report on New Orleans---after Katrina came ashore.

Today, I logged onto the Net and searched for the National D-Day Museum. I discovered its home page had been removed from the Web. Several related links were no longer available. I hope the museum has not met the same fate as the nearby French Quarter and the wonderful Antoine's. I fear the LCVP in Figure 2 of the previous report has returned to its natural habitat.

One of my high school friends is a museum honcho in California with a network to other museums. I hope he will let me know if the National D-Day Museum is above water. I don't know if Antoine's made it through the storm. I doubt it. I doubt Antoine's will be serving anything for quite a while...certainly not from the waters that currently inundate New Orleans.

Get Some Perspective

Of course, in the final analysis, the fate of a café or a museum is small potatoes compared to the magnitude of the Katrina disaster and its tragic effects on thousands of people. This writer and a lot of other people need to gain a bit of perspective. As one example, a Coast Guard aide, after saving the life of a (young and healthy) victim on Thursday said this person responded to her, "Why weren't you here earlier? Why can't you take our luggage?"

The aide said other people were not grateful for having been saved from a probable death. They were hostile because their saviors arrived late---as if a huge, unprecedented disaster recovery operation ran on a tight schedule. All of us can understand the frustration about a three-day rescue. But luggage? People could have died because of the lack of space on this aide's helicopter.

I recognize my perspective may be lacking the proper perspective. Who knows how I would have reacted after three days of hunger, dehydration, and fear? If I had been on the roof of a house for three days, I might have been a bit hostile when the cavalry finally arrived. As they say, "Where you stand on an issue depends on where you sit." I'm sitting in a comfortable chair in Falls Church, Virginia, and not on top of a roof in a disaster area.

What's Next?

If you are an Environmental Blue, I suspect you think the rising of the seas is because of global warming, and the emissions from SUVs, Boy Scout campfires, cattle, and beer drinkers. I think the following would be a fair paraphrase:

Human induced global warming is causing the melting of glaciers and other ice formations, leading to the rising of sea levels. For example, Alaska's major glaciers and icebergs began to melt very rapidly in the late 1900s and early

2000s.¹ At the turn of the 20th century, the earth's icebergs were experiencing an annual loss of 24 cubic miles of mass, and studies indicate the melting is occurring at twice the rate than in the mid-1950s.

If you are an Environmental Red, I suspect you think the rising of the oceans is because of the last throes of the Ice Age and the resultant warming of the oceans. I think the following would be a fair paraphrase:

The global average sea level has risen about 400 feet in the past 15,000 years. Why? Certainly not because of human-based emissions. It is the result of the ending of the Ice Age, which is still happening. The world is stuck with the rise in sea levels and there is nothing that can be done about it.

If you are neither Blue or Red, or really don't care about much of anything, you might be saying, "It's time the Miami Dolphins earned their name."

For New Orleans, regardless of your political slant, the fact remains that the seas are rising. Reds agree. Blues agree. And therefore, I think we Americans, as taxpayers, need to do some thinking about rebuilding a city that is surrounded on three sides by a water level that is higher than the city itself---and likely to go higher. I am not discussing the aid and assistance to the people on the Gulf Coast that is underway. I'm concerned about the future.

There will be another Katrina on the Gulf Coast and the port city of New Orleans. It may not be next year, or the next, but there will be one. Do you, as a taxpayer, want to start from scratch every few decades or so? It's a free country and it's your money. Write your Congress person.

The Louisiana Purchase valued an acre of land at less than five cents an acre. I wonder what the going rate is for a spot of land on Bourbon Street. Would you buy land down there? You would?! Great. I've also got a great deal on a bridge for you.²

Just joking, because I predict New Orleans will be rebuilt with massive funds from the U.S. Government coffers. Is that the way for our tax dollars to be spent? It's worth giving it a thought or two. I don't have the answer myself, but I look forward to knowing yours.

Your on the Street Reporter here, thankful I am not there, on the streets of New Orleans.

¹ *USA Today*, July 22, 2002. Life Section, page 6D.

² Truth is, now is an opportune time to buy real estate in New Orleans. Buy it now, hold on for a few years, and sell it before the next flood.