



**DMORT**

# NATIONAL NEWS

**Disaster Mortuary Operational  
Response Team**

SPRING 2006

EDITORS: SHEILA HALL AND TERRY SWANSON

## IN MEMORIAL



John Clifford Oldfield, Jr.  
1916 - 2005

The DMORT Family sadly mourns the death of one of its earliest Regional Commanders since the organization's inception. **John "Cliff" Oldfield** – Region II Commander – passed away on December 24, 2005. He suffered a heart attack, while visiting Disney World in Florida with his family.

Many members of DMORT have served with Cliff on previous deployments, and most recently in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. Please keep his family and the DMORT II Team in your thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.

### Farewell Cliff

*A poem by Troy Bastion  
(Region VII)*

*"Dedicated to the memory of a friend of all too short a time. What an impression you made on my entire family."*

I was a mere newcomer, fresh on the team:  
Unfamiliar, per se, with the DMORT routine.  
Katrina blew in, and everything changed.  
We all would be needed - it all seemed so strange.  
We were told to "Stand By," so I packed up my gear.  
I waited by the phone: the order to hear.  
Confusion, frustration: "When would they call?"  
If only someone could answer it all.

Then I found the web page.  
The page for Team 2,  
And a comforting man told me just what to do.  
Each day he wrote something: sometimes small, sometimes lots,

But never, not ever...he never forgot.  
Each day this fine gentleman, regardless of heat,  
Or workload, exhaustion, he must have been beat.  
But each day he wrote, he kept us all posted.  
A labor of love, this journal he hosted.

When the call finally came, I bid family goodbye.  
And as tears welled up in my family's eyes,  
I said: "Not to worry, you'll be with me each day,  
Just go to Team 2's site: see what Cliff has to say.  
He'll make you feel better, he'll keep you informed."  
And he did, and like me, their hearts were so warmed.

I arrived in St. Gabriel, his biggest fan.  
The first thing I asked: "Can I meet this great man?"  
My memories of that day never will end,  
For on that day in October, I made a great friend.  
I worked for a week under Commander Oldfield,  
I knew all along, that he was the "Real Deal."



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We talked and we joked, I thanked him so much,  
For thinking of everyone....  
keeping in touch.  
When Cliff shipped back home, I wrote him some lines,  
We said we'd exchange some e-mail sometime.

That time never came, but I know as I write,  
He realized he'd touched so many lives.  
Not often in life do we meet a great soul,  
Who gives of himself, no matter the toll.  
Somewhere up above, there's no crisis tonight,  
Cliff's got it all handled; it'll all be all right.

Next time I deploy, I'll miss seeing this man,  
But perhaps, the one thing he's made me understand:  
Is that this is a team, regardless of rank,  
Regardless of status, or what's in the bank.  
And if you stand proud, and if you stand tall,  
In the end, that's what matters: Farewell  
Cliff... That's all.

*The following letters are from Cliff's sister – **Regina Oldfield Puzzo** - and brother-**Richard T. Oldfield**. Their words of reverence to Cliff's "second family" – DMORT – originally appeared in the DMORT Region II website and graciously shared by **Kevin Costigan** (Region II Acting Commander and Administrative Officer).*

Dear Kevin, the members of DMORT II, and members of other DMORT Regions,

Our collective loss is great. We lost a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a grandfather, an uncle, a friend, and a colleague. My brother's time with us was too short; obviously God has other plans for Cliff.

Cliff's professional life as a funeral director was one of dedication and compassion for people, which brought him great satisfaction. Naturally, his work with DMORT flowed from that compassion and dedication. We talked of DMORT often and I followed along like so many of you through the Katrina updates. While Cliff was deployed in St. Gabriel, I discovered that other websites (non-DMORT) had linked to the DMORT II site to follow his "blog," and I emailed him to let him know. It should come as no big surprise then, when I tell you he seemed surprised that anyone would do that. I don't think he knew the impact the updates were having on people and the connection he was providing

for families and team members and to those who were simply just interested in the struggles you faced each day. Such a simple thing, yet it helped so many. That was the way Cliff did things, quietly with no thought of the outcome: he just did what he felt needed to be done. I know Cliff was always proud of his affiliation with DMORT and the tireless efforts of its members. You are the unsung heroes of disasters.

The outpouring of expressions of sympathy, kind words, and the presence of the members of DMORT spoke volumes about Cliff and the way he touched your lives. I know he will be missed by so many. When we live our lives, most of us only dream of leaving the world a better place: to make some kind of a lasting mark. It is apparent that Cliff left that lasting mark. I am glad so many of you had the opportunity to know Cliff and to work with him. I was always proud of my "big" brother and his work, but when you read the poem written by Troy Bastion from



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DMORT VII, even though I was overcome with sorrow in the moment, I was even more proud of him. Thanks to the help of Bill Young, the Team Leader of DMORT VII, I was able to get in contact with Troy on Tuesday to thank him for his kind words.

Thank you again to all DMORT members for the kind words and your presence during such a difficult time. Our family appreciates everything you did. Together, we all will be struggling to find a way to deal with the loss of a life seemingly cut short. Together, we can honor Cliff's life, if we only live the words from the Old Testament, quoted by Deacon Rich, Anne's cousin, at the wake on Thursday afternoon, "To do mercy, to live justly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Please know the DMORT members will always hold a special place in my heart.

With warmest regards,

Regina Oldfield Puzzo

Kevin:

I just wanted to again thank you and all of the DMORT folks who were so kind to Cliff's family and me. It was a real tribute to Cliff to see you all there and to hear all of your kind words, but it is also a tribute to the kind of people who form DMORT. The work you people do is so important and necessary, and you do it with no thought of reward or recognition, but simply for the intrinsic value of the work itself.

My heart nearly broke on Friday when the DMORT members gave their final salute, but I realized later how needed that was for everyone there. Unfortunately, we probably concentrated on our loss, and if we overlooked the fact that you people also suffered a loss, we are sorry. The love and affection you people held for Cliff was evident, and that, together with the simple presence of all the DMORT Team members, went a long way to ease some of the pain felt in our family. We hope we

were able to help some of the pain felt in the DMORT family.

Please let me know if you can send a copy of the poem that you read at the wake - it was beautiful. I tried to take it from the website, but I could not copy and paste it. Please let Troy Bastion know how deeply it was appreciated.

Thanks again for everything.

*Richard T. Oldfield*

**If anyone would like to make a donation in Cliff's memory:**

**NYSFDA Tribute  
Foundation for Victims of  
Hurricanes Katrina and  
Rita  
c/o New York State Funeral  
Directors Association  
426 New Karner Road  
Albany, New York 12205**



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### NEW ACTING TEAM COMMANDERS APPOINTED

In January 2006, **Shannon Dotson** (Region V) was appointed Acting DPMU Team Commander by Gary Moore.

**Jennie Thommen** (Region X) was appointed Acting FAC Commander.

And following the untimely death of Cliff Oldfield, **Kevin Costigan** was appointed Acting Region II Commander.

### JENNIE THOMMEN Acting Director of the Family Assistance Core Group

**Jennie Thommen (Region X Deputy Commander)** has been appointed Acting Director of the Family Assistance Core Group.

Jennie was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. She is an Oregon licensed Funeral Director and Embalmer. She received her degree from the Department of Mortuary Science at Mount Hood Community College in Portland.

Mrs. Thommen has been a strong supporter of community affairs. During the 1980's, she spent six years volunteering for the Cascade Aids Project as a

“Pal” (Personal Active Listener). Jennie possesses an exceptional sentiment for the aging population – she is very active with the Senior Citizens Council of Clackamas County. Jennie has devoted numerous hours with this non-profit agency, holding various positions on their Board of Directors. In 1998, she was selected “Outstanding Clackamas County Volunteer” by the United Way. Jennie is a member of the Mt. Pleasant Extension Club and has served many offices in this club, including President for several terms. She is a past member of the American Business Women's Association, The Oregon City Chamber of Commerce, and Hilltop Boosters, where she was Past President.

Jennie has consistently held an interest in mass fatalities. In 1985, she attended her first mass fatality course, which was sponsored by FEMA, and received a “Qualified Mortuary Disaster Coordinator” Certificate. In the years following, she took as many mass disaster classes as possible, to further her knowledge on the subject. Jennie joined Region X DMORT in 1996. In 1997, she attended the Emergency Management Institute's Mass Fatality Incident Response course. In 1999, she was appointed Administrative Officer and Deputy Commander of Region X

DMORT - she simultaneously held both positions for several years. Jennie has been a member of the FACG (Family Assistance Core Group) since its inception. Jennie's diligence and persistence have helped Region X become the great group that it is today.

Jennie and her husband, Randy, own and operate Hillside Chapel Funeral Home in Oregon City, Oregon. Jennie considers herself the “mom” of two Brahma's cows, two cats, and a Rottweiler, named Laci Olivia.

Jennie's passion in life is caring for the survivors of disasters. The Family Assistance Core Group will definitely benefit from Jennie's leadership abilities.

### DMORT TEAM MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN A FUND RAISER FOR HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIMS

*The following originally appeared in the January-February 2006 issue of Region V's newsletter: “Voice of V”*

While deployed in St. Gabriel, Louisiana, a group of creative individuals contrived a fund-raising project to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina.



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This fundraiser activity was done by team members on their own time. The group included: **Region V team members - Shawn Wilson, Mark Whetstone, and Randy Mayfield; Region IV team member - Jason Hucks; Region VII team members – Tommy and Donna Hensley, Mark Frill, and Carlana “Wink” Grandgenett; AFDIL team members – Faith Patterson, Sean Oliver, and Ryan Vachon.** The group designed a “Katrita” (effectively combining the two hurricane names) tee shirt and sold them for a profit.

All proceeds were donated to **Mr. John Vickers (DMORT Region VI)** and **Mr. Carl James.** Mr. Vickers was a resident of New Orleans and lost everything, including his house and funeral home, following Hurricane Katrina. Mr. James was an employee of Mr. Vickers and lost everything as well; his family fortunately evacuated to Atlanta to stay with close relatives. The compassion in Mr. Vickers and Mr. James directed them to assist in DMORT operations at St. Gabriel: their presence and spirit inspired everyone at the camp.

A total of 150 tee shirts were ordered and sold, raising a profit of \$400. The money was presented to John and Carl on behalf of the entire

camp, honoring the group’s anonymity.

From the recipients’ emotional reaction, this heartwarming act of humanity and kindness was deeply appreciated!

*The FEMA Ethics Office wants to remind our DMORT audience that we may not do fundraising in our official DMORT capacity, on FEMA time, and that any personal fundraising DMORT members do off duty must not use their official DMORT titles, DMORT/NDMS symbols or insignia, or authority.*



*Participants in the “Katrita” tee shirt fund raiser include: Jason Hucks, Randy Mayfield, Donna Hensley, Tommy Hensley, Carlana Grandgenett, Shawn Wilson, and Mark Whetstone.*

### LOUISIANA DEPLOYMENT RELOCATES FROM ST. GABRIEL TO CARVILLE

*By David Hunt, Region V Training Officer*

*The following originally appeared in the January-February 2006 issue of Region V’s newsletter: “Voice of V”*

DMORT West Operations took place in St. Gabriel, Louisiana from August to November 2005. Over Thanksgiving weekend, morgue operations relocated from St. Gabriel’s City Hall to a newly constructed facility in Carville, approximately ten miles away. The complex, situated on a 32-acre field, is called the **Victim Identification Center.**

The Victim Identification Center consists of eight buildings, all of which were constructed in just over a month. The two main buildings are tensioned fabric construction and resemble large tents - they are designed to withstand 150-mph winds and last for fifteen years.

The main building is comprised of several areas, utilized for a variety of purposes: a large business area, with several offices and conference rooms; a warehouse for additional storage and receiving of supplies; an overflow



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sleeping area that can accommodate up to 250 people in open dormitory style; a medical clinic; a recreation/lounge room, consisting of a spacious common room, with two televisions and separate sitting areas for socializing; a fitness area, with weights, treadmills, stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, pool table, and air hockey table; a laundry facility for the workers; a great dining hall, with an impressive commercial quality kitchen.

The second large building is the morgue facility. What a difference from past morgues! It is split in half lengthwise: one half is the morgue, and the other half is used for warehousing, office space, and casketing operations. The morgue has an anti-skid, easy-to-clean floor. The cubicles are very large and wired for computer networks. Everything is washable and easily decontaminated. Lighting, airflow, and comfort are dramatically increased in the new facility. Behind the main building, there are six “butler” buildings; each building has 25 rooms, used for housing the workers. Each room includes a bunk bed, a double storage locker, a bedside table, and a table with two chairs. Currently, everyone is delegated their own room. Each of these buildings has shower facilities and a

common room, with a microwave and refrigerator.

The move to Carville has been positive. The Victim Identification Center is a well-designed complex, adequately meeting the needs of morgue operations and addressing the well being of workers.

### ARTICLE ABOUT DMORT AND THE CARVILLE OPERATION

Click on the link below (or do a copy/paste) for a good article about DMORT and the Carville operation.

<http://www.kbtv4.tv/news/default.asp?mode=shownews&id=10069>

### HURRICANE KATRINA - IN PERSPECTIVE *A Collection of Team Thoughts*

*On August 29, 2005  
Hurricane Katrina hit the  
Gulf Coast as a Category 4  
storm. The 145-mph winds  
and rain resulted in massive  
devastation in Louisiana and  
Mississippi. DMORT teams  
from all ten regions,  
including DPMU and FAC,  
were deployed to these areas.  
The following are personal  
accounts from team members  
who participated in this  
tragic event.*

### A First Deployment *A Personal Narrative* *By Chuck Berner, DDS* *Region V Forensic Odontologist*

I checked my email at 7:30am before leaving to my office. Several bold messages from my Region V DMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team) leadership alerted me to something important happening. As I read each in its turn, the message was at first to “get ready” and finally “here’s your travel number” for flight reservations. I knew the possibility of deployment was in place; and after a short conversation with my wife/office manager, I was in the air to Memphis at 3:30pm.

At 12:30am, I was being briefed to repack and prepare to chopper by Blackhawk to the coast and to plan on wading thru a flood zone for assessment of the area. The “go” order never came but the adrenalin rush had me awake most of the night. I knew my team from training and forensic meetings and we were clearly part of a large mobilization with DMAT (Disaster Medical Assistance Team) from several states, VMAT (Veterinary Medical Assistance Team), and other federal groups. When orders did come down to my group, the team was divided and I was embedded with Rhode Island/ Tennessee DMAT for



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search & rescue/recovery. Security was attached to travel with us, “super cops” with attitude from the Federal Protective Services. I was grateful for their company. The rest of my team was assigned other missions to other places.

The next few days involved sleeping on floors, fire ants, high heat and humidity, no electricity, boredom and waiting for a mission. Cell phone service was absent to poor and battery power had to be conserved, as recharging was difficult. I eventually convoyed thru Jackson, Hattiesburg, and Baton Rouge while spending most of my time in St. Gabriel. I was quartered in an abandoned school near a warehouse sheltering one of our two national portable morgue units. The equipment provided operations in Photography, Radiology, Anthropology, Pathology, Odontology, DNA, Personal Effects, Fingerprinting, etc. Unloading and setting up the morgue in essentially a large tin box warehouse required constant attention to hydration. The task was straight labor.

It was into the second week before I applied my science to the effort. I worked the 12-hour nightshift once operations began and was treated with the gift of Benadryl by our resident

DMAT after two days of light groggy sleep. The U.S. Forest Service eventually provided wonderful meals and shower facilities. More people continued to report to camp and sleeping quarters became more cramped. The 24-hour operation meant someone was always sleeping in quarters so quiet courtesy was the rule. I had the opportunity to work with American Board of Forensic Odontologists (ABFO) Diplomats who were supportive and mentoring. When I wasn't sleeping, I depended on the companionship in my camp.

I slept in large groups, ate MRE's (Meals Ready-to-Eat), worked 12-hour nightshifts, and formed intense new friendships, felt selfless service, and lived a rare experience that I treasure.

### Hurricane Katrina Deployment

*A Personal Narrative  
By O.J. Fawcett  
Region V Funeral Director*

This Fall, I was one of many of the federal Disaster Mortuary Response Team (DMORT) members deployed to Mississippi and Louisiana in response to the many deaths caused by Hurricane Katrina, as well as numerous human remains who were displaced from cemetery crypts and compromised graves. There were some recoveries by

team members, but our primary purpose was aid in the identification process, casketing some remains and returning them to the cemeteries, and releasing the majority of the others to local funeral homes.

In expectation of possible mass fatalities due to Hurricane Katrina heading for the Southern Gulf Coast, the two DMORT Deployable Mobile Morgue Units (DPMU's) were dispatched on or about August 27<sup>th</sup> to be prepositioned, in case they would be needed in Louisiana and Mississippi.

I flew to Gulfport, Mississippi on September 9, 2005. The first location of the DMORT Katrina East morgue was in a damaged cargo building on the far side of the Gulfport Airport. The first group deployed to Gulfport was subjected to spartan living conditions. They slept in refrigerator trucks, ate MRE's (Meals Ready-to-Eat), washed up with a hose, and were forced to dig a latrine. By the time I arrived, there were sleeping tents, “port-o-potties,” and four showerheads in a semi-trailer for about 160 workers. When Hurricane Rita caused more damage to the building, the operation was moved to the parking lot of a large water park.

When remains were received at the morgue, they were



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stored in refrigerated trucks. In the identification process, the body bags were brought into the morgue on stainless steel tables and taken to the Admitting station, where they were assigned a bag number, a folder with the necessary forms for each of the additional stations, and assigned a tracker. The tracker carried the paperwork, moved the remains to each station, and saw that each section chief documented information obtained and signed off for that station.

The next station was Photography, where photos were taken of the clothed body, unclothed body, and all personal effects. Clothing was described as to the style, color, and size of each item. All personal effects were described and placed in a bag, labeled with that bag number and placed in a locked metal locker.

Pathologists at the next station noted any scars, tattoos, piercings, wounds and trauma, evidence of medical implants, and examined and noted any serial numbers on the implants, which could provide a person's name from the manufacturer. Anthropologists were there to provide information from skeletal remains as well as any inconsistencies with x-rays. Full body x-rays were taken of each remains to locate implants, fractures,

and unique bone structures. Fingerprints were not attempted due to body conditions.

The Dental station took dental x-rays, and noted missing and artificial teeth, as well as any restorative work. A tissue sample for DNA was taken from almost all of the remains with the exception of most of the remains from the cemeteries. Once the examinations were completed and the paperwork was complete, the remains were returned to a refrigerated truck.

This information was entered into the Victim Identification Program (VIP) on a computer in the Post Mortem area. Information of this same type, gathered from family members, medical and dental records, etc. were entered into this same program in the Ante Mortem area. Comparison of data from Ante Mortem and Post Mortem areas assisted in narrowing down who this person might be, or more importantly who this person could not be. The computer never made identifications, but it helped to narrow down the choices. The Medical Examiner, with the assistance of DMORT, made the final decision as to identity and cause of death. When DMORT closes down and leaves, they transfer all of this information, as well as x-rays and photos to a CD, and

leave it with the Medical Examiner or Coroner and purge the computer.

The first week, I was primarily a tracker, but on September 15th, five dentists and five mortuary officers were flown by a U.S. Marine helicopter to DMORT Katrina West located at St. Gabriel, Louisiana near Baton Rouge. I lived at the base camp, but worked twelve-hour days at the "National Find Family Call Center," that was located in the ballroom of a hotel in Baton Rouge. Families were encouraged to call this center to report missing family members or friends. A report was taken with the name and address of the missing person, the name of the caller as well as their phone number. Persons like myself then returned these calls to see if they had been located and if not, tried to get the information for a Death Certificate, as well as information such as scars, tattoos and location of possible medical and dental x-rays, so they could be obtained to compare with the Post Mortem information.

DMORT Katrina West is where the human remains from New Orleans and surrounding areas were taken and was a larger operation. I never was involved with the morgue there, so I am not too informed about it.



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I returned home on September 22<sup>nd</sup> and returned to Gulfport for a second two-week deployment in October. Again, I was assigned to the morgue, primarily as a tracker, but another mortician and I applied some external preservation to some initially unidentified remains and the remains that were returned to crypts and cemeteries, before we casketed them.

Even though people were assigned in their professional duties in each section, often if they were not needed in that section for a period of time, they were willing to sweep floors, clean equipment, or do whatever was needed to get the mission accomplished.

I am extremely proud of our mission and what we accomplished. We were tasked with identifying approximately 375 human remains that were killed by the storm or swept from compromised crypts and graves in Mississippi. DMORT Katrina East was closed down several weeks ago (October 2005). The last I heard, there were only seven who had not yet been identified.

DMORT Katrina West is a larger operation and faces greater difficulty in identifying their victims due to larger loss of life, medical and dental records destroyed by the storms and floods in New Orleans, possible loss of

entire families and with many families still scattered throughout the country, creating difficulties in obtaining identifying information. The identification process there may extend over the next year, and I suspect that there will be many who may never be identified. Recently, facilities at St. Gabriel were closed down and moved to Carville, Louisiana (November 2005).

I was fortunate to meet many great people from all disciplines and from many areas of the country. I hope to maintain contact with many of them. Other Region V members from Minnesota who were deployed to St. Gabriel or Carville are: Andrew Baker, M.D. and Shawn Wilson from Hennepin County Medical Examiners Office, Ray Benson and Joan Held-Benson from Nisswa, Harold Risk from St. Cloud, and Mark Haskins (videographer) from Bloomington. There may be others deployed from Minnesota that I am not aware of.

This article is based on my personal experience and observations and in no way is to be construed as to be the position of DMORT or the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS).

### How Would I Know If I Were At DMORT East?

*A Humorous Outlook  
Contributed by Region IV*

1. If you sleep in a tent with 10 women and 2 men, you might be in DMORT East.
2. If you shower in a refrigerated truck in shifts, you might be in DMORT East.
3. If you think 20 ounces of water and diaper wipes are a shower, you might be in DMORT East.
4. If Wal-Mart re-opening is the highlight of the month, you might be in DMORT East.
5. If you wear your underwear on the outside of your clothes - and everybody thinks it's normal - you might be in DMORT East.
6. If you greet new arrivals in your skivvies, you're the Commander of DMORT East.
7. If flip-flops are worth more than \$10 a piece to you on the black market, you might be in DMORT East.
8. If, after two weeks of MRE's, you put peanut butter on the box and throw the food away, you might be in DMORT East.



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9. If you went for more than 14 days without a bowel movement, you might be in DMORT East.
10. If you felt the need to share with your teammates your excitement over your bowel movements, you might be in DMORT East.
11. If you become more excited over the delivery of port-o-potties than a visit by the President of the United States, you might be in DMORT East.
12. If you've ever shut down an entire airport by driving over an active runway just to get a shower, you might be in DMORT East.
13. If you think a flush toilet is a vague memory, you might be in DMORT East.
14. If you are threatened with the cost of your first born, if you don't wait on the airport gate to close, you might be in DMORT East.
15. If you have been drinking "Pharmalat" and have no idea what it is, you might be in DMORT East.
16. If watching legs in a shower has become a team sport, you might be in DMORT East.
17. If you bumped your head more than 5 times going to the IR tent, you might be in DMORT East.
18. If you carry your dirty drawers (underwear) in an empty sandbag, fooling yourself into thinking they are clean, you might be in DMORT East.
19. If you are a female and find yourself attracted to Trucker Jim (and want tattoos like his), you might be in DMORT East.
20. If you are male and find yourself attracted to Trucker Jim, you are **NOT** at DMORT East.
21. If you would rather flush the toilet at Wal-Mart than shop, you might be in DMORT East.
22. If you tell everyone about the flush toilets at Wal-Mart, you might be in DMORT East.
23. If your oriental DMAT Strike Team doctor is named Billy Bob Yee, you might be at DMORT East.
24. If you know that the commander and Admin Officer are both blond and you follow them blindly anyway, you might be in DMORT East. (sadly enough)
25. If you have developed bonds and friendships that will last a lifetime, and witnessed the true sprit of the team members that are the heart of DMORT, you are definitely at DMORT East.

**Hurricane Katrina**  
***A Personal Reflection***  
***By Todd Ellis***  
***Region VI Commander***

As the biggest mission we have ever faced comes to a close over the next week or two in Louisiana, I want to take time to reflect back on what the DMORT system has accomplished over the last six months. If you had told me at the beginning of this mission that we would stand this operation up from the ground up, process 910 storm-related victims, have a 90.5% identification rate by conventional means before DNA, assist six Parishes with recovering 1300 caskets, vaults, and disinterred human remains, and process 610 of those for identification and re-casketing, and do it all in six months, I would have said you are crazy! During 9/11, we spent eight months assisting one of the largest medical examiner systems in the world, with one of the largest facilities and staff. In Louisiana and Mississippi, they had none of those resources to bring to bear. DMORT worked two separate theaters of operation in Louisiana and Mississippi, which spread personnel and resources over a broad area for a long time, in an austere



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environment. With all that said, look what happened: DMORT adjusted, adapted, and overcame the obstacles before them. It took Commanders, Command Staff, and Team Members from every team in the country to accomplish the mission. All of us had to come together as one team, just as Tom Shepardson envisioned DMORT (**ONE TEAM, TEN REGIONS**). This is what really makes me proud to be a part of DMORT.

During this catastrophic disaster, many DMORTs really stepped up to a new level to meet the mission requirements. I think all of us had to change from a “Mom and Pop” structure to a corporate structure, with this mission being so large and complex. If we had not done that early in this mission, I think we may have failed. We need to take the things we learned from this one, to prepare for the next one, which could be the really big one (50,000 to 100,000); and how will we deal with that? It will not be successful by thinking at that “Mom and Pop” level. It will be successful with all of us putting our heads together to prepare. It is vital that all the teams read and understand the **National Response Plan (NRP)** and know how we fit into that structure, when there is a catastrophic event of National Significance. We must all know and follow

**NIMS (National Incident Management System)** and understand **Incident Command**.

Some of the challenges we faced involved the Family Assistance and Search and Recovery efforts. On the Family Assistance side, we had family members that were evacuated to all parts of the country. It was not like the normal DMORT operation, where we could bring all those people together in one place, especially in a city bulging at the seams with no housing, no fuel, and little resources in the early days of the mission. Also, many of these families were trying to survive and take care of other family members. That is why the **Find Family National Call Center** was developed to take the place of the normal Family Assistance Center. It was not perfect, but it was what we had to try to meet the challenge. The DMORTs that worked there did a tremendous job, considering the obstacles and the shortcomings of the State. Family Assistance is an area I feel we need to expand to meet the challenges of future catastrophic events.

Search and recovery also presented many challenges in this event. In the beginning, we had a city under water for months and were presented with many obstacles such as water, unstable structures,

chemical hazards, and bacterial hazards. DMORT has always been involved in search and recovery in some form or aspect in the past. It is my understanding that NDMS is committed to further development of this function to the level of training, personnel, and equipment that is needed to perform this function in future missions. We were requested to extend ourselves into search and recovery to the point we thought we could do safely, until the state hired a private contractor to perform this duty. Originally in the pre-hurricane planning, another entity had agreed to do this. During the mission, a decision was made by that entity not to proceed. DMORT did assist the parishes with recovering 1300 caskets, vaults, and disinterred remains in the swamps and storm ravaged areas of southern Louisiana, some as far as 35 miles from the cemetery where they came from. Great Job DMORT!

DMORT also had the challenge of writing a plan to deal with numbers of fatalities above 5,000 since the state had no workable plan. This was accomplished in the first 36 hours after land fall. I feel DMORT and NDMS need to review and refine that plan for future Catastrophic Mass Fatality events.



# DMORT

## NATIONAL NEWS

### Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team

I want to thank everyone in DMORT for the tremendous job they did during this mission. It would not have been successful without you. I will leave you with a link to the White House Report on what went right in this Federal Response. Check out the NDMS and DMORT paragraphs.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/appendix-b.html>

**What I Learned on Deployment at St. Gabriel**  
*A Humorous Outlook*  
*By John Frasco, D.D.S.*  
*Region VII Administrative Officer*

- An armadillo is nothing more than a cat with hard fur
- 3,600 calories per day will make anyone larger
- WMD prefers that you do not run through the decontent “to cool off”
- The morning “Shepardson hug” is sometimes the highlight of the day
- Showering at a garden hose can be fun, if you think of it that way
- Night shift sucks, but somebody’s got to do it
- To get cell phone service, look for the

bare spots in the lawn

- You need two uniform blouses, 5 uniform pants, and 40 sets of underwear
- Gold Bond Powder – what more can I say
- Your teammates and those on other teams are ALL your friends
- DMAT’s are great people too
- The time sheet pay period is the government’s assigned two weeks, not your two week deployment
- BBQ Alligator tail is quite tasty
- Dentists can be PITA’s: they are not born that way, rather they are trained that way
- No matter what they tell you, okra is not meant for human consumption
- The moon goes through its phases in the Fall in Louisiana, horizontally
- Even out of a disaster, many life-long friendships are born
- Everyone, and I mean everyone, needs to fill out an 1199 Direct Deposit Form every year
- Most mental health folks are great people, and some

need help themselves

- What is a “yurt?”
- What it means when they say “No, you can’t have the Silver Expedition”
- Some Blackwater guys actually have a sense of humor (aka: Wes)
- Louisiana really does have 10-digit phone numbers
- It is amazing how fast a guy from Muleshoe, Texas can talk, when he wants to
- The majesty of the American flag is more brilliant when viewed through a hurricane
- Community coffee – the best there is
- It’s called “Trailer Management”
- A new appreciation for the term “Bird Bath”
- When the going gets tough, FEMA creates a new form
- There really is such a thing as an FAAT book, a book of FEMA Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Terms, whose name is an acronym
- Every day you think of when you can go home; and when the day comes, you think, “Do I really have to go home?”



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- Yes, mopping the morgue floor is in your job description
- Who is "Larry?"
- DMORT has some of the hardest working, intense, compassionate, understanding, caring, and loving people in the world

### PET STORIES

*The following originally appeared in the October 2005 issue of Region V's newsletter: "Voice of V"*

### A New Home For Morty



During **Leslie Eisenberg's (Region V Anthropologist)** September 2005 deployment to Gulfport, Mississippi, she learned about an animal shelter in Gulfport, which was run by Project Halo. The Animal Shelter was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and had set up temporary quarters near the airport. While some people bring home souvenirs, such as tee shirts, refrigerator magnets, or mementos, Leslie brought home an orphaned cat! She named him **Morty**, which is short for DMORT. Morty is doing well in his

new home with his two eleven-year-old siblings. He is Region V's newest honorary member.

### The Camp's Mascot - Iber

In September 2005, team members from the St. Gabriel Base Camp in Louisiana adopted an orphaned two-month-old puppy that would have been otherwise euthanized. The puppy was named **Iber**, and he was the camp mascot. Iber's name origin is in reference to the street where the camp was located - *Iberville Road*. Iber was an excellent addition to the team, lifting the morale and spirit of everyone who crossed his path. After two weeks in St. Gabriel, Iber was adopted and sent home with team member - **Dr. Larry Dobrin (DMORT Region II Odontologist)**. Camp members then adopted a new puppy, **Gabbie**. She was also a welcome member of the camp, "unleashing" smiles to those around her.



*Tee shirts of Iber with his camp ID badge were made up and purchased by camp workers. Proceeds were donated to local hurricane victims and their families.*

### Lucky Finds a Home By "Lucky" Jarabek



"Woof" to Everyone!  
As many of you may know, and some of you may not, my mom (**Audrey "AJ" Jarabek, Region V**) brought me home when she was down working Hurricane Katrina/Rita! A girl at the airport on our flight home suggested that I be called "Lucky" as I am lucky to be alive, and lucky to have been brought to a new home after such a traumatizing "childhood." After realizing how much work I was, Mom tried her darnedest to find me a good home. No one wanted me, because I was a "male dog" and because everyone anticipates me to "get so big." I am a German shepherd mix, and my doctor tells my mom that I will probably get to be a pretty good size. Well, after nine weeks, she did find me a home, and after only **FOUR** days of missing me terribly, she called and requested me to come back home to my "family." Can you imagine? Who would have guessed? Now she loves me **SO** much, and I have charmed all of the



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family and friends. I am SO in!!!!

I am writing to say hello to all of you. If you're my mom's friend...you're my friend! I wanted to meet you all and fill you in a bit on myself.

I have just had my six-month-old birthday! Mom brought me home at six weeks, weighing in at a mere five pounds. As of last Friday at my doctor visit, I am tipping the scales at 47lbs. Wow...I just might get to be a big boy like they said. I start training with our local Police Department K-9 team dogs two weeks from this Saturday. I am SO excited! Mom says I am VERY easy to train and learn everything very quickly. I love to mind; I can see it pleases Mom so much! She spoils me terribly, and walks me all of the time, even on the freezing cold days. I love to fetch my toys when she throws them. We have a lot of fun together! I will already sit, down, shake, come, fetch, and stay on command. If you can believe it, Mom has even taught me how to pick up all of my toys and put them back in my dog-toy-basket one by one. Everyone seems to be most impressed with this. I love the treats; I'll do most anything for one! The latest task she has taught me is that I must sit and wait, drooling over my food, until she says "OK"...then I am able to dig in, but not a moment before. She keeps telling me that a good dog is a good thing!

Above is my 5-month-old picture at which I was right around 38 lbs or so. I hope you like my smile!

### WHAT CAN THE ANNUAL NDMS CONFERENCE DO FOR YOU?

Each year, the **National Disaster Medical System (NDMS)** holds an annual conference, designed to promote interaction between local, state, and federal practitioners and policy makers. Expert faculty from a variety of agencies, as well as volunteer and academic entities, present on key topics, such as weapons of mass destruction, clinical medicine, mental health, disaster teams, and international coordination. Networking with these experts and other team leaders, in the field of emergency management, allows participants to access current emergency response and coordination capabilities. Also, Continuing Education Credits are awarded to those who require them for their profession.

The cities, chosen to host these meetings, are commonly "family friendly" – convenient for attendees to include their spouses and children. In the past, conferences have been held in Orlando, Atlanta, Dallas, and Las Vegas. This year, the conference will be taking

place in **Reno, Nevada on April 22-26, 2006.**

Attending the **NDMS Annual Conference** is not only an excellent opportunity to gain knowledge about our organization and the many disciplines that comprise it, but it also allows for team camaraderie on both regional and national levels.

The complete conference program, detailing daily course and activity schedules, is available on the NDMS website [www.ndms.chepinc.org](http://www.ndms.chepinc.org), well before the conference begins. Registration can also be accomplished online. There are a variety of session tracks, one of which is "Mass Fatality Response" – recommended for DMORT members.

Within the past year, there have been some FEMA-related changes, from training requirements to deployment procedures. Attending the National Conference allows team members an excellent opportunity to understand and stay current with these modifications. When committing to be a member of the DMORT team, it is important to remember that we, as individuals, need to be thoroughly informed, in order to perform our duties properly and efficiently. Our team relies on everyone to be well informed with new procedures and protocols –



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this enables us to function effectively as a unit.

All ten regions have representation from their leadership team at the National Conference. Meeting the leaders from other regions and recognizing them can be beneficial, because in a deployment, any of these people may be in charge.

Then, of course, there are the social rewards: the conference is an ideal place for forming new friendships, and rekindling old friendships. You may not always be deployed with people from your region, and the National Conference provides you with the opportunity to meet members from all over the United States, who you may see again.

### TRAINING ANNOUNCEMENTS:

#### REGIONS I AND II TRAINING ALBANY, NEW YORK March 17-19, 2006

Regions I and II will be conducting their annual training session jointly in Albany, New York on March 17-19. More information will be provided, as it becomes available.

#### REGION III TRAINING GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA March 24-26, 2006

Region III will be holding their annual training session in conjunction with PA-2 DMAT on March 24-26 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

#### REGIONS IV AND VI TRAINING TBA

#### REGION V TRAINING LOCATION: TBA June 2-4, 2006

#### REGION VII TRAINING LAKE OZARK, MISSOURI July 7-9, 2006

Region VII will be conducting their annual training session at the Resort at Port Arrowhead in Lake Ozark, Missouri on July 7-9. For more information, contact **John Filippi** (Region VII Training Officer) at [Flipdmort@aol.com](mailto:Flipdmort@aol.com).

#### REGIONS VIII AND IX TRAINING SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH July 28-30, 2006

Regions VIII and IX will be holding a joint training session in Salt Lake City, Utah on July 28-30, 2006.

Topics to be discussed include: Logistics, Disaster Planning, specific functional stations in the morgue (including Trailer Management), and Recovery Operations.

#### REGION X TRAINING BOTHELL, WASHINGTON June 3-5, 2006

Region X will be holding its annual training session in the Bothell, Washington area from June 3-5, 2006. Highlights of the training include: the basics of DMORT deployment, sexual harassment, pathology and dental topics.

The Family Assistance Core Group will present and share with the team their experiences, including FAC involvement during deployments.

A representative from FOH (Federal Occupational Health) may also be at the meeting to update immunizations.

#### DMORT WMD TRAINING

January 2006  
March 2006 Specialty Training  
May 18-21, 2006  
July 14-16, 2006  
September 28-October 1, 2006



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### CONDOLENCES



1972-2006

**Brian Fiffick**, from the Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance at the National Transportation Safety Board, died on February 25, 2006 - he had sustained fatal injuries following an automobile accident.

In the years prior to joining the Safety Board, the Ohio native was a Senior Forensic Technician with the Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner in Phoenix, Arizona, and he had numerous years of experience in the funeral industry.

In February 1999, Brian joined the Safety Board, where he served as the Manager of Disaster Services. As the inter-agency liaison with the American Red Cross, he worked closely with the Red Cross at major transportation disasters. He strived to ensure that the needs of victims and their families were met with dignity and in a timely manner. Brian played an integral role in developing

the curriculum and training for the Red Cross Critical Response Team. He also assisted in training the Childcare Aviation Incident Response and Spiritual Care Aviation Incident Response Teams.

At the NTSB, Brian interacted with DMORT during several of the Board's most challenging accidents, including the Egypt Air Flight 990 crash off the coast of Massachusetts; the Alaska Airlines Flight 261 accident off the California coast; the American Airlines Flight 587 accident in New York; and most recently Corporate Airlines Flight 5966 accident in Kirksville, Missouri.

Brian was an essential member of the NTSB Academy's Disaster Assistance Courses that trained well over a thousand family assistance professionals in the transportation industry, law enforcement, emergency response, and all levels of government in the United States, as well as dozens of foreign countries.

Brian was acquainted with many DMORT members whom he worked with and helped train. He will be remembered by co-workers and colleagues as compassionate, quick-witted, comical, conscientious, always willing to help, and for his trademark smile. He

will be greatly missed by many.

Brian is survived by his parents and five brothers and sisters. All of DMORT extends its heartfelt condolences to his family and the NTSB.

### REGION V CONDOLENCES

It is with great sadness that the Region V family grieves the loss of another valued team member. **Donald Lukomski** passed away on January 12, 2006 from heart problems.

Don was an experienced Medical Investigator at the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office in Detroit, Michigan.

The DMORT family expresses their deepest sympathy to the Lukomski family.

[DMORT National Newsletter](#)

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