THE NEW YORKER
FACT
A REPORTER AT LARGE

DELUGED

by DAN BAUM

When Katrina hit, where were the police?

Issue of 2006-01-09
Posted 2005-01-02

Tim Bruneau discovered New Orleans in 1997, when, as a twenty-three-year-old soldier at Fort Polk, Louisiana, he was close enough to the city to hit Bourbon Street on weekends. He'd spent two years in Panama as a military policeman, and New Orleans reminded him, in a good way, of Central America—hot, sensual, and easygoing. Rather than go home to Texas after leaving the Army, he joined the New Orleans Police Department.

Bruneau is tall and thin, with a big Adam's apple in a long neck. He walks like a marionette, lurching along with his knees slightly bent and his feet dragging. In 2002, he was hit by a car as he was running after a drug suspect. When he awoke, six weeks later, he couldn't move his left side. Bruneau assumed that his career was finished, but the department stood by him, paying for several operations, including the amputation of the little finger of his left hand, and keeping a job open for him. When it became clear that he would never be strong enough to return to patrol, he was made a detective.

The Hurricane Katrina crisis began for Bruneau on Monday, August 29th, shortly after the storm had passed through. A young woman lay dead in the middle of the 1900 block of Jackson Avenue. Her skull was crushed, and a fallen street light, blown down by the ninety-five-mile-an-hour winds, lay beside her. Along Jackson Avenue, people were emerging from shotgun shacks into a world of smashed oak trees and downed power lines. Some of them knew the woman. She had gone out during the storm to buy drugs.

Bruneau's police radio carried reports from the Lower Ninth Ward, three miles away: it was flooding rapidly, from a breach in the so-called Industrial Canal. But that was another district's problem. Bruneau radioed for the coroner. Nobody showed up. Bruneau called again. Nothing. An hour passed. The dispatcher told Bruneau that floodwater was heading toward him. The Seventeenth Street and London Avenue Canals had breached their levees, and Lake Pontchartrain was pouring into northern New Orleans. Bruneau asked for an ambulance. None was available, because most of them had been moved out of the city before the storm. He asked the dispatcher to try the coroner again, but the coroner's office was flooded.

Bruneau waited by the body for two hours, and finally left it with a patrolman and drove off to another call. When he checked back, in the early afternoon, the woman still lay uncovered on the hot pavement. Standard operating procedure, it seemed, no longer applied. In some nearby storm wreckage, he and the patrolman found a deflated water-bed mattress. Neighbors watched as the two men rolled the woman onto it and hoisted her into the back seat of Bruneau's unmarked white Crown Victoria. He explained to the neighbors that he planned to deliver the woman to the morgue. "So they wouldn't think I was up to no good," he told me. After informing the dispatcher that he had a 29-U, a victim of

an unclassified death, in his back seat, he drove to Charity Hospital, about a mile away. Water was approaching the building's steps, and the doctors and staff members were evacuating. They couldn't take the body. At Tulane University Hospital, down the street, an emergency-room doctor refused to let Bruneau in the door.

By this time, Bruneau knew from police reports that his own house and car were underwater. He parked a few blocks from the Superdome, staring through the windshield at the huge structure rising incongruously from deep water. "I was dazed and confused," he told me later. All he had was his uniform, the cash in his wallet, and his gun. He didn't know what to do with the corpse. The entire edifice of city government seemed to have dissolved in the floodwaters. He sat gazing at the Superdome for two hours. Finally, the dispatcher got back to him.

"Undo what you did," she said.

"You mean dump the body?"

"Undo what you did."

Bruneau drove back to Jackson Avenue. A sergeant met him there with a body bag, and the neighbors watched again as the cops pulled the woman out of the car and onto a strip of grass. They unrolled her from the water bed and zipped her into the bag. This time, Bruneau didn't know what to say to the neighbors, so he simply drove away. During the days that followed, he headed back toward Jackson Avenue every now and then. The 1900 block eventually lay four blocks into the flood zone, and he stood at the water's edge and peered through his binoculars. The woman floated this way and that, and came to rest about half a block from where he'd first found her.

All over New Orleans, officers like Tim Bruneau were trying to do their best. One swam from his flooded house with his Rottweiler. A heavyset female officer who could not swim huddled on her daughter's desk all night, floated out on a door, and reported for duty. Kristi Foret, a tiny twenty-five-year-old single mother who joined the department in August after serving with the Army in Afghanistan, spent two days trapped on her roof in the sun. After a neighbor with a boat rescued her, she stayed with him for another three days, sleeping in the boat and pulling people off roofs and out of attics. "It's called an oath," she told me. "Whenever you give your word, you do exactly what you say you're going to do."

As an institution, though, the New Orleans Police Department disintegrated with the first drop of floodwater. The current chief, Warren J. Riley, likes to say that no department anywhere has ever faced "an enemy like Katrina." The flood deprived the department of ammunition, communications, and cars. But the loss of equipment doesn't fully explain a collapse that shocked even the department's oldest veterans.

The N.O.P.D. was notorious long before Katrina for failures of leadership, professionalism, and discipline. The department was one of the most poorly paid in the country—even the highest-ranking patrolmen earned less than eight hundred dollars a week before taxes. Officers had to buy their own uniforms, gun belts, raincoats, and handcuffs—everything except a badge, a gun, a radio, and a nightstick. They were required to live within the city limits, and many sent their children to New Orleans' notoriously underfunded public schools. Nearly all patrolmen worked private security details to make ends meet. For instance, Sabrina Richardson, the single mother of an eight-year-old boy, worked eight-hour shifts for the department and then a midnight-to-six shift in a Wal-Mart parking lot.

On weekends, she patrolled the stands of the Superdome. “My son didn’t like it,” she said. “I’d tell him, ‘You gotta suck it up. Put on your tough skin, and *man up!*’ ”

New Orleans disrespected its police, and often the police seemed to disrespect themselves. Even the department’s official history reads like a multicount indictment of graft, ineptitude, and brutality, as far back as the Louisiana Purchase. The first police force in French New Orleans was organized in 1803, but after “numerous complaints” the entire unit had to be dismissed, and that set the tone for two centuries of bribe-taking, drug-dealing, beatings, torture, and murder of civilians and fellow-officers alike. In 1994, the United States Attorney in New Orleans suggested that as many as fifteen per cent of the department’s fifteen hundred officers were corrupt, an estimate that—judging by the arrests and firings that followed—was probably short of the mark. Many officers came to the force from the public schools with limited writing skills. Their inability to produce clear reports was one of the reasons that about half of the serious cases the N.O.P.D. cleared between 2002 and 2004—some twenty-two thousand—were rejected by prosecutors. (The traditional reluctance of many New Orleanians to testify on behalf of prosecutors may have been another.) The mistrust and contempt between the city and its police became as established a feature of New Orleans as the humidity. The largely black underclass suffered most for it, and filed scores of brutality complaints over the years, but for some citizens, particularly among the white middle class, the department served as a topic of ironic amusement. The force wasn’t just rotten; it was flagrantly, exuberantly, entertainingly rotten—a city signature, like the food and the music. “It isn’t something you’re ever going to change, so you may as well have another drink and enjoy the spectacle,” a local rug dealer named Bob Rue told me. “You’re not in America here. You’re not even in Louisiana. This is New Orleans.”

Everything is viewed through a racial lens in New Orleans, but it refracts differently there than elsewhere in the South. Louisiana was colonized first by the French, whose Code Noir encouraged intermarriage between whites and their black slaves to create a buffer class that might prevent insurrection; and briefly by the Spanish, whose custom of *coartación* let slaves buy their freedom. By the time the United States took over, in 1803, the two customs had helped to create a large educated middle class of black freemen and black French Creoles that divided itself socially according to skin color. The Americans who poured into Louisiana made no such distinctions and generally treated all of them as inferiors, which rankled especially in New Orleans, where the most privileged blacks and Creoles lived.

Before the hurricane, New Orleans was more than two-thirds black. For many years, though, the police department was largely white. When Marc Morial—the son of New Orleans’ first black mayor, Ernest (Dutch) Morial—became mayor, in the mid-nineties, the influx of black officers accelerated. By this year, slightly more than half the officers were black. Some white New Orleanians malign Morial’s administration as the acme of corruption. Blacks, though, tend to remember him as a Robin Hood. In addition to helping increase the number of blacks in the department, he delivered the first serious effort to clean it up.

In 1994, Morial broke with tradition and went outside the department to recruit, as chief of police, Richard Pennington, an African-American who was then the No. 2 of the Washington, D.C., force. Pennington hadn’t applied for the job, and accepted only when Morial promised not to interfere. Pennington, by his own account, was something of a prig. “I never went to a police party. I didn’t want to be the officers’ friend,” he told me this fall in Atlanta, where he is now chief. Pennington forbade officers from working details at bars and strip joints, banned the practice of patrolmen lavishing expensive presents on their commanders at Christmas, and stopped hiring officers with criminal records or bad credit. During his eight years as chief, he fired, arrested, or forced out more than three

hundred cops.

Crime and brutality complaints fell significantly. Pennington wrested a big pay raise for his cops from the city council, but felt it necessary to carry a gun—as much to protect himself from cops, he said, as from ordinary crooks. In 2002, Pennington ran for mayor against Ray Nagin, the general manager of Cox Communications' cable-TV monopoly in New Orleans. Pennington lost, and resigned. Nagin reverted to tradition and hired a chief from within the department, a friend since primary school: Edwin P. Compass III.

In personality and management style, Compass was Pennington's opposite. He was known as "a cop's cop." He was as likely to greet an officer with open arms and a cry of "Give me some love!" as with a handshake or a salute. Compass had been highly regarded as a street cop and was among the few African-Americans ever asked to command one of the department's eight districts. In a department riven with racial divisions, he went out of his way to be color-blind. "Once, when some mid-level officers were saying I was racist, Eddie Compass stood up at a meeting and backed me up," said Felix Loicano, who is white and was at the time in command of the Public Integrity Division, which investigated crooked cops. "He was just a lieutenant then—this took guts." But Compass himself seemed to question his qualifications as chief. An old friend of his said that Compass never seemed comfortable in the role and harbored self-doubts. As chief, Compass was criticized for limiting the scope of an investigation into whether district commanders were downgrading crimes to make their statistics look good. The murder rate in New Orleans rose. By the time Katrina struck, it was ten times the national average. Whatever respect the department had earned during the Pennington years was gone; by the middle of 2005, the *Times-Picayune* and the weekly *Gambit,* in news stories and editorials, were upbraiding the department regularly. And then, in a gesture that typified relations between the city's poor and its police, the cops picked a needless fight with one of New Orleans' most beloved institutions, the Mardi Gras Indians.

Captain Anthony Cannatella, the commander of the Sixth District, is, for better or worse, a New Orleans Police Department legend. Supporters and detractors use the same adjective to describe him: old-school. In the positive sense, it means incorruptible, hard-charging, and devoted to the city and its police department. N.O.P.D. officers can retire after thirty years with a pension equal to a hundred per cent of their pay. Cannatella, who has been on the force almost forty years, has essentially worked the last ten for free. In his first year as commander, the Sixth District, a triangular slice of uptown New Orleans, suffered about half as many murders—twenty-seven—as it had the year before. In the negative sense, "old-school" connotes roughness, racial insensitivity, and the convoluted family relationships that make the police force resistant to reform. Cannatella likes to say that he is related to twenty-five current and former cops. He is built like a street-corner mailbox, with a fringe of hair around a neckless, bald head, and he walks with a busy, short-legged gait. He usually doesn't carry a gun, preferring to talk his way out of trouble. New Orleans experienced the same wave of nineteenth-century immigrants that swelled the East Coast—from Ireland, Germany, and Italy—and Cannatella's accent ("Get to woik!") suggests Jersey City rather than the Old South. It's a good accent for a cop—contemptuous, authoritative, and intolerant of back talk.

Through most of his career, Cannatella got along with the Indians—the Wild Magnolias, the Geronimo Hunters, Fi-Yi-Yi, the Wild Tchoupitoulas, and others. These tribes of working-class African-American men, as formal in their rituals as Masons or Elks, honor the Native Americans who took in escaped slaves. They compete to create the most lavish faux-Indian costumes and the most outrageous

songs and dances. In the early years of Mardi Gras, blacks were banned from the main parades, and "masking Indian," as it's called, was a ruse for inclusion. The Indians eventually began participating in a second annual parade as well, on St. Joseph's Night, an Italian-American holiday celebrated on March 19th. Participants whoop through the streets in beaded, primary-colored, threedimensional polyester-fleece costumes, topped by four-foot-wide headdresses of hot-pink or chromium-yellow fake feathers, shot through with rhinestones and multicolored glass jewels. One place they traditionally gather is A. L. Davis Park, in a rough Sixth District neighborhood not far from where Tim Bruneau found the dead woman.

During his first two years as Sixth District commander, Cannatella continued his predecessor's practice of giving the Indians free police protection on St. Joseph's Night, though he regularly charged an uptown Irish club thousands of dollars for police services at its annual parades. "Everybody knows Indians don't do permits," he told me in October. "There's a heritage issue here. They're always drunk, and selling alcohol on the street, and for years everybody looked the other way. But if you try to stop it you'll have a riot." In 2005, though, Cannatella allowed his police pride to get the better of him. He made no plans for extra crowd control on St. Joseph's Night, because, he said, nobody from the Indians called to let him know they would be gathering. The Indians, he insisted, should come to him. "It's incumbent upon them to do that," he said, defiantly thrusting out his chin. "I got no letter, no call. How do I know they're not having it on the eighteenth, or the twentieth?"

Cannatella was at home on March 19th, packing for his first vacation in five years, when a neighborhood resident called to say the park was filling with drunken Indians, one of whom was carrying a shotgun decorated with feathers like a spear. Cannatella radioed the station, then drove to the park. His officers—some only a couple of years out of high school—were using their sirens and loudspeakers to push the Indians out of the street and into the park. They roughed up several people and arrested one. "Did they say dumb, vulgar things?" Cannatella said. "Probably. I wish they hadn't."

Community outrage was heated, and refused to subside. Eventually, the city council scheduled a "reconciliation" session, for June 27th. Cannatella, in his white dress-uniform shirt, sat up front, facing the council. A full house of neighborhood activists, reporters, and the chiefs of the tribes sat behind him. The first chief to speak was the eighty-two-year-old Chief of Chiefs, Allison (Tootie) Montana, the most celebrated craftsman of Indian costumes. Montana walked slowly to the microphone and began recounting forty years of N.O.P.D. mistreatment of Indians. Several minutes into his speech, he coughed once, collapsed to the floor, and stopped breathing. As the room exploded in shouting, Cannatella and another officer performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but Montana was dead. To the Indians, it was as if the Chief of Chiefs had fallen in battle.

Thus began a summerlong decline in the department's stature and morale. In July, there were two days of street fights and other mayhem in which twelve people were killed or wounded by gunfire; in August the department announced that it had arrested two of its own, one for writing bad checks, the other for rape.

August 27th was White Buffalo Day, another important ritual on the Indian calendar. It fell on a Saturday, and the Indians dedicated ceremonies in Congo Square to the memory of Tootie Montana. That night, the National Weather Service reported that Hurricane Katrina, in the Gulf of Mexico, had made an unexpected right turn. The storm was no longer headed toward the Texas coast but toward the city of New Orleans.

Planning is an ant's business, and New Orleans tends to view itself as a grasshopper town. "People here aren't serious," a white-haired member of an old Mardi Gras krewe told me one evening. "Look at us. All our energy goes into floats and suits and parties. I guess it's the difference between being Mediterranean and northern European." The City that Care Forgot wasn't one to dwell overmuch on hypothetical bad times. Even while local officials conjured the spectre of a catastrophic flood in their pleas to Congress for levee funding, the city failed to prepare adequately for the event. In 2004, the police department produced an elaborate hurricane plan and issued it to all its commanders. But it stayed on their bookshelves. The department didn't run exercises to familiarize officers with the plan. Few officers I spoke to even knew it existed.

On the Saturday that Katrina took its unexpected right turn, Mayor Nagin signed a proclamation declaring a state of emergency. He asked residents to evacuate and, in a clause that led to untold mischief, authorized police to commandeer private property "necessary to cope with the local disaster emergency." Police started in on the second directive almost immediately. Doug Stead, president of a large downtown car dealership called Sewell Cadillac Chevrolet, was on his way to Lafayette, Louisiana, at about 10 A.M. on Sunday—some fifteen hours before Katrina hit—when an employee called to say he'd seen N.O.P.D. officers driving around Metairie, a suburb west of New Orleans, in new Cadillac Escalades with Sewell license-plate frames on them. The employee wanted to know whether the officers had permission. They didn't. Stead spent the next nine days in Lafayette wondering how many cars the police had taken and whether they had sealed up the dealership when they left.

Most of New Orleans, including police headquarters, on South Broad Street, lies below sea level. As the storm approached, officers tucked hundreds of patrol cars into low garages to protect them from wind, or moved them to highway overpasses, where they would be safe from the flooding that occurs in the city during any heavy rainstorm. By about 2 A.M. on Monday, August 29th, Katrina's winds were so strong that uprooted palm trees were flying down Canal Street, in the words of one cop, "like torpedoes," and police cancelled patrols; responding to calls would have been too dangerous. That night, electricity failed throughout the city.

In the morning, while Tim Bruneau was trying to find a place to deliver the dead woman, floodwater swamped police headquarters, the crime lab, the evidence room, the armory, the jail, and all the police cars stored in low garages. The cruisers parked on overpasses were stranded; in all, the department lost about a quarter of its cars in the first hours of the flood. Radio antennas were destroyed; the department's primary radio system died later that day.

Like everybody else in New Orleans, Tim Bayard, the commander of the vice and narcotics squads, assumed on Monday morning that the Hurricane Katrina drama was over. Bayard, whose close-clipped hair and steel-framed eyeglasses give him the look of a high-school science teacher, got one bad piece of news after another: the Lower Ninth Ward, the Seventeenth Street and London Street Canals, the loss of Police Headquarters. He gathered his officers in the valet-parking driveway of Harrah's casino, on Canal Street in the Central Business District. He tried to reach his commanders by cell phone, but the exchange that handled the 504 area code had perished in the storm. It became clear that the department had no way to respond to the crisis: no boats, no cars, no ammunition, and no way to communicate effectively. Officers who were used to taking their orders by radio were drifting aimlessly around the city. Bayard knew of a mobile command post housed in an eighteen-wheeler's trailer and equipped with radios, generators, and emergency supplies, but somebody had moved it out of the city for protection from wind and flooding, and no one knew where it was. Instead, the police

were trying to fight the disaster with a couple of picnic tables and a few folding chairs set up in a casino driveway. They had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, no cots, no place to relieve themselves.

And, at Harrah's, no chief. Superintendent Compass spent the night of the storm in the Hyatt Regency with his wife, who was eight months pregnant, and his three-year-old daughter. Mayor Nagin and members of his staff slept there, too. They turned a ballroom into their headquarters, with desks for the power company, the sewage-and-water department, the military, the fire department, and other services. Compass told me recently that he made forays into the city to talk to his officers, but Bayard didn't see him at the Harrah's command post during the first three days of the crisis. Aside from one brief encounter with a *Times-Picayune* reporter on the second day, Compass was also invisible to the press during that period. Many cops believe he left town; Compass insisted to me that he did not.

On Tuesday, as water inched toward the Sixth District station, Anthony Cannatella told his cops to clear out. The few cars they had saved were low on gas or had flat tires from running over debris. The cops crammed into them and fled across the Mississippi River—on the soaring Crescent City Connection bridge—to the parking lot of a McDonald's in the wind-battered but unflooded part of the city called Algiers. Across the street, people were ransacking a convenience store. Cannatella told several officers to chase them off and salvage what was left: a few boxes of Pop-Tarts, soda, and some bottled water.

Officers could still use their radios as short-range walkie-talkies, but the single band was so crowded with police, fire, and ambulance calls from the extended metropolitan area that it was all but useless. After nightfall, Cannatella picked up a call from then Deputy Chief Warren Riley, who told him that boats were leaving people from the Ninth Ward on Interstate 10, and that he should send patrol cars to take them out of the city. Cannatella grabbed seven officers to accompany him, and in seven of the district's precious remaining cars they sped back over the bridge to the Louisa Street exit, where hundreds of wet, terrified people milled about in the heat. A hodgepodge of fishing skiffs, makeshift rafts, and waterskiing boats were approaching with more.

Riley, who is short, powerfully built, and very dark, emerged from the crowd. He projects none of Compass's warm exuberance; he's all business. A twenty-three-year veteran, he ran (unsuccessfully) for Orleans Parish sheriff last year, with Nagin's support. Despite his political connections, he is regarded by most cops as sensible and hardworking. He told Cannatella to ferry people to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, a complex of cavernous exhibition halls that had not previously been thought of as a shelter. The Superdome, which was guarded by hundreds of cops and soldiers and was stocked with food and water, was inaccessible to cars.

Cannatella and his officers dropped carloads of traumatized refugees, each clutching a few belongings, at the huge darkened building. They had no food or water to give them and no idea what predators might await them in the center's stifling heat. The Convention Center is Eighth District police territory, but no police or soldiers were assigned to receive the refugees, and officers visited only intermittently during the five days that the center served as an impromptu shelter.

The Sixth District police left the McDonald's parking lot Wednesday morning, and set up housekeeping in their own district, in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart on Tchoupitoulas Street, near the Third Street Wharf—the former site of the St. Thomas housing projects. It was, Cannatella felt, a fitting place for them to rally. Some years ago, as part of an ambitious plan to "deconcentrate" poverty, the city had torn down St. Thomas. Residents—including gang members and drug dealers—dispersed

all over the city, violating various gangs' territories. "They didn't ask us first—they didn't do anything but move 'em," Cannatella told me. "They started an instant turf war." He spread his hands as if to say, "What are you gonna do?"

Cannatella found the Wal-Mart's glass doors smashed and the place full of people grabbing merchandise. He and his officers chased them away, then took a refrigerated truck from the nearby Brown's Dairy lot and filled it with the spoiling groceries from Wal-Mart's coolers. Sabrina Richardson and four other female officers liberated some butane tanks, pots and pans, and a metal rack with which to jury-rig a stove. They set up a kitchen in the parking lot, feeding two meals of gumbo, pasta, or burgers to a hundred officers a day. The mission of the Sixth District police officers, at this point, was their own survival.

They called their outpost Fort Wal-Mart. The short-range function of their radios dwindled and died, because the radios took only rechargeable batteries, which were useless in a city with no electricity.

Cannatella ordered his cops not to use up their gasoline by patrolling. One day, Richardson violated Cannatella's nopatrols rule, taking a short drive onto the interstate, which was elevated above the floodwaters. Masses of desperate people crowded the searing asphalt. As she rolled past, they banged on her windows and begged her to stop. Terrified, she floored the accelerator. She never went back. At night, Richardson washed her sweat-soaked uniform in one wastebasket, rinsed it in another, and laid it on the hood of her cruiser. Then she crawled into the passenger seat, gun in hand, to sleep. All the officers slept holding their guns.

Four days after abandoning the young woman's body, Tim Bruneau was driving with another detective, Alan Bartholomew, to a sergeant's house to take showers.

"Let's go to my house," Bartholomew said.

"What?" Bruneau asked.

"I'm leaving," Bartholomew said.

"For good?"

"Yeah."

Bruneau drove in silence. As they pulled up to Bartholomew's house, he said, "Look, don't take stuff we can use." Bartholomew gave Bruneau his M-16, his bulletproof vest, his pistol, and his police credentials. "As long as you can live with what you're doing, more power to you," Bruneau said, and drove away. A couple of days later, the police announced that as many as five hundred cops were missing—about a third of the force.

Part of the problem was that the protocols that normally keep cops in line vanished during the crisis. On the same night that Bartholomew deserted, Bruneau answered a looting call at a pharmacy. When he turned on his car's flashing blue lights and siren, he expected the looters to run. Instead, they started shooting. As Bruneau shifted into reverse, he leaned out the window with his Glock and squeezed off a few shots. Normally, when a cop fires his gun investigators rope off the scene, find the bullets, figure trajectories, and write it up. But Bruneau, who had spent a day chauffeuring a corpse, knew that the department had no time for such procedures. Warren Riley told me later that the department eventually investigated every shooting by an officer in which someone was hit by a bullet; there were seven

instances, four of them fatal, during the first month of the crisis.

Without a proper jail, the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections had turned Union Station, a combined bus and train depot, into a lockup. The terminal looked normal, with its schedules and newsstand, but the bus platform was a cellblock. High chain-link fences topped with razor wire ran along either side, and sullen men stood in clumps or sat on the floor. Wired to the fence were crude handlettered signs: "Cell 5 Federal," "Cell 3 Felony." Most of the prisoners had been arrested in suburban Jefferson Parish. No N.O.P.D. officers I spoke with knew about the makeshift jail. One captain told me that when his officers caught looters they photographed them with their booty and turned them loose, hoping to arrest them later on a warrant.

Much has been made of looting by N.O.P.D. officers. Most, like those of the Sixth District, took what they needed to stay on the job. Some behaved criminally. One band of cops turned a downtown hotel into a private club, terrorizing the hotel engineer and chilling beer with a generator stolen from Tulane Hospital. Another gang holed up in a Holiday Inn in a nearby suburb, and when a local cop confronted them they threw him on the floor and pressed a shotgun to his head.

Richard Pennington has no compunction about criticizing the department he used to run. "When officers don't see their commanders, they become renegades," he said as we sat in his office, which is decorated with laminated newspaper clippings extolling his successes in New Orleans and in the tough Anacostia section of Washington, D.C. While watching the Katrina media coverage, Pennington said, "I never saw the chief for three days. I was saying, 'Damn, you watch CNN, where's the police chief?' " Low-lying neighborhoods often flooded during hurricanes when Pennington was the N.O.P.D. chief, and he made a point of driving around with the mayor in a National Guard high-water truck, to let his officers see that he was on the job. "Troops will wait for instruction and guidance," he said. Also, he added, "I had no policy allowing officers to commandeer things. It would have gotten out of control."

Pennington said he was astonished at the number of officers who disappeared during the storm. "I heard them say they might be moving their families," he said. "But we had a policy where twenty-four hours before a storm we'd allow all our cops time to get their families out of the city. Then they had to report back to work. When I watched television and heard them say some of these people left and didn't come back because they're caught in the water, I said, 'How did that happen?' "

Bayard, the captain of vice and narcotics, and a few other captains organized a makeshift rescue operation out of the Harrah's casino driveway. They divided the city into quadrants, and put out the word that anybody with a boat—officer, civilian, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department—should check in at Harrah's each morning for an assignment. The National Guard, with trucks that could negotiate water as deep as eight feet, also took assignments. Bayard could see helicopters over the city but didn't know whose they were. An aerial view would have helped him assign rescue missions, but he had no means of contacting the pilots. He had no contact with FEMA, and he later found out that FEMA and the N.O.P.D. had unwittingly covered parts of the city in triplicate, delaying by more than a week the intense searching that involved breaking into homes to find survivors. He figures the lack of coördination cost lives.

At four o'clock on the hot afternoon of Friday, September 2nd, Captain Edwin Hosli, Anthony Cannatella's counterpart in the Second District, sloshed through filthy knee-deep water at the corner of Napoleon Avenue and Carondelet Street, directing his own makeshift operation. The smell of rot and gasoline that blanketed the city was strongest here at the water's edge, where floating sewage and

garbage gathered in foamy skeins. Hosli, at forty-five, is compact and muscular, with spiky hair and a face that narrows from a wide forehead to a pointed chin. He carried a black semi-automatic assault rifle and wore the same squishy wet shoes and uniform he'd had on since the storm. His wife and children had evacuated the city—he didn't even know where they were—and his house was ruined. Half of the hundred and twenty-three officers under his command were missing. As he climbed aboard a fancy white speedboat, I squeezed in as well.

One of Hosli's lieutenants, a tall, ropy Cajun named Darryl Albert, was fumbling with a screwdriver at the speedboat's ignition, trying to hot-wire it. Another, Eddie Selby, thumbed through the handwritten notes that agitated citizens kept pressing on him, scribbled with the addresses of people who needed rescue. Hosli sat heavily on a vinyl seat, leaned against the barrel of his rifle, and closed his eyes.

Like Cannatella, Hosli is old N.O.P.D. On New Year's Eve, 1972, a Black Panther fatally shot his father, Edwin Hosli, Sr., during a weeklong downtown attack in which four other N.O.P.D. officers were killed. Edwin was twelve. His father's grieving colleagues closed ranks around him, getting him onto the force right after high school.

The speedboat's motor came to life and Hosli sat up, blinking. As we started moving, there was a shout, and a shirtless young man in cutoff jeans ran through the water and leaped aboard. His name was Ryan Asmussen, he said, and he had fifteen years' experience as a Navy diver. "I'm a recovering alcoholic," he added proudly. "I've been living in the Volunteers for America halfway house around the corner. I want to help."

The boat proceeded slowly up Napoleon Avenue, bumping against sunken cars and fallen trees. Graceful multicolored turn-of-the-century houses reflected prettily in the calm water. The officers ducked a street sign as they rounded the corner onto commercial Claiborne Avenue, and fell silent as their view widened to a panorama of their city. A body floated face down in a used-car lot. The rounded shoulders of another bobbed near a funeral home. The giant root-beer mug that announced Frostop Burgers was upside down and half submerged. On the horizon rose a thick spiral of heavy smoke. A young woman sunbathed on top of a heap of boxed toasters, blenders, and other kitchenware piled into a speedboat moored outside a Walgreens drugstore. She waved nervously and yelled to someone inside the store; the cops cruised past.

A huge gray helicopter scooted in low, sending loose roofing tiles knifing through the air and raising a rotor wash that nearly swamped the cops and drenched everybody on board with filthy spray. The officers waved their arms frantically until the pilot noticed them and veered away. They shook water from their clothes. Around the corner, a man seemed to be drowning, a toothless African-American of indeterminate age, clinging to a pickup-truck toolbox. "Leave me alone! I'm fine!" he yelled, flailing about in the greasy water. "I've got to take my sister her medicine." Asmussen looked straight down from the boat deck into the truck box and cried, "It's full of liquor!" The truck box tipped, filled with water, and sank. "There it goes!" Hosli yelled. "Like the Titanic. It's gone. Now get in the boat." The man was sobbing with fury, thrashing to stay afloat. "I was fine before you got here. Leave me alone!" The cops pulled him aboard, flopping like a fish; he clutched to his chest a blue zippered bag through which the outlines of two bottles showed. Asmussen shook his head with admiration. "That's a real alcoholic," he said.

With a hand on his holstered pistol, Hosli disarmed the man of a hammer and a knife. Sunset crept up through the murky air, and night fell. The man sobbed and kicked the floor of the boat, wailing about his medicine and his sister. "You want her to die!" he kept shouting. Hosli pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes. Then he leaned out with a paddle, determined that the water was only waist-

deep, and rolled the man out of the boat. The man was speechless for a moment, then beat his hands on the surface and shrieked invectives as he receded in the darkness.

Hosli's police radio, which had been silent all afternoon, suddenly crackled, and a man's voice said, "Ah, we just got a report that a police officer has taken his own life."

No one spoke. The boat chugged on through the darkness.

The flooding covered eighty per cent of the city, leaving dry only a mile-wide sliver of high ground that recalled how New Orleans came to be known as the Crescent City. The mansions of Carrollton and the Garden District, the tall office buildings of the Central Business District, the French Quarter, and the rougher neighborhoods of Faubourg Marigny and Bywater were squeezed between the floodwater and the river. Those in dry New Orleans during the first week of the crisis hardly ever saw cops, or anyone in authority. Except for some orange-and-white Coast Guard helicopters and a few choppers from the Louisiana National Guard, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday went by with little sign of the police or outside help. To those left in the city, it felt as if government at all levels had vanished, as if not only New Orleans but the nation itself had disappeared. Lurid rumors filled the void. A creepy compulsion to believe the worst distorted what New Orleanians saw, heard, and felt, what they chose to do, and what they would remember.

Looters smashed their way along Canal Street, a diverse commercial strip that divides the Central Business District from the French Quarter, grabbing discount clothing, DVDs, and sneakers. Saks Fifth Avenue was sacked and burned. Burglars along St. Claude, the main commercial avenue bordering Faubourg Marigny, cleared taverns' cashboxes and liquor shelves. In the suburbs, where thieves could use cars to haul booty, they made off with guns, bicycles, and stereos.

Yet what was striking was not how many stores were ransacked but how few. Television crews, their trailers parked on Canal Street, saw the worst. In the French Quarter and the commercial districts along St. Charles Avenue and Magazine Street, storefronts stayed largely intact. Antiques and fine art rested behind unshielded plate-glass windows. People pried open pharmacies and grocery stores, taking diapers, aspirin, food, water, and soft drinks, but left wine and liquor on the shelves, intact.

Even at the Superdome and the Convention Center, signature hellholes of the crisis, peace prevailed. Hundreds of policemen and soldiers kept order in the Superdome. Though half a dozen people died there, mostly from natural causes, nobody was murdered. After six days of misery, without air-conditioning, running water, or working toilets, the citizens lined up politely to be bused out. At the Convention Center, where the miasma of hot garbage, sweat, and feces was sickening, there was one apparent homicide, but evacuees generally took care of one another. A group of young black men brought luggage carts from nearby hotels and used them to gather trash into enormous piles. Those who staggered in with food and water shared it. Even though the police presence was at best intermittent, the windows of stores across the street remained unshattered. A brand-new Chevrolet SSR sat unmolested on a side street.

The citizens of New Orleans tried to weave their own safety net. A casting director and a tax attorney who had never met before the storm commandeered a waterskiing boat to salvage wheelchairs and cots from an abandoned hospital and rescue people from roofs and attics. A curly-haired doctor named Jeff Brumberger painted crude red crosses on the side of a white hearse, loaded it with supplies from deserted hospitals and pharmacies, and roamed the city for days, dispensing care and wisecracks.

Mama D, a witchy old woman on Dorgenois Street, stoked charcoal grills in her driveway, feeding whoever walked by. A motherly transsexual on St. Claude Avenue kept her tavern open night and day, dispensing dollar beers and free food to comfort the poor and the bewildered.

Yet public officials who might have counselled calm did the opposite. Mayor Nagin declared on television that he'd watched "hooligans killing people, raping people," but his spokesperson, Sally Forman, told me that he didn't see them "with his own eyes. He was relying on reports of people in authority." Councilwoman Jackie Clarkson told the Associated Press, "Looting is out of control. The French Quarter has been attacked." Police Superintendent Compass tearfully declared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" that "little babies" were being raped in the Superdome and told a reporter that people had tried to kidnap him. "In hindsight," Compass told me later, "I should have kept my mouth shut."

It was the city's bad luck that, in addition to relentlessly hot weather, there was a new moon that week, and the nights were utterly dark. I gave a ride home late one evening to a man named Jimmy Delery, a black-sheep member of a founding New Orleans family. We drove slowly among fallen oaks and downed power lines cluttering St. Charles Avenue, and as we got out of the car at his house we heard the double click of a shotgun. Two ripply-fit blond men walked toward us in the gloom, shirtless and gleaming with sweat, wearing bandoliers across their chests and holstered sidearms on their hips. The muzzles of their shotguns looked like the entrance to the Holland Tunnel. "Look, guys," Delery said. "I know you're all up on your testosterone, but, please, stay home. Don't be walking around with the guns. You're just going to get people agitated."

The men lowered their guns. "It's not testosterone, Jimmy," one of them said. "It's self-preservation." I noticed that their shotguns were not hunting weapons pressed into emergency service but stainless-steel combat guns with racks of extra shells mounted on the stocks. At some point, these guys had each spent at least eight hundred dollars to be prepared for an occasion like this.

"Yeah, well, whatever it is, I want you, please, to stay near your houses," Jimmy said. "You don't need to be out here, patrolling around." After they left, he said, "They're looking to pop somebody so they can brag, 'I shot a nigger looter in New Orleans.' "

Bob Rue, the rug merchant, described stepping outside with his .38, ready to shoot someone lurking by his neighbor's Porsche. "It's not about the car," he said. "It's about chaos. If you let them get started, there's no telling where it will end." Of all the white people I met that week who had chosen to remain in the city, only two were unarmed. Jimmy had a .45 automatic in his fanny pack. The hearse-driving doctor had a Bulgarian Army pistol in his armrest. The motherly barkeeper kept an automatic shotgun beside the door and a revolver in her back pocket. The blackout, the crowds of evacuees straggling through their neighborhoods—and, above all, the rumors—persuaded some citizens that an apocalyptic race riot was imminent. But, even in the absence of police, the unspeakable didn't come to pass.

For the poor, without resources, the disappearance of authority was genuinely terrifying. Many had never left the city, or southern Louisiana, in all their lives. They faced a terrible choice: turn themselves in to face evacuation or tough it out. If we stay, how long will it be before the power and the water come back on and the grocery stores open? If we go, go where? To the Superdome, where babies are being raped and murdered? To the Convention Center, to get on a bus? A bus to where? (The rumor that evacuees weren't being told their destination before boarding buses turned out to be true.) With no reliable authority to issue information, the holdouts were paralyzed.

National Guard units from as far away as Puerto Rico showed up in force the weekend after the storm. For the most part, they brought no tools other than M-16s—no chain saws or bulldozers, no grappling hooks, generators, or field hospitals. They were not equipped to clear debris, repair power lines, or deliver mass medical care. Like the city's armed residents, they had prepared for an uprising, and stood on street corners nervously fingering their weapons. Kevin Shaughnessy, a courtly, gray-haired sergeant first class of the California National Guard, stopped me on St. Charles Avenue to demand I.D., and, after letting me pass, called me back. "Say, you don't have a map of New Orleans you can spare, do you?" he asked. He also accepted a box of canned food and three gallons of water. "We can sure use it," he said. The active-duty Army showed up, too, in the form of the 82nd Airborne Division, patrolling in full combat gear and snappy maroon berets, but these soldiers had their magazines out of their rifles. I asked a sergeant first class what he and his men were permitted to do, given constitutional constraints against the military enforcing domestic laws. "We're just trick-or-treating," he said. "If I saw someone going in that store right there, I couldn't do anything but radio it in."

That weekend felt like a lawman's Mardi Gras. The dry slice of New Orleans filled not only with federal and state troops but with well-meaning deputy sheriffs and policemen from as far away as Oregon and Michigan—cops whose activities were uncoördinated, who knew nothing of the city, and who were pumped on rumors of violence. They tumbled out of their cars in boxy bulletproof vests, pointing their M-4 carbines every which way, as though expecting incoming rounds. Adding to the Dodge City atmosphere were such private soldiers as those of Blackwater, U.S.A., who lurked on the broad steps of several mansions, draped in automatic weapons. As I sat on the porch of a house on tranquil St. Charles Avenue on the Saturday night after the storm, a red laser dot from a gunsight moved slowly across my chest.

The phrase on the lips of the guest enforcers was "martial law." An Oklahoma Guardsman stopped me Sunday afternoon and ordered me to get out of town. When I told him that the N.O.P.D. was allowing reporters to stay, he said, "It's not up to the police. We're in charge now. The city's under martial law. We're not backing them up anymore—they're backing us up." Later, a California Guardsman whose emblems identified him as Sergeant Kelley pointed an M-4 at me and said, "See this? This is martial law. We're in charge." The Constitution makes no provision for anything called "martial law," though Article I allows for the possibility of calling out militia—even of suspending habeas corpus—in times of unrest. The sole large-scale unrest afflicting New Orleans that weekend was thirst and a hankering to bathe.

By Sunday, the Convention Center was empty. The only traces of the twenty thousand people who had stayed in its exhibition halls were mountains of moldy clothes, empty water bottles, and the brown plastic wrappings of military rations that had arrived, finally, with the buses. It was spooky: twenty thousand people gone within twenty-four hours.

On Tuesday, September 6th, Mayor Nagin—lacking a computer, or even a typewriter—signed a four-page handwritten "Promulgation of Emergency Order" that directed the police, the Fire Department, and "any branch of the U.S. military" to "compel the evacuation of all persons from the city of New Orleans, regardless of whether such persons are on private property or do not desire to leave." Nagin's order frightened the holdouts. Each lawman and soldier seemed to interpret it differently. At Lee Circle, two Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents told a couple of old men sitting outside drinking beer that they had to leave the city at once. "We're using the A.T.M. method," they barked. "Today we *ask*. Tomorrow we *tell*. The day after that, we *make* you leave." The men nodded politely, and were still sitting there several days later. On St. Claude Avenue, policemen were ordering people to leave or risk being shot. On Prentiss Avenue, Guardsmen hauled a black fifty-seven-year-old social

worker named Ernest Timmons from his house and drove him forcibly to the airport, from where, he told the *Times-Picayune*, he was flown to Salt Lake City. On the other hand, soldiers calling at the Carrollton home of an engineer merely told him that leaving would be a good idea.

When I tried to leave New Orleans late that week, driving to the Jefferson Parish line on one of the two remaining roads out, officers of the Springboro, Ohio, police department and soldiers of the Oklahoma National Guard refused to let me pass. As frantic drivers lurched through three-point turns, I asked the soldier in charge if he'd been told about the mandatory evacuation. "Sir, turn your vehicle around," he said.

On Thursday, September 8th, Vice-President Dick Cheney was expected in New Orleans, and television reporters were setting up cameras in Harrah's driveway, near Tim Bayard's picnic tables. A medical team offered free tetanus shots. Volunteers manning barbecue grills served hamburgers to anybody who walked by—police officer, soldier, reporter, FEMA official—and the air was thick with greasy smoke. Superintendent Compass showed up for this occasion, in a crisp white dressuniform shirt with four gold stars embroidered on the epaulets. The cameras surrounded him. Off to the side of the grills stood a man who looked wild enough to draw the attention of the Secret Service. It was Anthony Cannatella. He was wearing a filthy white T-shirt, and he clenched and unclenched his enormous fists as he rocked from one foot to the other. "What a clusterfuck," he muttered. "I ain't got time for this shit." His eye fell on Superintendent Compass, who was talking into a reporter's microphone. "Look at that guy, acting the hero. I need to be back with my officers, saving people. Fucking Vice-President. Come down here and salute, I'm done. I'll take my forty and go."

I returned to Harrah's the next day to try to clear up the question of martial law and who was in charge of New Orleans. Compass was posing for photographs with California sheriffs' deputies. When he finished, he sat in a folding chair between two cars, his hands in his lap. He slumped there alone, taking in the scene. I asked whether the Oklahoma Guardsman was correct that the N.O.P.D. was subordinate to the military. "I am in charge of all law-enforcement aspects," Compass said. "Does it look like I'm not in charge?" I asked if he felt cut off, with no phone, no radio, and no staff to help him. He rose from his chair. "Does it look like I'm not in charge?" he asked twice more. "I don't spend all day here!" And he walked away.

The New Orleans City Council did not meet in full until September 27th. The chamber was inaccessible, so the seven council members gathered in a boardroom at Louis Armstrong International Airport. Half an hour before the meeting, the news came over the radio that Compass had resigned as chief of police. The radio announcers were stunned into silence. They and their call-in listeners had spent weeks vilifying officers who abandoned their posts in the city's hour of need, and the Chief was now doing essentially the same thing. The room was crowded with hotelkeepers wanting to know if the city's water was safe for guests to bathe in; real-estate brokers wanting to hear a plan for drying out title records; restaurateurs hoping for a temporary waiver of health regulations; and ordinary citizens eager to hear when the rubble would be removed and services restored.

The council members proceeded to pack about twenty minutes of useful business into five hours of storytelling, self-congratulation, venting of racial mistrust, and false-hope-raising applause lines. Arguments dragged on about the use of the word "black" versus "African-American," about construction companies not hiring "brothers with felony records," about why only houses on the poor side of St. Charles Avenue were red-tagged for demolition. (It was the side that flooded.) "Our people

need to be made not ninety per cent whole, not ninety-five per cent whole, but one hundred per cent whole!" the council president, Oliver Thomas, declared to a rousing cheer. The council members were as traumatized as any New Orleanians—four of them had lost their homes—so some cathartic group therapy was to be expected. But, as the meeting wore on, people in the crowd began whispering to one another, "What about Compass?" A FEMA representative was patiently absorbing the council's wrath when Mayor Nagin walked into the room, alone, wearing a blue-and-white golf shirt. He slipped into a chair in the back, rested his chin on his chest, and closed his eyes until called to the podium to report on repairs. When he finished, Eddie Sapir, an at-large councilman, said, "We don't even know if the news about Chief Compass is true." "It's true," Nagin said. "He's a hero as far as I'm concerned. He performed very well during the storm. He asks everyone to respect his privacy."

A few weeks later, I talked with Nagin in the downtown Sheraton, and he was so tired that his eyes often closed while he spoke, and when he listened his face relaxed into a middle-distance stare. He was still cagey about whether he had fired Compass. "Before the storm, he was in decent shape," Nagin said. But his wife was about to have a baby, and he had his daughter to consider. Nagin had been shaken by the police suicides—there had been a second as well—during the flood, and when Compass said, "Look, man, I've done my share," Nagin didn't try to talk him out of it. "If someone says they want to leave, I'm not going to tell them otherwise," Nagin said. "I'm not a psychologist." Compass wouldn't discuss the circumstances of his leaving with me. "That part of my life is over," he said.

One thing that went better than anybody expected was the pumping. After a couple of weeks under a brutal subtropical sun, the water covering the city's streets had become an opaque, semi-gelatinous brew of sewage, fluids leaked from submerged cars, and bodies of rodents, cats, dogs, and people. Fumes rising from the surface caused a tickly cough, and an hour in a rescue boat raised tiny white bumps on the skin. It was hard to imagine the stuff leaving. But by the end of September the city's ingenious network of culverts, canals, and pumping stations had pushed it all out of the city and back into Lake Pontchartrain. New Orleans emerged smashed and muddy. In vast regions, not even birds broke the silence.

At St. Patrick's Church, on Camp Street—one of the first to reopen—the congregation for the Tridentine Latin Mass on September 25th consisted of fifteen N.O.P.D. cops, who knelt with their guns on their hips, the murmur of their police radios competing with the liturgy. "We pray," the Reverend Stanley Klores said to the tops of their bowed heads, "that those in civil authority will not succumb to the temptations of this world. Lord, hear our prayer." "Lord, hear our prayer," the officers responded.

The church's counterweight, Bourbon Street, was also starting to come alive. I walked its length several times one night during the last week of September, and each time another bar crew was taking down barstools and plugging in a jukebox. Tropical Isle, the Steak Pit, Café Lafitte in Exile, and Bourbon Street Blues Company were roaring, the music drowning out the constant growl of generators. Outside the Steak Pit, a ten-year-old boy named Daniel held a sign that read "HUGE ASS BEERS TO GO." On the sidewalk in front of Alex Patout's Louisiana Restaurant, a wizened cinder of a chef stirred a cannibal pot of spaghetti sauce on a gas burner. The smell, cutting through the vomit-and-mold reek that hung over the city, was heavenly. Except for a few buff F.B.I. women carrying Glocks, a reedy scientist from the E.P.A., and about a dozen determined, don't-joke-about-it dogrescuers from the Humane Society, the Bourbon Street crowd was all strapping men from myriad law-enforcement agencies, in camouflage fatigues, golf shirts, or T-shirts advertising restoration

companies—LVI Services, Belfor—their guns at their sides. Noticeably absent was the New Orleans Police Department; a few cops leaned sullenly into cell phones at the entrance to the Royal Sonesta Hotel, whose formerly radiant ballroom had become the new Police Headquarters.

By then, hardly anyone was left in New Orleans to police. Cannatella's Sixth District officers moved back to their station house and made desultory patrols, but mostly they gathered around a couple of long folding tables in the open-sided garage under the station—with no electricity, it was the least oppressively hot place to sit—and occupied themselves with such tasks as cleaning pistols that had been submerged for several weeks. They wore purple cards around their necks announcing, in big yellow letters, "ECSTASY." Most of the eight hundred and ninety cops who had lost their homes were living on the cruise ship of that name, docked behind the Convention Center. Tim Bruneau wore no "ECSTASY" badge, because he'd been expelled from the ship for pulling a gun on another officer and a crewman. "I was sleeping!" he told me. "They screwed up and assigned my room to someone else, and when they came barging in I freaked out! Forgive me! I asked them, 'Where am I supposed to go now?' And you know what they said? They said, 'We don't care.' "

The adrenaline high that had sustained many cops through the crisis was wearing off. They complained about the cramped conditions aboard the Ecstasy, about unpaid overtime throughout the crisis, about case files lost in the flooded evidence room. Tim Bayard, the vice-and-narcotics commander, finally found the mobile command post he had needed so badly the first week of the flood: driving through the Lower Ninth Ward, he saw it in a parking lot. It had been commandeered by firemen. He was so angry he didn't stop, for fear of getting into a fistfight.

Anthony Cannatella did not take his forty and go. He swung his unmarked gold Crown Victoria into the Sixth's garage one October afternoon, and called for everybody's attention. Shaved and cleaned up, he looked powerful, with his bald head, slit mouth, and bull shoulders. Patrolwoman Kristi Foret, the rookie who had been stranded on her roof two days and then had helped her rescuers save other victims, put her arm around him, and he hugged her to his side while delivering a briefing. "We should have our overtime on Thursday or Friday of this week. Start checking your bank accounts on Friday," he said. "Next, I got a bunch of off-duty details to announce. Wal-Mart will pay thirty dollars an hour. They need two during the day, two at night. They pay every Friday at Marrero School, in cash. Now, don't fuck with the I.R.S.—Wal-Mart's not going to not report what they're paying for security. Fuck with the I.R.S., they don't give a shit about ten Katrinas. They'll shove it right up your ass. Next: We still got Wal-Mart guns missing. Four shotguns. Turn them in, no questions asked. They'll be on the A.T.F. hot list. Don't embarrass yourself." He ended with a joke. "Next: There's a T-shirt going around. It's blue, and it says, 'Katrina 2005: I stayed, I worked, I was there, I am—the N.O.P.D.' I asked for another two hundred and fifty, in yellow: 'I ran, I left my buddies, I was—a coward.' "

"You're not assigned here anymore," Cannatella had told a sergeant who deserted and then tried to come back. Alan Bartholomew, who ran out on Tim Bruneau, was unrepentant and gave reasons that sounded a lot like what Nagin says Compass told him. "Look, man, I stayed that whole week," he said, when I reached him by phone in Jefferson Parish. "No electricity, no radio communications. I hadn't heard from my wife and kids. . . . I finally decided this, this job . . ." He sighed, looking for words to describe the thanklessness of being a New Orleans cop. "I decided that my family was more important." More than a hundred and fifty officers were fired or left the department after failing to perform during the crisis. Another forty are under investigation.

On another afternoon, an N.O.P.D. patrol car pulled up outside the Sixth District with a big-screen TV hanging out of the trunk—an attentiongetting sight, given the tales of cops looting. The officers swung open the back of one of three eighteen-wheeler trailers parked on the street, revealing a mountain of bicycles, appliances, diapers, stereos, office furniture. The cops hoisted the big-screen TV into the back. "When we recover looted goods, this is where we keep it," Cannatella said. "We figure it's all from Wal-Mart. They've already written it all off, so I'm going to ask them to donate it to my officers who lost everything."

Nagin's emergency order authorizing cops to commandeer private property required that owners be compensated. Doug Stead, at Sewell Cadillac, lost more than two hundred cars—some to cops, some to looters who followed when the police left the dealership open—but he has not received a call about the cars from either the police department or the city attorney.

A sense of failure, and of failures to come, hangs over the department. Frank Young, a laconic Sixth District detective sergeant who shuttled people to the Convention Center on the night of the flood, pointed to the slogan on the fender of a patrol car on loan to the N.O.P.D. from another city—"Excellence in Policing"—and said, "Obviously not ours." He drove the car late one night to his house in Lakeview, which borders the ruptured Seventeenth Street Canal. Standing in the back door of his bungalow, he shined a flashlight into the kitchen. The refrigerator lay on its side, a moldy sofa was wedged in the doorway, and black ooze covered the granite countertops he'd installed himself. "Today, it finally hit me," he said softly. "I woke up and thought, There's nothing here for me. Not at work. Not at home. What did we accomplish? Nothing. We took such an ass-whipping. We didn't stop the flooding. We didn't stop the looting. The whole city got destroyed. We lost."

Warren Riley, the new chief, still insists that the N.O.P.D. didn't fail but was overwhelmed. "You take any military commander—any lawenforcement commander—this was a far more formidable opponent than anyone has had to deal with," he said. John Casbon, the president of the New Orleans Police Foundation, a private agency that raises money for training and equipment, said all American cities need to take better care of their police. "Nobody gives a shit about cops anywhere," Casbon said. "They get paid nothing. We don't give them the equipment. That's the lesson here." Lots of cops, though, think that a more professional department would have done better. "That they had no cars and no gasoline isn't important. You put them on foot beats. You put them on bicycles," Felix Loicano, the former Public Integrity Division commander, said. "If you have to take cars, you sign them out in an orderly fashion and then secure the building, because now it's your responsibility."

Yes, the levees should have been built stronger or better, the city should have had an evacuation plan for those without cars, the governor should have called for help earlier, and FEMA should have responded more vigorously. But the police owned the failure. However much other agencies pass the buck, cops know they're responsible for the safety of a city.

Tim Bruneau used to think of the department as family, and he still thinks of his district that way. But now he's eager to leave. New Orleans still reminds him of Panama, but in a bad way: autocratic, incompetent, corrupt. "I'm leaving first chance I get," Bruneau told me. "I'm going to the University of North Texas to study emergency management. I've given this city my health, my physical ability, my little finger, and everything I own. Now they want more, and I have nothing left."

Cannatella is expecting an exodus. At one of his roll-call briefings in the garage, he made a case for standing by the city and the battered, despised police department that he has served since graduating

from high school. “Every one of you has been here from the first, and I know you’re contemplating your options,” he said. “Some of you are thinking that this big fat overtime check is coming—maybe you’ll take it and go. If that’s what you want to do, I’m not angry.” He stopped, emotionally gesturing with his big hands while searching for the right words. “But this is a history-making event. Out of this will be a new city, and there’s no new city without cops.” ♦