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Second Step Take In Floodway Operation

MAY 01ST 2011 BY NEWS

Second Step Take In Floodway Operation

Breaking News

An SMT News Report

SIKESTON, Mo. - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will take the second step in the activation of the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway this Sunday afternoon.

Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, President of the Mississippi River Commission, has directed Col. Vernie Reichling, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Memphis District Commander, and field crews to be prepared to move to the next step in the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway operational plan at 3 p.m. today.

The second step in the operational plans involves repositioning the barges at Birds Point. These barges will contain the munitions that will be used to blast a breach in the floodway levee, thus activating the Birds Point floodway plan for only the second time since the 1937 flood.

At 1 p.m. Sunday the river gauge at Cairo, Ill., measured 59.89 feet, reaching an historic level.

Widespread storms Saturday night contributed to a swift rise in the river level. At Cape Girardeau, 1.5 inches of rain was measured from storms Saturday night.

The Ohio River at Cairo rose 0.7 feet in the 24 hours before the early Sunday afternoon reading of the guage.

"The Project Flood is upon us," Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, President of the Mississippi River Commission said today. "This is the flood that engineers envisioned following the 1927 flood. It is testing the system like never before."

Walsh said Public Safety is the Corps' highest priority and that all resources are being used to battle the effects of this flooding. Hundreds of Corps' personnel from around the nation as well as the Engineering Research Development Center, in Vicksburg, Miss., are working around the clock, monitoring the situation.

He added that he and his advisors are closely monitoring the situation but that no decision has been made at this time whether or not to operate the floodway. However, should flood pressures continue to increase it may be necessary to move to the next step in the Floodway Operations Plan.

Activating the floodway is multi-step process, with step one taken Saturday in moving the barges to Birds Point, and step two Sunday in repositing the.

The other steps in floodway operation include loading the pipes in the levee with slurry (explosives), and finally activating the floodway.

On Saturday, Welsh held a briefing with news media in Sikeston, and U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson attended that briefing.

Walsh was scheduled to conduct a briefing at the Southeast Missouri Regional Port Authority in Scott city, with U.S. Senator Roy Blunt and Emerson both in attendance. That briefing was cancelled due to weather conditions.

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Corps: First Step Taken In Floodway Plan

APRIL 30TH 2011 BY NEWS

Corps: First Step Taken In Floodway Plan

*By Annabeth Miller,
ShowMe Times Editor*

SIKESTON, Mo. - No official decision has been made to activate the Birds Point – New Madrid Floodway, but the commander in charge of floodfighting efforts said the first step was taken Saturday afternoon toward possible activation.

Major General Michael J. Walsh, commander of the Mississippi Valley Division of the corps and the president of the Mississippi River Commission, said at a press conference Saturday afternoon that he ordered the Motor Vessel Mississippi, a corps vessel, to leave Hickman, Kent., and travel up river to Birds Point.

“That’s one of the many decisions we make before - and if - we ever get to the decision of operating,” the floodway, Walsh said. The MV Mississippi arrived at Birds Point Saturday evening.

Walsh said three additional decisions must be made now that the barges have been moved to the northern end of the floodway at Birds Point: take the barges and “pre-position them; then the decision would be made to charge the pipes; and finally a decision to operate the floodway by blowing three gaps in the levee – one at the northern end at Birds Point and

two down at the southern end of the system.


“There are still a lot of decision points as we move forward in this event,” Walsh said. “The decision clock has been rolling.”

If activated, the plan will be to artificially breach the levee in three places – one north and two south - by using of ammunition. The move will flood more than 130,000 acres of prime agriculture land in Missouri, but, the corps says, relieve pressure on a river system that has never experiences such high levels.

Walsh reported the Cairo river gauge - at the confluence of the great Mississippi and Ohio rivers - on Saturday afternoon was measuring 59.19 – not the highest ever recorded on the gauge but Walsh said it was close to the record of 59.5. The projection is that the level at Cairo will reach 60.5 for May 2 and 3.

“We’re keeping a close on that and we’re also keeping a close eye on the system,” he said. “This system has never been under this kind of pressure before and there’s different places where things are beginning to degrade. So we’re keeping track of the Cairo gauge and we’re also keeping track of the system.”

Walsh reported sand boils and seepage at a number of levees near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, a condition that Walsh said also threatens the integrity of the total project. The sand boils and seepage weakens the integrity of the levee.

"There is  water in places where we have never ever seen it before," Walsh said.

U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, was on hand for the briefing – one of her many stops in a day of checking on floodfighting throughout the region. She listened intently to what Walsh and other corps officials had to say – as well as to the area residents who attending. She was joined by State Rep. Ellen Brandom, R-Sikeston. Near the close of the briefing, a gentleman from the Commerce area asked Walsh about the integrity of the levee in his area and said he was trying to decide if he should move his family before flooding occurred at Commerce.

“What you tell me will determine my decision,” the man told Walsh.

Unlike other corps briefings this week that had a few members of area media in

attendance, Saturday afternoon's briefing was a "full house." Several television outlets sent news crews, more newspapers joined the group of journalists, and a national telephone network was set up for those not in Sikeston to participate. One reporter on the telephone hookup identified herself from CNN-News.

Photos Above: Major General Michael J. Walsh, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and President, Mississippi River Commission

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- On Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/MemphisDistrict>
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Dexter Celebrates Honor Tour

Dexter Celebrates Honor Tour

*By Annabeth Miller,
ShowMe Times Editor*

They were from communities like Dexter, Bloomfield, Essex, Poplar Bluff, and Cape Girardeau. And as young men they put their lives on the line in p Bastogne, Normandy, Sicily, in the Coral Sea and at Midway, and in the skies over Dresden, and at places like Pointe du Hoc and Omaha Beach.

Today, they are living testaments to the courage, conviction, bravery and tenacity that saved the Free World six decades ago.

And on Friday, the area came to salute them, their generation and a group departing on a different type of “tour of duty” – the Honor Tour for veterans of World War II. It was a patriotic rally unlike most any other; a multi-generational celebration of America and the men and women who fought for their country.

The Bearcat Event Center was “filled to the rafters” with students, families, fellow veterans, friends and community leaders to salute the 30 men who departed on an Honor Tour of Washington, D.C. to see “their” memorial – the National World War II Memorial.

School children from Southwest and Central schools marched into the BEC like young soldiers – all with white shirts with the American flag – and sat on one side of the BEC, while middle school and DHS students on the opposite side. The DHS Jazz band and the Honors Choir both participated, and high school students carried American flags and served as escorts. .

A large group of Dexter High School students formed two long lines down the center aisle of the BEC with large American flags to create a walkway for Honor Tour veterans walked through on the way to seats of honor. The DHS Jazz Band under the direction of Scott Rybolt played “2001 Space Odyssey” and “In The Mood.” Seated behind the Honor Tour men were their families and fellow veterans.

On the program were Dexter Supt. Dr. Thomas Sharp, U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, State Sen. Rob Mayer, State Rep. Billy Pat Wright and Jennifer Kasten of U.S. Senator Roy Blunt’s staff.

U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson told the group that she had hoped to be in Washington, D.C. this weekend to greet them at the World War II Memorial. However she has been in the area all week and will be here through the weekend to work with constituents and agencies fighting the flood.

“Here among all the folks in Dexter - this is the heart and soul of America,” she said. “We are here today because of each and every one of you. None of you would ever call yourselves heroes. But we can call you heroes because in your humbleness you have watched out for us, you have given us all the tools that we have to carry on and make a much better community and a much better country. We thank you for your service to our country and the sacrifice that you made.”

Emerson said she hoped the travelling veterans would remember that when they get off the bus at the World War II Memorial that that memorial was a “small token” to thank and honor their service and for “serving as role models for your children and grandchildren.”

Guest speaker for the morning was Charles Kruse, Dexter High School graduate, area farmer, former president of the Missouri Farm Bureau and a retired brigadier general in the Missouri National Guard.

“Today, Dexter, Missouri is standing tall,” Kruse said He commended Sharp and the school district’s administration and faculty for their work in planning the ceremony. “The Dexter Public School s has really made a great showing here and made us all proud.”

Kruse noted that the chairman of the community committee that planned Friday morning’s event, Dr. Roger Alsup, was unable to attend the ceremony. Alsup is the principal at T.S. Hill Middle School and is a veteran of the Iraq War.

“Roger was so proud that the Dexter Public Schools were going to be involved in this activity,” Kruse said. “It’s quite ironic that Roger is not able to be with us today because he is on his way to St. Louis to Jefferson Barracks with his daughter Katie. Katie and many other members of the Missouri National Guard soldiers are going to be deployed to Afghanistan.”

Kruse asked the audience to keep Katie and all area residents in serving in the military in their thoughts and prayers.

“The word ‘hero’ should not be used often. It should be used to describe the best of the

best; the bravest of the brave' people we hold up and honor for doing great deeds," Kruse. "We are privileged to have the opportunity to honor 30 special heroes – 30 veterans of World War II."

Veterans at the ceremony had their own stories to tell, Kruse said. They were all young men when they went off to war.

"Think about that – being a teenager and being told that you are going to war – being told you are going to leave your family, your loved ones and community – and not knowing if you'll ever come home again."

These men and women stepped forward 60 years to do what had to be done.

"We can only imagine the courage that these folks demonstrated, stepping up and saying, 'I will serve my country,'" he said. "If it had not been for the bravery and courage of these men and all the others who served in World War II, we would live in a much different country today. So many of the freedoms we enjoy and take for granted would most likely not even exist."

Kruse said every member of the Honor Tour is a hero, and he expressed the community's thanks for their courage and honor.

Following Kruse's remarks, T.S. Hill Middle School students presented each of the 30 men on the tour with a special cap for their journey. The musical ensemble Replica from Sikeston performed a selection of World War II era popular songs.

To close the program the DHS Honors Choir under the direction of MaryRuth Boone sang "Armed Forces – The Pride of America" and Boone and the choir led the entire gathering in singing "God Bless America."

After the veterans were escorted from the BEC, they gathered their belongings and said farewell to family and friends, they made their way to the charter bus for the first leg of their journey to Washington, D.C.

The Honor Tour will return to Southeast Missouri Sunday evening.

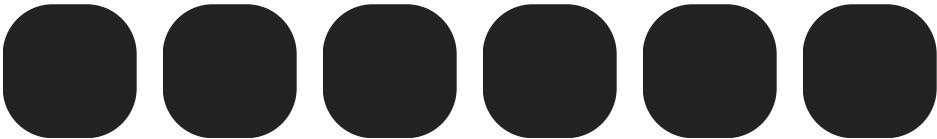
Photo Above: Four members of the Honor Tour during the departure ceremony Friday morning at the Bootheel Event Center, (from left) Lawrence Konzen of Branson, Chet Medler and Joe Hutchason both of Dexter, and Harold Springs of Sikeston.

ShowMe Times Photo Gallery

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Corps: Goal Is To Not Execute Plan

APRIL 29TH 2011 BY NEWS

Corps: Goal Is To Not Execute Plan

*By Annabeth Miller,
ShowMe Times Editor*

SIKESTON, Mo. - Fighting floods in 2011 is an art coupled with science, according to the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in charge of directing efforts on the Mississippi River.

Col. Vernie L. Reichling, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Memphis District, said the corps top priority is public safety as the floodfighting on the river is coming down to a matter of inches and cooperation from Mother Nature.

Reichling spoke Thursday afternoon at the corps information center in Sikeston. He explained that floodfighting in 2011 is taking a “systems-wide” approach – what one part of the river does affects the whole. “‘Hold as much as you can.’ That is our message to our brothers north and east of us,” Reichling said. He explained the corps is holding back as much water as possible in Lakes Barkley and Kentucky, reducing the waters flowing into the Ohio and into the Mississippi. “This is a system approach to try to prevent not only the operation of the (Birds Point New Madrid) floodway, but reducing the risk of flooding all over.”

“We are not out of the woods yet,” he said. As of Thursday, Reichling reported the corps had a large contingent in the region fighting the flood.

“We have plenty of boots on the ground,” he said. There are currently 200 men and women in the field and the corps has spend \$3.3 million in fighting the flood since it activated on Sunday, April 24.

Reichling is the officer in charge of the corps operation in the floodway, but he reports to Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, president of the Mississippi River Commission. It is the commission that will issue any order to activate the floodway in Southeast Missouri.

Reichling and his staff said the corps was doing everything possible to avoid activating the floodway – accomplished by blowing holes in the Birds Point levee. However, the stage is set if such an action is ordered. The MV Mississippi, a corps motor vessel is currently at Hickman, Kent., with two barges carrying the munitions that would be used to blow three holes in the floodway levee – one at the northern end and two south. But this action would submerge over 130,000 acres of prime agriculture land, destroy homes and the livelihood of a region.

The corps has completed the ground preparations at two of the three sites on the levee system, and the third expected to be completed by the end of Thursday. But the munitions will remain downriver and no further action will be taken until – or if – the order is given

to activate the floodway.

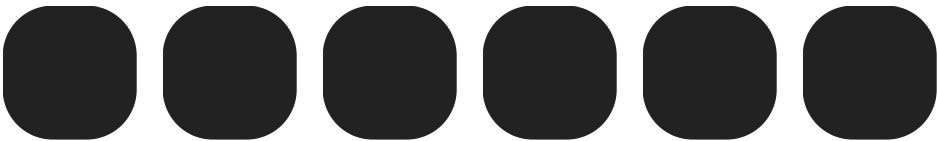
“We are listening to the river ,” Reichling said “This is not a science – it is an art. We are taking a holistic approach and reacting to the stresses on the system. We are constantly evaluation conditions,” he said. “Our goal is to not execute the floodway.”

Photo Above: Col. Vernie L. Reichling, Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Memphis District, points out features of the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway during a briefing.

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Highway 60 Reopened Dexter To Sikeston

APRIL 29TH 2011 BY NEWS

Highway 60 Reopened Dexter To Sikeston

By Annabeth Miller
[ShowMe Times Editor]

MOREHOUSE, Mo. - Water flooding the the roadway forced the Missouri Department of Transportation to close a major highway in Southeast Missouri on Thursday.

U.S. Highway 60 between Sikeston and Dexter was closed at late Thursday afternoon as the Missouri Department of Transportation fought flooding across the roadway near Morehouse.

By 4:30 p.m. Thursday westbound traffic leaving Sikeston was delayed in two lane, bumper-to-bumper traffic that inched its way toward Morehouse. Once to Morehouse, traffic was turned as drivers returned to Sikeston and forced to find alternative routes.

Much westbound traffic toward Dexter was re-routed to I-55 to Portageville, and then Highway 62 to Malden where drivers were able to turn north onto Highway 25.

By 6:30 a.m. Friday, Highway 60 was re-opened to traffic. Motorists can expect two-lane traffic on the eastbound lanes from Route E to Route AH.

Motorists are urged to use extreme caution near the area.

Photo Above: An ariel photo of the Highway 60 at Morehouse, taken Thursday afternoon by the New Madrid County Sheriff's Department.

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