

# WILMINGTON DISTRICT NEWS ONLINE

OCTOBER 2007

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Workers offload the turbine before it's installed at the John H. Kerr Powerhouse. (Photo by Roy Henry)

## AFTER LENGTHY TRIP FROM CANADA, FIRST TURBINE IS INSTALLED AT JOHN H. KERR

The first of seven turbines made its way from the General Electric Hydro plant in Montreal, Quebec to southern Virginia with a final destination at the John H. Kerr powerhouse. The scene invited curious onlookers to gawk at this huge piece of equipment.

“It was on a special transport truck that had several axles, a seven-and-a-half foot

Lowboy and it took nine days to get here,” explained John H. Kerr Resident Engineer Matt Folk. “It required police escorts through New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland. It was a big deal! It had chaser trucks and the whole nine yards.”

Transporting, then fitting this monstrous element that will become an integral piece

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# USACE FAMILY ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS YEAR'S CFC

Corps Family,

The 2007 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is currently underway, and we invite the entire Corps Family to participate. The CFC theme this year is the same as last year's, "Be a Star in Someone's Life!" The USACE Family embodies this theme every day, especially through our work in Iraq, Afghanistan, and national disaster response. This year's CFC campaign provides us the opportunity to once again offer help and hope to those in need who live around the corner, across the Nation, and throughout the world.

The CFC provides each of us with an annual opportunity to help others by voluntarily donating to community, national or international service organizations. There are over 3,600 charities included in the CFC Catalog of Caring. They

include organizations serving the military, arts, education, environment, health, medical research, shelter, community improvement, and human services. The Catalog of Caring contains information on all these eligible charities and can be obtained from your CFC volunteers. I'm sure that everyone can find one or more charities worthy of your personal consideration given the wide diversity of organizations and causes.

We are still a Nation at war and continue to witness first hand the tragedy and difficult circumstances associated with war on our Soldiers, Civilian Employees, Family Members, Neighbors and Friends. We recently marked the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an event that continues to impact the lives of so many of our fellow Americans along the Gulf Coast. And, we are currently witnesses to the devastating fires in

Southern California that have led the President to declare a state of emergency in several California counties. You can designate your CFC contributions to organizations that offer support and relief to efforts like these, and to a wide variety of other noteworthy causes.

Our goal this year is to raise \$230,000.00. As we did last year, we hope to surpass that goal through your compassionate generosity.

I am proud of the Corps tradition of service to the Army and the Nation. I am also proud of the annual tradition of commitment by Corps Team Members to the Combined Federal Campaign. I encourage you to "Be a Star in Someone's Life!" Thank you for caring.

**ESSAYONS!**

**ARMY STRONG!**

**LTG VAN ANTWERP**

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**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

**Wilmington District**



## ENGINEER OFFICERS POOL THEIR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS AT ANNUAL COMMANDERS CONFERENCE

Every year, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) district commanders go through courses specifically designed for them before and shortly after they take command. In June, they take an introductory course at USACE headquarters to familiarize them with the complex mission sets of the organization. These initial classes are especially designed for a soldier-leader coming into command who may never have been in a District in his or her career.

This October, the Wilmington and Norfolk Districts co-hosted the Commander's Conference held in Vicksburg, Mississippi. This course is timed to occur after a commander has been with his or her district a few months. At this point, the commander has had the chance to assess where the district stands: its strong points, where improvements can be made, and particularly where command attention should be focused.

"The October Course is designed to hit at the center of mass of the command population, and is structured to allow more in-depth discussion," said Wilmington District Commander COL John Pulliam. "By October, commanders are coming in with topics they either want to get smarter on or, perhaps even more importantly, find out from fellow commanders similar problems and solutions to those problems. We feed off each other."

Pulliam said there are numerous issues they try to tackle, and none stand out over the others.

"The Corps is a complex organization with a complex mission. So each year, a number of 'hot topics' arise. This year some of the key topics were the ACE-IT transition and the logistics

High-Performing Organization (HPO) shift. We also had a chance to talk with Dr. Jeff Holland, leader of a team at the Engineer Research and Development Center designing and improving the P2 system. We spent a significant amount of time on P2 and the project management business process."

Some District Commanders, like those who command the Savannah and Mobile Districts, are able to keep one foot in the military arena and the other in the civil side of the house. They share their information with commanders in charge of civil works districts to help keep them abreast of the changing Army.

"We shared information about military construction (MILCON) transformation and how to apply some of the doctrinal pieces that have been put into place over the last couple of years. But we also talked about a regional MA-TOC [a "multiple award task order contract" contracting instrument] for dredging which the South Atlantic Division is in the forefront of developing right now. We talked about how to make Project Review Boards better because every district does it a little differently. There was a consensus that we should have a common set of doctrinal points for PRB continuity. We'd like to improve on that."

For younger employees of the U.S



Chief of Engineers and USACE Commander LTG Robert Van Antwerp addresses Army engineers officers at the Commanders Conference held at Vicksburg, Mississippi. (FT Eyre Photo)

Army Corps of Engineers or even new commanders who may find it hard to understand why a military organization is in charge of such things as navigation, regulatory or supplying water and ice during disaster recovery, Pulliam said all they have to do is look at history.

"When America needed something or someone to do what at the time was an important job that nobody else wanted to do, the Army was able to do it. Very typically the United States Army and the Corps of Engineers are standing there, capable. Is it sometimes logically the best fit? Maybe not. But we're the ones who can get the job done. These are all important missions or the Army and the Corps wouldn't have been asked to do them. In many cases the Army might not want the mission, but as servants of the American people we say yes. Somebody's got to do it and we can do just about anything well. And we as commanders never forget that." ■

## TURBINES CON'T

of the power plant is all part of a plan to modernize the facility, which was built in the early 1950s. The rehab process started in 1995, when tests were conducted to determine whether the components had begun to lose efficiency. Although the generating power at Kerr Dam has remained reliable, officials found efficiency losses and deterioration beginning in some major equipment. Leaking pipes were identified, there was cavitation in turbines and problems with peripheral equipment, and other problems associated with age and wear and tear.

“These work a lot like the old turbines that we’re removing, but the new ones are more efficient. They’re wider and made of stronger material. Basically this new turbine is the water wheel that provides the mechanical energy, the generator, to make the electrical energy.”

The seven years of complex construction work that preceded this moment included several other impressive projects. The entire switch yard at the power house was converted from oil to gas circuit breakers, a much cleaner process. Seven transformers were also replaced, and the massive bridge crane that

runs on tracks above the two-football-fields-long chamber that holds the generators was also renovated, getting a new control system that allows the crane operator to run the equipment from a station on the ground. Project Manager Jan Brodmerkel said that the transition from 1950s to 2000 technology is something that she still finds fascinating.

“The interesting thing about this project is that I came to the District in 1986 and I went to the powerhouse right out of school and I was amazed that the facility was completed in 1953. I thought that it was remarkable that it was still running smoothly and that it had a dedicated staff. Here we are in 2007 and the facility members still take pride in their workmanship to keep it running. So, it’s an honor and a privilege to be able to rehabilitate the facility so it will continue into the future, cleaner and more efficient.”

The project is expected to be finished by 2010. There will be more trips like this turbine took, and more on-going modifications to the powerhouse to make it state-of-the-art. And to preserve a piece of John H. Kerr history the first turbine that was replaced will be saved and put on display. ■



A worker, bottom right, is dwarfed by the new turbine that was carefully maneuvered inside the powerhouse. (Roy Henry photo)

## DEPARTING USACE EMPLOYEE CITED FOR EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF IRAQI PEOPLE

By John Connor

### *Gulf Region South District*

TALLIL, Iraq – On the final day of his tour in Iraq with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Neil Myers said, “I think I’ll try it again.”

He said he would like to take “a little break” from working in Iraq, but repeated, “I think I’ll try it again.”

After six months in Iraq, Myers is returning home to North Carolina where he works for the Wilmington District of the Corps of Engineers.

Myers said the first month in Iraq was the toughest. “After that, you get in the groove working on projects,” he said.

“Through his direct efforts, over half a million citizens of Qadisiyah will have six new primary health-care centers, a new water treatment unit and a new electrical distribution network,” according to the Commander’s Award for Civilian Service presented to Myers by COL Steve Hill, commander of the Corps’ Gulf Region South district.

Myers served as a construction

representative in the Qadisiyah Resident Office at Camp Echo, near Diwaniyah in Qadisiyah Province, an area where coalition forces from many

countries served during his tour, in-

cluding troops from Poland, Mongolia, Slovakia, El Salvador and Denmark. The resident office is part of the Forat Area Office, which in turn is part of the GRS district of the Corps’ Gulf Region Division.

Projects of the sort cited in Myers’ award are representative of key areas of work undertaken by the Corps of Engineers in Iraq.

For instance, water projects ranging from high-profile facilities such as the recently completed \$277 million Nasiriyah Water Treatment Plant to compact water treatment units sprinkled across the country are providing clean water to count-



COL Stephen Hill admires Neil Myers' handiwork during a visit to Forward Operating Base Echo. (USACE photo by John Connor)

less Iraqis. Corps of Engineers power projects, large and small, have strengthened the country's power grid. And scores upon scores of primary healthcare centers have been constructed throughout Iraq or are in the pipeline.

The Corps' Gulf Region South District has handled a workload of more than 1,500 projects valued at nearly \$3.5 billion, \$2.6 billion of which been completed to date. It has some 209 projects active now, valued at about \$815 million. ■

*Note-* Myers will be ready to share his SW Asia experience when he returns to work in December.

## SIDECAST DREDGE VESSEL GETS A WARM VISIT FROM THE FRY FAMILY

Article and Photos by  
Hank Heusinkveld

Raymond J. Fry, Jr. watched with amusement from the second deck of the sidecaster vessel FRY as its 90-foot long sidecast pipe on the deck swung to the starboard side to begin spewing dredged material from New River Inlet. Named after his late father, Raymond J. Fry, the vessel slowly made its way into shallow waters to begin vacuuming the bottom of the inlet. His father, he said, would be amazed because he spent a lot of time trying to figure out just how to get dredges into shallow areas like this.

“I think he was probably frustrated a lot from not being able to get into inlets and keep them open,” he said. “The big dredges just couldn’t do it. That would have been a great part of



Jennifer O'Connor, granddaughter of Raymond J. Fry, pilots the Dredge Vessel Fry at New River Inlet. She and her mother, father and husband were guests on the sidecaster.

his motivation. And he was an engineer. Engineers putter!”

Ray and his wife, Mary, and daughter Jennifer and her husband Shawn O'Connor, were guests of the Dredge Vessel FRY on a routine dredging mission. Ray talked fondly about his father, a World War Two Army engineer officer and USACE employee whose life was cut short by cancer. He said his father was always thinking of different ways of doing

things better on the job or at home. He was a classic model of American Ingenuity.

“Putter around the house? Yes! He built cabinets for my mother for her china and he was always doing something. I learned how to overhaul an engine on a '49 Chevrolet because of him. I learned how to pull the cylinders out, put 'em back in. He was always doing something creatively.”

The ship itself was originally a U.S. Navy YSD-22, a floating crane originally applied to a self-propelled seaplane recovery vessel used at naval air stations. It was



FRY Captain Mitch Tillyard explains the capabilities of the sidecaster vessel to Shawn and Jennifer O'Connor and Ray Fry.

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## FRY CON'T



At one time the Dredge Vessel FRY was a U.S. Navy YSD-22 used for seaplane recovery during World War Two.



Crew member Phil Cline, seated, demonstrates how he raises and lowers the vessel's dredging arms that vacuum up material from the channel bottom.

built at the Boston Naval Shipyard in 1940. At the time it was converted for civil use in 1972 by the Philadelphia District, the FRY represented total conversion in terms of hull, superstructure, propulsion, operational equipment, accommodations and vessel use. Prior to that time, the Merritt had been assigned to maintain four inlet projects in New Jersey in addition to her schedule in North Carolina. The MERRITT'S schedule was such that the Wilmington District was unable to keep up with the work, so Wilmington assisted Philadelphia in constructing the dredge FRY. The FRY is identical to the MERRITT in all major respects,

and was transferred to Wilmington for operation in the sidcasting fleet in 1983. The FRY is staffed for two-shift operation and has permitted the sidcasting fleet to maintain the schedule and react to emergency needs.

At the end of the hour-long ride the Fry family received a few mementos from the crew. Ray had a pretty good idea of what his father's impressions would be.

"He would have been honored that this vessel was named for him as we certainly are. I really think he'd be amazed at all of the technical equipment that's onboard. He'd be impressed!" ■

## W. KERR SCOTT KEEPING WATER SAFETY FRESH AND AT THE FOREFRONT

By **Miriam Fleming,**  
**W. Kerr Scott Ranger**

The safety of visitors to our lakes is a top priority for employees of the Wilmington District. For those of us who bear this message daily, the problem is, how do you keep that message fresh in the minds of those who recreate on our waters? If we don't find new, creative ways to present the same message, we and our visitors become complacent about the whole idea of water safety. This, in turn, leads to increased water related deaths.

Fortunately for us, we have a team of dedicated rangers who are always thinking of new ways to encourage safe water recreation which includes encouraging adults to wear their life jackets, promoting safe boating, teaching children the importance of responsible behavior around water, and most importantly, setting the example for everyone who visits our projects.

The staff at W. Kerr Scott kicked off the recreation season by reviving the ever popular Water Safety Forum. The Forum brings together representatives from many local and regional organizations whose have a vested interest in promoting safe water recreation. Presentations from the Lake Wylie Marine Commission, Charlotte/Mecklenburg Police Department, as well as the Sa-

vannah and Wilmington Districts brought methodology from very diverse operational aspects. Each agency brought something new and interesting to the table allowing each organization an opportunity to learn what worked in other areas and take back ideas that can be incorporated into their own programs. Of course, the highlight of the event was the hands-on activities such as throwing rescue rings, putting out fires on water, and learning the basics of boat inspections.

One of the biggest benefits of the Forum is the opportunities to network. In fact, the Forum brought Rangers R.G. Absher and Tara Novakowski together with representatives of the Winston-Salem chapter of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary who agreed to provide Vessel Safety checks at W. Kerr Scott during Safe Boating Week. Members of the Auxiliary and North Carolina Wildlife Commission checked approximately 35 boats for required equipment and provided information to boaters entering the pro-



Getting people of all ages to wear a personal floatation device is one of the main goals of water safety programs. (Jory Shepherd Photo)

ject at Dam Site and Smithey's Creek Parks.

Rangers at W. Kerr Scott provide a valuable service to the community by recording a radio report which provides weather and statistical lake information daily on WKBC, the local AM station. There are those in the community who listen faithfully and will even call asking for the information if they happened to miss the report. At the end of each report, the ranger provides a safety message which changes daily. This year, we took the reports a step further. Ranger Juanita Souther was given a five minute spot every Wednesday to talk about upcoming environmental education programs and water safety initiatives. We received quite a bit of feedback from the com-

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## WATER SAFETY CON'T

munity on this program and were asked by station representatives to continue the practice next year.

One of the most important things we do at W. Kerr Scott is to make personal contacts on the swim beaches. Wilkes County has a large Hispanic population and 75 percent of our beach users come from that community. To reach that community, managers at W. Kerr Scott resolved to hire a Spanish-speaking ranger, who also happens to be a certified swim instructor, to fill the communication gap with this com-

munity. This move has had a great effect for our visitors. There are fewer flare-ups requiring enforcement actions and the Hispanic community is now the largest group of participants in our bi-lingual basic swim classes. As a result, there has not been a minority drowning at W. Kerr Scott in more than 10 years.

Our water safety focus at W. Kerr Scott has always been on children. We believe what we teach children now will help them develop safe habits later. The rangers continue using tried

and true methods of education such as the “Safe Passage” and “Young and the Reckless” videos as well as the extremely popular Ranger Trading Card program. The new Junior Ranger Journal continues to gain steam and the “Wear it and Win” program that rewards children for wearing their life jackets was expanded into rewards for adults that are seen wearing their life jackets. Whatever the case, staff at W. Kerr Scott remain on the forefront of fresh and innovative ideas to keep our visitors safe in and on the water. ■

## Falls, Jordan Staffs Attend Carolina Sports Expo

By Dana Matics,  
Falls Lake Ranger

What do you get when you mix a purple, jet-ski riding Sea Serpent, a few Corps rangers, and 10,000 kids and parents? The Corps booth at the Carolina Kids Expo – and a good time!!

The Carolina Kids Expo is a family event in Raleigh that provides entertainment and education for local families one weekend a year in May. This year the Falls and Jordan staffs took Seamoor the Water Safety Sea Serpent and set up a booth to promote water safety. For two weekend days, rangers and Seamoor promoted proper fitting of life jackets, the im-

portance of swimming lessons, and reminded parents to watch their kids around the water.

Attendance at the expo was estimated to be 10,000 people and many stopped by to say Hi to Seamoor. After all, how can you resist a talking purple Sea Serpent? While Seamoor was a little scary for some, most kids and parents loved to talk to him. He even made the cover of the expo program – what a star!!

Everyone who stopped by the Corps booth could try on life jackets and try their hand at the bean bag toss game “Sling-a-Slug” to win a water safety Frisbee or football. Of



Seamoor catches the attention of a youngster at the Carolina Sports Expo.

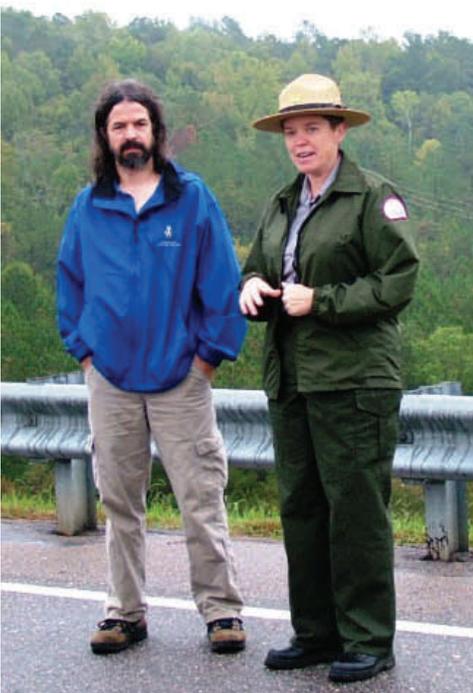
course, everyone left with a water safety coloring book as well. Literally thousands of contacts were made over those two days; making the Carolina Kids Expo a great new event that will surely become a yearly tradition. ■

# CAROLINA RAPTOR CENTER RELEASES ANOTHER BALD EAGLE INTO THE WILD

## Article Courtesy Carolina Raptor Center

A one year old bald eagle brought to Carolina Raptor Center in May with serious injuries after a likely collision with an automobile, was released on October 25<sup>th</sup> at Falls Lake Dam near Wake Forest.

The injured bird was found by a local resident, Scott Salmon, in a field behind a trucking company in northern Wake County. Steve Stone of the American Wildlife Refuge in Raleigh, stabilized the eagle by providing food and fluids. The eagle was then brought to Carolina Raptor Center, where it has been receiving intensive medical care



Mathias Engelmann and Carol Banaitis chat before the release of the bald eagle.

and rehabilitation prepare its return to the wild.

When the young eagle arrived at Carolina Raptor Center, it was suffering from a fractured radius near its elbow as well as from internal parasites. Dr. Laurel Degernes of the NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine in Raleigh, was consulted on a treatment regimen, which included the use of a wing bandage to stabilize bone fragments, and a gradual progression from indoor housing to a small outdoor cage. When the eagle's fracture was completely healed, it was placed in a 100-foot outdoor flight cage to be exercised for several weeks before receiving a fitness exam in preparation for its release.

"We are extremely pleased at how well this young eagle has responded to the care she has received here, and that she is well enough to leave us and live as nature intended," said Mathias Engelmann, Carolina Raptor Center's Director of Rehabilitation. "Each and every bird release achieved by the staff and volunteers here is a hard-won victory we truly celebrate."

"Carolina Raptor Center makes every effort to release rehabilitated birds of prey back into the areas where they are found. That is why we're bringing this bald eagle back to Wake County to be set free, and



Frank Schmitt cradles the recovered bald eagle before release. The bird was hit by a car in May and suffered a fractured radius.

not releasing it in the Charlotte area," explained Alan Barnhardt, President and CEO.

Scott Salmon, the concerned citizen who found the injured bird, as well as Steve Stone of the American Wildlife Refuge, helped celebrate the release. Another local resident, Frank Schmitt, who is a long time supporter of Carolina Raptor Center, had the honor of setting the eagle free.

Carolina Raptor Center is a not for profit organization dedicated to environmental education and the conservation of birds of prey, and cares for over 700 injured and orphaned raptors annually. ■

# DUTCH CONTINUE TO STUDY NEW ORLEANS TWO YEARS AFTER KATRINA

On February 1, 1953, a high-tide storm breached dikes in the Netherlands in more than 450 places. Nearly 1,900 people died, and more than 47,000 homes and other buildings were swept away. The Dutch government followed up with a \$3-billion, 30-year program to strengthen the storm surge protections. The country built an elaborate network of dikes, man-made islands and a mile and a half stretch of 62 gates to control the entry and exit of North Sea waters into the country's low-lying southwestern provinces.

Two years after Hurricane Katrina hit the Dutch are continuing to take a second look at their fortifications against the sea.

Jaap van Wissen is a Dutchman who experienced the flooded city of New Orleans two years ago. He was the leader of a five-man mobile water

pump team sent over by the government of the Netherlands to help the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers unwater the city and areas south in Plaquemines Parish. van Wissen visited the Wilmington District recently after attending a water conference in Las Vegas, and after spending a few days in New Orleans to see how the city is coping.

“You see that New Orleans has been cleaned up in many places,” he said. “And you see in many places workers busy in the houses to better them up. In some place I have been two years ago the houses have disappeared. But New Orleans is starting a new life.”

The Dutch team and another portable water pump team sent over by the German government to work closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers pumped the city dry within two months, a mission expected to take up to six months.



Netherlander Jaap van Wissen talks with District Commander COL John Pulliam about water issues in Holland. (Heusinkveld Photo)

“Holland was very pleased to give assistance. My team was self-supplied, self sufficient. The only things we needed were food, water, shelter and fuel which the Army Corps gave us. We wanted to help share our lessons from the flood of 1953.”

During his recent visit to new Orleans van Wissen said scores of Dutchmen have been there studying the after effects of Hurricane Katrina, and are trying to figure out ways to make improvements to their water management system in the Netherlands. Dutch government officials, he said, feel those defenses might be insufficient. A larger population and climate change have left the country's interior more vulnerable to flooding than ever.



With Marine Corps reservists in Plaquemines Parish south of New Orleans Jaap van Wissen assembles pipes that were flown over from the Netherlands. (Heusinkveld Photo)

# WEBSITE HIGHLIGHTS

## WITH BARBARA EKLAND

With the holiday season approaching, I thought it would be relevant to introduce you to a few travel tools available on the web. The first concerns airline flight schedules. FlightAware ([www.flightaware.com/](http://www.flightaware.com/)) offers real time flight info. You can track flights for delays, departure or arrival time changes or check on specific airport flight activity. A similar site to see airport and flight delays is available from the FAA ([www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usmap.jsp](http://www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usmap.jsp)). A third site from FlightStats ([www.flightstats.com/](http://www.flightstats.com/)) is another real time site giving information on arrivals/departures and delays. With this site you can

see the status of flights by route (by time of day), flight or airport...great for planning ahead. Another useful tool is SeatGuru ([www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com)) which has a visual guide that advises on airplane seating by airline and type of aircraft.

If you are planning a driving trip, AAA offers a fuel cost calculator ([www.fuelcostcalculator.com](http://www.fuelcostcalculator.com)) that takes into account the average cost of gas by region. GasBuddy ([www.gasbuddy.com](http://www.gasbuddy.com)) also tracks gas prices by zip code. If knowing traffic conditions beforehand may help you plan your drive, the U.S.

Dept. of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration ([www.fhwa.dot.gov/traffic/info/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/traffic/info/)) has national traffic and road closure information. This site links into state and city transportation sites giving traffic updates.

At this time of thanksgiving and cheer, many of us are moved to make donations to charitable organizations. The Charity Navigator ([www.charitynavigator.org/](http://www.charitynavigator.org/)) is the website to go to for information on charitable giving. Find out how your favorites use the funds they are given and how responsible they are with our trust. Blessings to all! ■

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## DUTCH CON'T

"We've always been involved in the risks of storms and the possibility of rising sea levels. We want to revise our plans. What we've learned from New Orleans is that evacuation plans are difficult. To get out one million people from the city shortly before the hurricane struck...was very difficult. In Holland we are now working out evacuation plans for the people who live beneath the sea level which is

about 8.2 million people living between Amsterdam and the Hague. Utrecht and Rotterdam are in the lower parts and they have the possibility to evacuate if there's a dike breach or flood."

Since 1820, one-fifth of the Netherlands has been reclaimed from the sea. The Dutch look at this modern marvel practically, and never take living below sea level for granted.

"You never know if improvements will be a success, but we in Holland have been working with the water in our delta for more than a hundred years. We have a lot of experience in how to manage water and how to deal with water and how to live with water. We are well experienced people and we like to give our experience to other countries to learn from it." ■

PASTOR BILL

## THUNDER AND SLEIGH BELLS

Some years ago, the Canadian songwriter Gordon Lightfoot wrote a song called the “Canadian Railroad Trilogy.” It is probably one of the finest songs ever written about the pioneering spirit. But the last line of the first verse always gives me pause:



Bill Adams

*There was a time in this fair land  
when the railroad did not run*

*When the wild majestic mountains  
stood alone against the sun*

*Long before the white man and  
long before the wheel*

*When the green dark forest was  
too silent to be real.*

I know that line about silent forests was intended to mean a lack of human sounds; but when I hear it I can't help but think about how noisy those green dark forests actually were.

One of the common sounds of that early landscape was bell-like coo of the passenger pigeons. Passenger pigeons nested and roosted

on our continent in numbers beyond comprehension. It was the most abundant bird in North America, breeding from the Canadian north, south to the middle of the continent, and migrating and wintering south from there.

In 1701, John Lawson observed the species in North Carolina and said they were so abundant that they broke the branches from trees when they landed. Early settlers in Virginia said the species was beyond number or imagination. In 1813, Audubon noted a migratory flock in Kentucky so huge that the “light of noonday was obscured as by an eclipse.” The flock was one mile wide and it flew overhead for 3 hours (at 50 mph). In 1806, Alexander Wilson observed a flock he estimated to be a mile wide and 240 miles long. The number of birds in that one flock was estimated to be well over a billion. And there were many other migration routes and flocks! No one living today has ever seen anything like it. There probably were more passenger pigeons living in North America then than there are people

on earth today.

Chief Simon Pokagon of the Pottawottomi Indians wrote an account of the sounds of migrating passenger pigeons, stating that in May 1850, he was “startled by hearing a gurgling, rumbling sound, as though an army of horses laden with sleigh bells was advancing through the deep forests toward me. As I listened more intently, I concluded that instead of the tramping of horses it was distant thunder; and yet the morning was clear, calm and beautiful. Nearer and nearer came the strange commingling sounds of sleigh bells, mixed with the rumbling of an approaching storm. While I gazed in wonder and astonishment, I beheld moving toward me in an unbroken front millions of pigeons . . .” He later noted the “bell-like wooing notes” of the pigeons and how they fearlessly landed on his head and shoulders.

Sadly, this is all part of the former majesty of our land that we shall never see. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, many people realized that the pas-

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## THUNDER AND BELLS CON'T

senger pigeon was declining, a few even tried to save it with conservation legislation that was never passed. Nothing of substance was done and, as its forest habitat was being cut down, the passenger pigeon was hunted, clubbed and netted to extinction. The last one died in a zoo on September 1, 1914. Nothing can be said other than it was a relentless and merciless ecological holocaust on an unimaginable scale. All we have left today are the namesakes – Pigeon Forge, Pigeon Hill, Pigeon Lakes, Pigeon River, etc.

It's a heart-wrenching tale, too often repeated. Much like the passenger pigeon, the huge herds of American bison were decimated with no law of man broken. The Carolina parakeet and other species were driven to extinction with no law of man broken. And before the white man, Native Americans had likely driven much of the Pleistocene megafauna of the continent to extinction. Sadly, when men came to North America they walked into a treasure trove of God's creation and looted it in a most reckless and shortsighted manner. A great species richness and abundance was

taken from us all.

Are we doing better today? We know God's call to stewardship and break His will at our peril. Only by respecting all He has given us is the

future secure. The flocks of thunder and sleigh bells are gone. That tragic loss is enough; let's not create a future where the dark forest really is too silent to be real. ■



# CORPS FAMILY NEWS

Ryan Paul Alexander was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, United States Army, Infantry, by his father, former Wilmington District Commander Colonel (Retired) **Ray Alexander** on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 on the campus of the University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia. Lieutenant Alexander graduated with honors from Hampden-Sydney College in May 2007 with a Bachelors of Arts in Political Science. Currently, Ryan is assigned to the Army Cadet Command with duty at the University of Richmond's ROTC department serving as a Gold Bar Recruiter. In February 2008, he will report to Fort Sill,

OK for his initial officer's training followed by the Infantry Officer's Basic Course at Fort Benning, GA. Lieutenant Alexander returns to North Carolina in late 2008 to his first assignment with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, Fort Bragg. Ryan is a third generation Soldier, following the service of both his father and grandfather.

James R. Harpold, son of **Penny Schmitt**, passed the Commonwealth of Virginia Bar Exam and was sworn in as a licensed attorney. on October 29, 2007.



Ryan P. Alexander  
2LT, USA, IN  
Commissioned on  
2 OCT 07 by  
Ray Alexander, Jr.  
COL, USA (Ret.)

## *Wilmington District Holiday Christmas Party*

*Friday, 14 December*

*Shriners Club on South College Road*

*Menu includes Ribeye Steak or  
Breast of Chicken*

**RSVP Hank Heusinkveld in Public Affairs by 30 NOV**  
**Retirees welcome!**