

## **I didn't know what was coming; I kind of never left**

**Herman:** Katrina hits, next thing you know it, I'm on an aircraft taking off to Louisiana. This time, I'm not going over there to be an Aircraft Mechanic. I'm there now fulfilling a police role. So, I'm given a weapon. I'm having to leave my job. I'm having to leave my wife who was pregnant with our son. I left the home construction process that I undertook earlier that year, you know, and an efficiency apartment because we were building this home. So, I had to drop everything. And then, having to deal with my civilian employer thinking, oh, there goes Herman off to another vacation with the military. Well, not necessarily this time. This was, I mean more real than anything else, you know, because people's lives were at stake with this incident and I was gung-ho at the time, you know, because I knew what was at stake.

But I remember that cargo door opening. As soon as they opened it up and you just feel that vacuum. And there was a smell and a site that I still remember to this day. It was in the evening. We landed at 7:45 p.m. and everything just smelled wet. It was like a war zone. Helicopters were coming in and out. There was ground control who was controlling the aircraft. There were jets taking off. There were landing. We had just landed, and this was just, you know, Operation San Antonio, Task Force San Antonio and there to go help out. I didn't know what was coming, but when they said we needed to get, you know, M16 qualified, weapons qualified, I knew.

Two days, three days later, we're at the Convention Center and that's where it really hit me because as we're clearing out, securing the premises, there were still some stragglers in the front lobby that we had to tell them to leave so that we could put all of our military asset there. We were now occupying that space. People, vehicles, we needed to set up, you know, satellite communications. So, I'm there, again as an Aircraft Mechanic, you know, just securing the place and it was again a site and smell that I had never seen because I've never been exposed to something like that.

I remember telling the guy to leave with his dog and it was the hardest thing for me to do because I wanted to help him more than he was helping himself because he didn't have the care that we had as military soldiers, but I knew he had to leave. It was just part of the process. As I'm doing that, I look down and I see in a circle, information about a woman that had graduated high school, had graduated college, she had her personal belongings there. It's as if she was sitting there, but she was not there. It's as if this person, this spirit was there looking at their things and all of a sudden, they just were gone because they were on the next bus to take them some where's else, whether it be to the Superdome or wherever, but she left her belongings there. And I started, you know, having some backflashes about my life, about my credentials and what I need to do to safeguard them. This girl's personal belongings were right there and gone even keys. I never knew what happened to that girl. I never met her. I only saw her through photos, keys and her credentials, her personal belongings and that was it. And you look around, there was food, you know, half-eaten turkeys. I mean, it was just a site that was just devastating, but I knew that I had to maintain my gung-ho attitude and I've held everything else in just to kind of make sure, we're here to do a job.

I've never left. I'm still in Louisiana. I'm still overseas because I carry that with me. Because I'm just passionate about what we do as military soldiers and its not as if I can just go into my brain and just kind of, well I don't like this particular file, I'm going to delete it. Oh, how about this one, I'm going to purge that from the recycling bin. I can't



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**

do that, so it makes me who I am today, and it charges what I do today; to be out there for other Veterans with what I do.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE**  
**CONNECTION**