

## ABC Students Inspired by General Honoré, Leader of Hurricane Katrina Response



New Canaan ABC students recently had the opportunity to meet with Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Russel L. Honoré, a three-star general who served as the commander of Joint Task Force-Katrina and led the Department of Defense response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Dubbed by some as the “Ragin’ Cajun”, LTG Honoré is actually of Louisiana Creole background. The meeting was facilitated by the New Canaan Red Cross.

Prior to his post-Katrina service, General Honoré served as the 33rd commanding general of the U.S. First Army at Fort Gillem, Georgia, served in command and staff positions focusing on defense support to Civil Authorities and Homeland Defense, and had a distinguished 37-year career in the U.S. Army. He often advises Congress and government agencies and is the emergency preparedness contributor to CNN Worldwide. The General’s book, *Survival, How a Culture of Preparedness Can Save You and Your Family From Disasters*, is both a memoir and an eyewitness report of the Katrina aftermath, one of the most devastating storms to hit the United States.

Yet the General’s conversation with the ABC students did not center on Katrina, but rather his youth and the obstacles he had to overcome. During dinner, he captivated the table of ABC young men with stories of his younger years. General Honoré was born in 1947 in the fertile bottomland 25 miles northwest of Baton Rouge, the eighth son of 12 children. He described his father as a “hard-working subsistence farmer who invested his life in his land. This was a time and place of self-sufficiency, when people were expected to fend for themselves.”

It was also a time of segregation, felt profoundly in the South. General Honoré lived a half mile from a school, but was bussed one hour from his home to a “non-white” school. When he got a job working for a local farmer after school, the \$3 he brought to his parents was the only cash in his home. When he made his first trip to Atlanta to attend a 4-H show, he and 24 other young black men traveled across Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia at night for fear they would be attacked during daylight hours. The next time the General arrived in Atlanta it was in a jumbo jet with his name emblazoned on the side.

Despite trouble with his studies, especially writing, General Honoré attended college, joined the ROTC, and built a rich life, including a wonderful family and an outstanding career. He gave the boys signed copies of his book, and later sent them all copies of *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, a book he thought they should read. He also invited them to visit West Point. He shared his most important life lessons with our students, communicating things that no one else could.