

Near an elementary school at Poland and St. Claude avenues, Dwight and Wilber Rhodes, two brothers, said they had tried to save a middle-aged man and woman at the Convention Center who appeared to have drowned.

"We performed CPR on them, but they were already dead," Dwight Rhodes said. "So we took the food out of the freezer and put the bodies in."

Of the four bodies that lay just inside the food service entrance of the Convention Center, the woman in the wheelchair rattled Brooks the most. When he found her two days before among the sea of suffering in front of the Convention Center where one of the last refugee camps evacuated, her husband sat next to her. He had only one concern when Brooks and some of his comrades carted her away. "Bring me back my wheelchair," he recalled the man telling him.

One of the bodies, they said, was a girl they estimated to be 5 years old. Though they could not confirm it, they had heard she was gang-raped.

"There was an old lady that said the little girl had been raped by two or three guys, and that she had told another unit. But they said they couldn't do anything about it with all the people there," Brooks said. "I would have put him in cuffs, stuck him in the freezer and left him there."

Brooks and his unit came to New Orleans not long after serving a year of combat duty in Iraq, taking on gunfire and bombs, while losing comrades with regularity. Still, the scene at the Convention Center, where they conducted an evacuation this week, left him shell-shocked.

"I ain't got the stomach for it, even after what I saw in Iraq," said Brooks, referring to the freezer where the bulk of the bodies sat decomposing. "In Iraq, it's one-on-one. It's war. It's fair. Here, it's just crazy. It's anarchy. When you get down to killing and raping people in the streets for food and water ... And this is America. This is just 300 miles south of where I live."

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