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A legacy and the Ike Dike

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By HEBER TAYLOR

Lt. Gen. Elvin R. Heiberg III was a brave man. He was awarded a Silver Star for his service in Vietnam.

But the general, who died at age 81, also had another kind of courage.

Lt. Gen. Elvin R. Heiberg III was a brave man. He was awarded a Silver Star for his service in Vietnam.

But the general, who died at age 81, also had another kind of courage.

He was one of those rare souls who could talk about what he should have done.

In the 1980s, Heiberg commanded the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In the 1970s, he was in charge of the corps' New Orleans District.

In both commands, he fought to build floodgates to protect New Orleans.

Heiberg and other engineers envisioned a big, expensive project.

But environmentalists were opposed.

And local governments weren't excited about picking up their share of the costs.

In the end, the proposed flood gates died the slow death of inertia.

The general would later say he gave up too easily.

Everyone in that argument had legitimate concerns.

The environmentalists who objected to the original plans were right about the law.

They were able to get a court ruling that required more study.

The governments concerned about costs were responding to businesses and residents who were concerned about taxes.

But people like Heiberg — people who could see the need for a better flood-control system — had legitimate concerns, too.

They could see what was coming.

Today, New Orleans is protected by a \$14 billion system.

But it was built only after the city endured the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina.

After Hurricane Ike, a similar system — the Ike Dike — was proposed to protect Galveston Bay.

Heiberg's legacy is a reminder that good ideas are not enough.

If the Ike Dike is going to be built, its supporters will have to show some determination and tenacity.

- **Heber Taylor**