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## A SORRY ANNIVERSARY

Ran across Captain Terry Martin at a waterin' hole the other evening, happened to be Boomerang Billy's, and we got to talkin' about the second anniversary of 9-15-01, the day the bridge went down. The rest of the nation will remember 9-11-01 when Osama and his minions tried and failed to take down the economy. Brilliant timing on his part, what with the dot.com implosion, the emerging corporate scandals and the workers paradise of Communist China entering the WTO and being granted most favored nation trade status. Almost looked like some kind of weird harmonic convergence. But I digress.

Terry captained the recovery barge for the few days it took to recover the bodies of the eight souls that were lost that Saturday morning. He and his crew were front and center for every body recovered. I know this is sad, but when they recovered the body of Chief Bob Harris, Terry and his crew damn near broke down.

The above leads to a point at the end of this mess but needless to say, those of us that live and work on the Sandspit were somewhat insulated from the fallout after the horror of 9-11-01 because we had our own horror at 2:15 in the morning on 9-15-01.

I can remember waking that morning to the phone ringing. The message that

dock in a wicked cross current it sheared off the pilings. As I recall the COE dude was run off the Island by some angry folks in Washington and the construction crew was told to do whatever was necessary to get the damn landing open.

One of the damndest sights I've ever seen was when they finally let Dolphin Cove Oyster Bar reopen. I was sippin' a brew and watching the car ferry come in to land as Captain Terry Martin and Captain Dave Harrelson in separate harbor tugs caught the ferry and maneuvered it so it could mate up with the barge. The dance was awesome and white knuckled because the current was rippin' around the point. This dance was pretty much around the clock for the next month.

While all this was taking place the Coast Guard had convened a hearing in Corpus Christi to determine what happened that morning. The hearing officer was Lt. Commander James Wilson and what he heard over the next four days of testimony dismayed him. From burned out lights on the two dolphin bumpers to a poorly maintained channel and the fact that the autumnal equinox with its big tides was only a week away, everything seemed to conspire against David Fowler that morning. The fact that Fowler was the relief captain making his first trip through the area alone in the wheelhouse also may have played a role. He was in



**Mating the car ferry with the barge, it only took two harbor tugs.** a

barge had knocked a hole in the bridge left me stunned. So did the notion that we were literally cut off from the mainland at the height of the Atlantic Hurricane season; no cable, no communication off the island 'cept for cell phones, and no ATM machines. This was gonna be a mess.

When Mona Murphy opened the office of Captain Murphy Charters there were a gaggle of folks milling around the parking lot. They too had the look of stunned bewilderment on their faces. They also had the look of panic in their eyes. She immediately called City Hall and told them she was canceling the day's charters and would give anybody that needed a ride to Port Isabel a free lift to Daniel Bryant's dock on Garcia Street. Thus began the Great Boat Lift that evacuated close to twenty thousand civilians off the Sandspit over the next two and a half days.

The next week brought TXDOT and a mess. The haggling over transportation contracts and the location of the first landing for the car ferry from Port Aransas did not bring out the best in the bureaucrats nor did the appearance of the United States Corps of Engineers. The first thing that the COE rep did was to shut down construction of the landing for the car ferry in Isla Blanca Park for lack of the proper permits with the suggestion that they may need to study the area to ensure that no damage was done to sea grass beds. The negotiation that reopened the construction site didn't take very long but the dude insisted that only single pilings be used to secure that barge for the ferry landing. The first time the ferry tried to



**After two years, these lights are all that's been done by Uncle Sugar. They still haven't placed a C-MAN platform with a current meter in Mexiquito Flats.**

the channel in the middle of the turn when he bumped bottom and lost control of the barges. The rest as they say, is history.

The accident report from these hearings and other evidence should have been finished and released by now but it hasn't been. Some say that the report has been finished but is being held in bureaucratic limbo because of damning evidence it uncovered, like a lack of proper dredging out of concern for sea grass beds. One lawyer close to the case suggested that the Coast Guard and the Corps of Engineers just plain don't want to know the real cause behind the accident. They just want to make sure it never happens again; which ain't a bad idea. But there are some other folks like the surviving families and those that worked around the clock to recover the dead that deserve to read the official account of what happened the morning of 9-15-01. For Terry Martin it took six months and a trip to the French Quarter to finally come to terms with the horror. There he found the lass he needed to find. She held him and listened while he broke down and grieved. He was lucky to find her but I'm not so sure others have been able to cleanse themselves just yet. Maybe the release of the accident report would bring them closure.

This Monday, plan to go by the memorial that Joe Buck, Mary Jo and many others made possible. It's at the entrance to the causeway leading to Port Isabel.

**We welcome your fishin' photos. Drop them by 2600 Padre Boulevard on the Island, or mail them to I.B. Hooked, c/o Coastal Current Weekly, P.O.Box 2429, South Padre Island, Texas 78597. Be sure to include the name of the angler, weight and type of fish, where caught, and name of boat if applicable. Photos with SASE will be returned.**