

On June 8, 1990, the Norwegian oil tanker *Mega Borg* was operating in the Gulf of Mexico, 57 miles southeast of Galveston off the Texas coast. She was 835 feet long and was carrying 38 million gallons of light crude oil. Because the *Mega Borg* was too big to dock in Houston, she was lightering oil to a smaller Italian tanker, the *Fraqmura*. At about 11:30 PM, an explosion took place in the *Mega Borg's* cargo pumphouse. This blew the pumphouse off the main deck, killing the pumpman on watch when it landed. The explosion also ruptured the bulkhead between the pump room and the engine room. That caused a fire and oil began to leak from the ship. The standby boat, an offshore crew boat named the *Patricia M.*, maneuvered alongside the *Mega Borg* and took on the remaining crew. The master and chief engineer stayed on board to engage the ship's CO₂ firefighting system.

Coast Guard Group Galveston was informed of the incident just after midnight. The group issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast and dispatched the cutters *Cushing* and *Steadfast* to the scene. MSO Galveston was also notified about the situation. The *Cushing* was the first cutter to arrive on scene, at approximately 2:00 AM on June 9. The *Cushing* took the master and chief engineer on board. The USCGC *Steadfast* arrived on the scene at about 3:20 a.m. on June 10. The 210' medium endurance cutter was flight deck-equipped, a significant addition to the on-scene response. Equipment and personnel from the Coast Guard, salvage crews, and pollution contractors were transported from shore to the scene by helicopter. In addition to the first two cutters, the Coast Guard response eventually included the Buttonwood, Point Hope and fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft. A HU-25 Falcon from Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod with AirEye side-looking airborne radar (SLAR) proved to be an especially valuable asset. Over 50 commercial vessels were involved in the response as well as a host of government agencies and private companies.

Two days after the initial explosion, five successive explosions added to the ship's damage and increased the rate of oil spillage. Ultimately it took eight days for the fire to burn out. The entire response effort included a host of technologies such as oil skimmer ships, skimming barriers, oil dispersants, and the first use of experimental bioremediation through oil-eating bacteria. Throughout the response period, communication proved to be extremely problematic as the incident took place beyond VHF radio range of land. By the time the oil spill was fully contained, an estimated 3.9 million gallons of crude oil was burned or released into the water from the *Mega Borg* over the course of the disaster.

Two members of the Class of 1980 were involved in the *Mega Borg* incident response.

Dave Regan's story: I was the Engineer Officer on USCGC *Steadfast*. After the explosion/fire erupted, we were sent to the scene to provide support. We were probably the most capable Coast Guard asset on scene. I provided damage control equipment and personnel from the engineering department to primarily help with dewatering. In reality, it was mostly a pretty boring time sitting off shore watching the disaster unfold before us, but operationally we were not in a position to do too much. Our crew was rotated off for shore leave via small boat as ops permitted. I spent a day or two ashore in Galveston. My wife flew in from Florida when she heard we would be offshore there for a while. Galveston was my first duty station (*Valiant*), where I met her, and where we got married, so we took advantage of the slack time to revisit memories.

Ron Lokites's story: I worked at the Coast Guard Maritime Safety Center (MSC) in Washington, D.C. at that time. I was sent to Texas along with Neil Van de Voorde (Class of '79) to aid in the incident response. We supported the Marine Safety Office (MSO) Galveston in their response. The MSO was focused on the overall safety of the vessel and, of course, included the oil pollution response from the perspective of minimizing the spill and the eventual cleanup. We had to verify that the ship structure would remain

intact and that the vessel would not sink due to the damage, the spillage from the tanks, and the weight of the water that was put on to combat the fire. The U. S. Navy also sent their salvage response team and the MSO supported the Navy and the actual salvaging activity. As a result of our efforts, the MSC then constituted a formal team for salvage response to support the responsible MSO.