

THEN I SAW THE BRIDGE GOING

'These Guys Have Got To Be Good To Go Through A Place Like This'

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 ting on the beach while building a home at Bonaparte Landing, on the mainland.
 "Would you like to hear my first thoughts?" she asked shortly after

getting a lift from a Shallotte Rescue Squad boat across the marsh to shore. "It was so wide...I thought, 'These guys have got to be good to go through a place like this.'
 "Then I saw the bridge going."

Mrs. Mew said the incident hadn't changed her mind about wanting the barge-bridge to remain in service. "I like this bridge," she explained. "We didn't have to be there on the island. We wanted to be."

Divided On Bridge

The fate of the bridge, built in 1958 by the father of Mayor Pro-Tem Ed Gore and taken over by the state in approximately 1961, has been a source of continuing debate within the Sunset Beach community for several years. The town board by a close split vote has recommended the state improve and maintain it rather than replace it a high-rise bridge similar to those under construction at nearby Ocean Isle and Holden beaches. Meanwhile, the county has recommended its replacement. DOT schedules show the bridge targeted for replacement after June 1989.

But proponents of the high rise, such as Mayor Pro-Tem Gore, say they think the incident will add weight to the argument for replacing the bridge.

One of Gore's sons, Greg, said he is aware of several "shifts" of viewpoint on the safety of the bridge after Saturday's incident.

As long as the existing bridge remains, he added, "It will always be a safety hazard."

During the past year alone, the bridge was out of operation for a full day on several occasions for repair or servicing, tying up town personnel for traffic control duty and restricting the flow of both regular and emergency traffic to and from the island.

A second landing craft, the M/V Hatteras was due in Wednesday morning primarily to provide back up only. On trial runs Monday ferry officials learned that the LCU could not be operated effectively at low tide, though during each trip of the vessel another portion of the shoal disap-

peared. "There's a lot of water going through on each tide, a difference of five to six feet," said Sughrue. "The ramps are getting torn up and they're having to make repairs each time."

DOT workers extended a temporary gravel boat ramp farther into the water on the beach side, allowing the LCU to operate about four hours on each side of high tide.

The LCU travels a distance of slightly less than two miles, from a point on the beach causeway near the bridge to Bonaparte Landing.

A barge leased from Bald Head Island Corp. began transporting non-resident property owners and their vehicles off the island Sunday evening, but on low tide about 5:30 p.m. ran aground on the shoals after only nine vehicles had departed. Another 14 vehicles had left the island by 9

a.m. Monday. The barge, which was transporting a Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department 500-gallon pumper and a Calabash Volunteer Rescue Squad ambulance to the island, floated off the shoals between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. on the rising tide, Logan told The Beacon.

Local emergency rescue squad and fire department volunteers were working for the duration, logging about 700 hours between Saturday noon and Tuesday evening. Shallotte and Waccamaw Rescue Squads handled the small boat ferry Saturday and Sunday helped by numerous Calabash Rescue volunteers. Shallotte's boat was put out of commission after striking an object that split the hull a distance of several feet, Logan said. Also assisting Sunset Beach VFD were Coastline Rescue Squad, Calabash, Supply and

Tri-Beach fire departments. **Emergency Precautions**
 As a precaution, several emergency medical technicians stayed on the island continuously. Cardiac patient Jim Thompson had recently returned home from the hospital and is recovering from quadruple bypass surgery, Town Manager Wallace Martin advised.

Accompanied by an EMT, Thompson was to leave the island by ferry Wednesday for an appointment in Charleston, S.C., with plans to return Thursday, Jim Weathers of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management said Tuesday. Thompson is a former Calabash town council member and former owner of the Calabash Motel.

An N.C. National Guard helicopter and crew also remained on the island, available in case of an emergency and within 10 to 15 minutes' flying time of nearby hospitals.

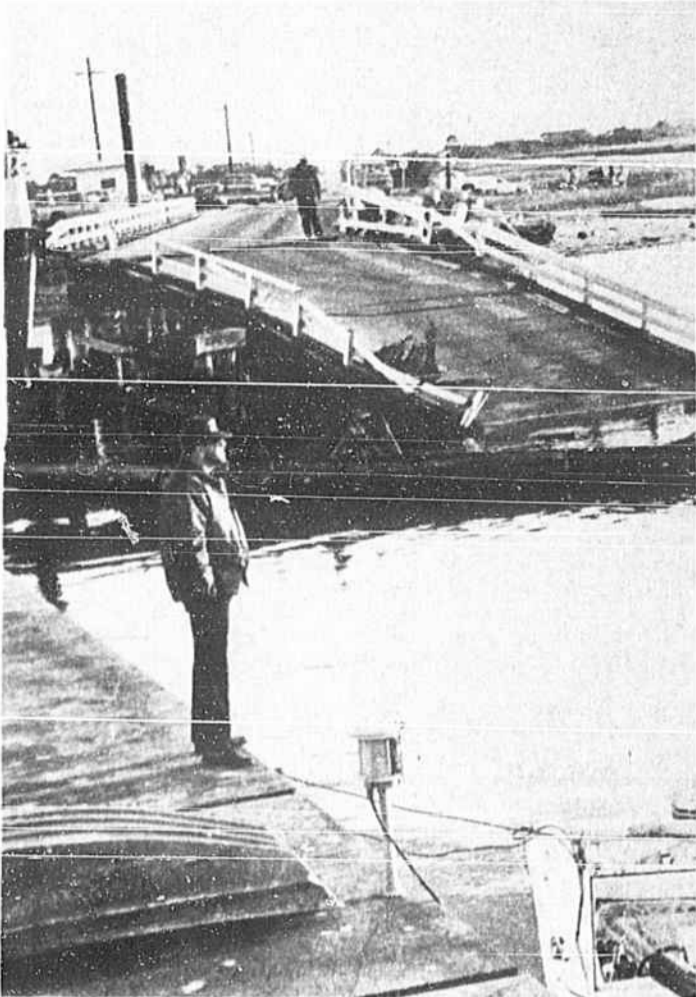
Back To Normal

Island residents generally were happy to hear their link to the island might be restored earlier than projected.

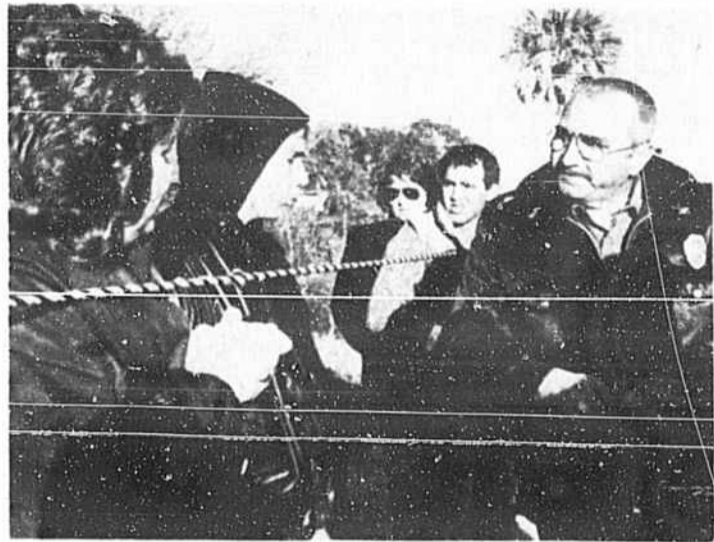
"There are not too many people who will be disappointed when it ends," said Greg Gore of Sea Path Realty, who was one of the few individuals for whom the system apparently broke down at least once. Because of problems with the two Boston whalers in service by DOT, he said he had an hour and 40 minute wait to cross from the island to the mainland Tuesday morning.

"Everybody's ready for transportation to resume as it was before—except may be the children," he continued.

Gore was aboard the landing craft R/V Long Bay at the same time as a busload of 21 thrilled youngsters returning home from school Monday. "They were really excited," he said.



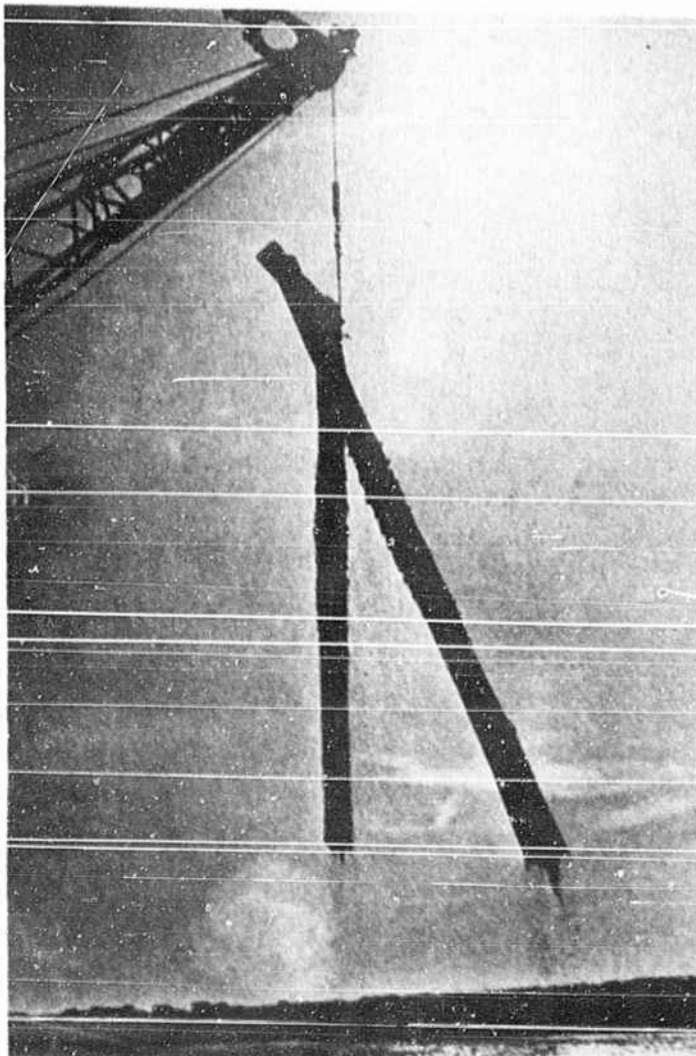
SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER Billy Smitley of the Oak Island Coast Guard station brought in a damage survey team Sunday afternoon.



POLICE CHIEF William Hill briefs Sunset Beach property owners on access to and from the island at a rope barricade that bars sightseers from the bridge itself.



BARRY DUFEK AND NANCY SMITH (center foreground) were among 50 or so islanders who met with officials Sunday afternoon to discuss transportation needs. Getting non-resident property owners off the island topped the list.



SILHOUETTED AGAINST the afternoon sun, a crane lifts pieces of channel debris freed by the divers.

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