

Tuesday, January 20, 1981

Officer charged in ship collision

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — The Coast Guard today ordered the commander of the buoy tender Blackthorn to face court-martial on charges his negligence led to the January 1980 accident that killed 23 crewmen in Tampa Bay, Fla.

The court-martial was ordered for Cmdr. George Sepel, who was master of the Blackthorn when it collided with the tanker Capricorn last year, the Coast Guard's worst peacetime disaster.

"He is being charged with failing to make himself aware of other shipping within Tampa Bay, failure to stay well to the right side of the channel, failure to sound proper whistle signals and with failure to properly supervise the officer of the deck," the Coast Guard said in a statement

released at 8th District headquarters.

The court-martial proceedings will convene within the 8th Coast Guard District sometime in the next few weeks.

Another Blackthorn officer, Lt. John Ryan, was ordered to appear at what the Coast Guard called a "non-judicial punishment proceeding."

Ryan was the Blackthorn's executive officer and the officer of the deck until moments before the collision with the Capricorn.

"This is an opportunity for a very fine officer to defend his professionalism," said Rear Adm. Paul Yost, 8th District commander. "There is no presumption that this fine officer is guilty."

Yost said the officers of the Capricorn, also held at fault by a board of investigators, could face charges under United States admiralty law.

He said the proceeding slated for Ryan was less severe than a court-martial.

"A non-judicial punishment proceeding is held by the district commander," Yost said. "It has far less punishments than could be imposed by a court-martial."

But Yost said both officers could be fined, imprisoned or dismissed.

"This is a complicated case," Yost said. "I would be very surprised if it were completed in less than a few weeks."



Staff photo by Greg Gammon

Drop it

In the quest to find the right class at the right time, many Texas A&M University students made their way through Monday's rain to G.

Rollie White Coliseum to add or drop spring-semester courses.



Airline pilots plan strike over policies

United Press International
HOUSTON — Airline pilots nationwide plan to protest federal aviation policies by holding a one-day strike in March, a spokesman for the Air Line Pilots Association said.

Dennis Greene, a Continental Airlines pilot and spokesman for the union, said the pilots plan a one-to three-day work stoppage starting March 1 if pilots are not satisfied with the Federal Aviation Administration's policies on aircraft certification, collision avoidance systems and investments of a national \$4 billion aviation trust fund.

"I do think they're (FAA) going to try to work with us because we've gotten their attention," Greene said.

Greene said the union's recent challenge of FAA's policy to man the new Boeing jetliners with two pilots instead of three is not an issue in the planned strike.

He said pilots want more of a say in the building process of jetliners.

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