

Mr. Roy Ferdin

Interviewed by Natasha Klatt  
September 29, 2017  
Corpus Christi, Texas

**Natasha Klatt:** Okay. Hi my name is Natasha Klatt, and it is Friday September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I am here with

**Roy Ferdin:** Roy Ferdin

**NK:** at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. Uh, today we will be discussing his experience with the historical Hurricane Harvey that took place here in Corpus Christi, Texas and made landfall August 25<sup>th</sup> in the South Texas region. Okay Roy, where were you when you heard that a hurricane was on its way to Texas?

**RF:** I first was talking with Phill about (unintelligible), reading about the storm that was coming, um—usually people weren't aware that it was going to come to the South or even hit the Gulf Coast—they were like “Oh, we haven't had a hurricane in over 20 years, um, we're not going to get this one.” So when I was telling them we should prepare, or we should start looking into what we need to do for the university, they were like “we're going to get word from the higher ups.” So, we waited, probably maybe a little too late, for preparation and once we told them that the storm was in the Gulf, now people were trying to rush and see what we're trying to do or what to do, to get things situated.

**NK:** And I can imagine that was maybe a little stressful for you?

**RF:** It was a little stressful, um, I'm used to being—I'm prior military so I'm used to, um you know, we have seventy-two hours, twenty-four hour, forty-eight hour—what to do for preparation. Not twelve hours and let's get things done.

**NK:** Okay, so it was a little off your track of trying to be organized?

**RF:** Yes.

**NK:** Yes, okay. And Roy can you tell me a little bit about your position here at A&M—what your responsibilities are and your status?

**RF:** I've been with the university, uh just over a year. I help out in the operations—I'm an operation's technician. I help out with anything from, maybe setting up work order's, purchasing, uh repairing things, small things—helping out, who—if someone needs to get stuff moved, they usually call me, or anything small that I can take care of that doesn't require work order; I'll take care of it.

**NK:** Okay so, it's uh, more of a physical job, your around campus, helping out with stuff, just everywhere? Any department, or just the college of Science and Engineering?

**RF:** Mostly for the college of Science and Engineering, but I'm doing stuff at the boat barn. I'm doing stuff with the shipping and receiving, and helping out with purchasing. So I'm all over basically.

**NK:** And what exactly is the boat barn?

**RF:** The boat barn's like where the—one of our, uh-uh, we send the kids out, when they check boats out, check vehicles out. It's considered a boat barn, which is- it's on campus but it's just, it's its own entity. Not attached to any of the uh, I guess the main campus.

**NK:** Okay. Is that the place over by the Harte center? Or is that in a different location? Or outside?

**RF:** It's outside, right across from shipping and receiving.

**NK:** Okay. All right. Are there any other staff members that share the same responsibility's with you?

**RF:** Right now I'm working alone, but If I do need help, I call on Phill Spreen. He's my supervisor. So if there's something that's required, I usually call him, tell him and he usually relays it to me. And I'll take care of what needs to be done.

**NK:** Okay. Where were you when you heard a hurricane was on its way?

**RF:** I was—when I first heard about it, I was um, at the house. Cause I do sports, um, I'm a sport's official also. So, I was watching the news and they said there was a hurricane developing. And I was like this storm, the track that it was on—I just felt that this is probably the storm that's going to come into the Gulf and probably caused some damage. Didn't expect it to come so close. I felt we got lucky that it did turn a little North. We didn't get the bad part of the storm, but um, it did do some damage around the area.

**NK:** And what made you feel like this was going to be a more severe storm than usual?

**RF:** Just the track and how slow it was going. Usually the storms are moving anywhere from twenty-five to thirty nautical miles, uh, or faster. This was going anywhere from ten to fifteen miles, so it had enough time to build up strength.

**NK:** So your familiar with the paths and the strengths of hurricanes?

**RF:** Well-being stationed in the Gulf Coast, I was stationed in Ingleside, Texas, we're prepared to where if the storm's seventy- two hours away, the ships are leaving the area. So, I felt kind of

bad, cause you're like, we're leaving the area but our families are still left behind. So once they, we leave the area, we have no place to go but we have to run away from the storm.

**NK:** Right. And I can imagine that's probably a little stressful as well.

**RF:** It's real stressful.

**NK:** Did you know at the moment that you were going to help, uh, and prepare the campus for the storm when you heard that the storm was on its way?

**RF:** I was ready to help—I knew we tested everything, probably a month prior. So we knew everything was operational. It was just, we had to get the word. We already knew that the storm was in, on the direct, not in a direct path, but in the vicinity, of coming to the Gulf Coast. I felt that we should of done maybe things days prior. Not, hours prior.

**NK:** And can you tell me a little bit about the hurricane preparedness, um routine? What does that entail?

**RF:** Since we're in a low-lying area, most of ours was probably making sure flooding, uh securing windows, securing anything that could be a missile hazard, trying to tie things down—um, in our preparation was in forty-eight hours—we're to move vehicles into the garage. Within twenty-four hours, we're due to move boats into secure areas. So our main boat, which is probably an eighty thousand dollar boat, that was within twelve hours, which actually, we were (unintelligible) to leave the campus at noon, that boat was put into shipping and receiving's warehouse which is a probably a six thousand square foot warehouse. Probably two hours prior to leaving the campus. So, that's kind of close.

**NK:** Um-hm. And how many people were helping you with this?

**RF:** This was just me.

**NK:** Just you? Did you feel under pressure?

**RF:** I felt under pressure cause, now the UPD, which is University Police Department, was requesting, people that are going to stay on campus after noon, to have a list of names of who's going to be on campus. That was never issued to university police department. So we all had to leave by noon.

**NK:** So as soon as you put the boat in, that was it?

**RF:** That was my last big item to put in and then we had one, to, cause if we don't have um, backup power to our building, then, then College of Science and Engineering. So, one of the items was a freezer that had to be moved to the Harte Institute, for backup power.

**NK:** And what would this be? What kind of things would this be?

**RF:** Um, most of it was either samples or media that needed to be frozen and kept frozen. So, we had to put it into emergency plugs and most of our emergency plugs were at the Harte Institute, that were available.

**NK:** And once again, this was just you doing all of this or were you being instructed to do all of this or at some point you had help?

**RF:** I was moving the items to—well this was a big freezer so I did request help, to move the, uh freezer. And then once we got it up to location to the second floor at Harte Institute, we plugged it in and that was, you know, till we, till we came back to, to bring the freezer back, to the central receiving.

**NK:** And did you say that you had to move samples as well?

**RF:** Well samples and put them into the freezers that were plugged into, uh, the red plugs for emergency generators.

**NK:** And were these scientific samples or just lab samples?

**RF:** Most of these were lab samples.

**NK:** Lab samples. Okay. And, so, what was exactly was the first step when you found out that you had to start preparing the campus? I know you told me that these multiple steps occurred, but what exactly did you start with first? What—how did you tackle this? What was your mindset?

**RF:** Well my mindset was—I didn't want to wait for them to give us word. I have uh, some stuff in the store-room for hurricane preparedness. So I issued out plastic to cover all the computers, instead of waiting for SSC to give us plastic bags.

**NK:** And what is SSC?

**RF:** SOUTHEAST SOLUTIONS COMPANY. They're a contractor on the university. They're the—in charge of the cleaning. They're in charge of uh, different maintenance areas and stuff that get our like a work orders and purchase orders and stuff like that.

**NK:** So, you had to get bags from them? Is that just like a policy?

**RF:** They're, they're instructed to issue out bags for hurricanes to cover computers and that also was within the four-hour period before we had to get off campus. So that's why I went ahead and broke out all the hurricane stuff I had prepared to issue to cover computers, cover windows. The only thing I wanted was uh, probably more sand bags to cover the doors. But like I said, I felt lucky that it—the hurricane did take a north, and we didn't get the bad side, so.

**NK:** And so, you did have the sandbags available for some places on campus?

**RF:** Yeah we got some for the low-lying areas (background noise), that we covered the doors. And it was only maybe a total of eight bags.

**NK:** Okay. So probably not enough bags.

**RF:** Not enough bags; yes.

**NK:** These are just bags pre-filled or you had to go and fill them?

**RF:** I filled them that day, so, and the only thing we had was those eight. So I had to use whatever I had available.

**NK:** And how come you guys didn't have more sandbags available? Was it because the city just ran out in general, or?

**RF:** No, like, um probably like I said before, the preparation—I don't, in my view wasn't there. To where as they, you know, we haven't had a hurricane in over twenty years. A direct hurricane, to we don't know. I hope we take this as a learning experience and we would be prepared if something were to come again our way, probably next year or so, that we'll have all these, assets available or readily available for all different, you know university.

**NK:** And I'm aware that there is, some kind of, uh, hurricane preparation meeting that takes place with all the staff members?

**RF:** There's a preparation meeting that takes place and we test all the—but now all the things we tested, I felt we didn't use the resources that we had. Building, in the CS building has uh, uh a roll up door that secures the glass doors that we have. That was not taken down, it was not put down. I felt that, that would of probably made more secure for the building. Cause once the hurricane turns into a category three, there is nobody on campus. University police department departs and everything is turned over to the Corpus Christi police department.

**NK:** Wow, so the, uh, campus police had to leave as well.

**RF:** As soon as the storm hit a category three, campus police was requested to get off campus.

**NK:** But you were here, maintaining (interruption) as well?

**RF:** No everybody's (interruption) required to, depart off campus.

**NK:** Uh, what exactly is a roll up door?

**RF:** Roll up doors, it's considered uh, maybe a storm door. If you had the storm windows, it'll be, it'll be that type of window, where to withstand up to a hundred and twenty degree winds, and uh, I just felt that maybe that was uh, uh maybe better security or sense of um, safety that the door should have been down.

**NK:** Okay, so these are already doors that are inside of the building or is this something manually that you have to pick up and move to all the doors or all the windows?

**RF:** No uh, this door's uh, it's uh , it's a permanent door, it's uh installed in front of the glass windows and it's mainly to protect the glass, if some, some debris were to fly around and break the glass. This, this will preventive maintenance.

**NK:** And, this is all over campus or are you just specifically talking about the science buildings?

**RF:** On the science building that I know of it's, which it belongs to, uh, the central supply. They require—they're not required, but they're instructed to go around and lower the doors. But I just feel that, that part, since we didn't have as much time, was not done.

**NK:** So, it was basically skipped?

**RF:** Yes.

**NK:** And, you feel that this is something you should of practiced in that meeting beforehand or it was something that was there that was kind of overlooked?

**RF:** I think it was just overlooked, cause it—we did test the doors, the doors are operational, um, probably a total of sixteen screws need to be taken down of the one by four covering the, where the hole's at, for the, for the door. And in, in for the button, probably another three screws, but that was just, just missed, it was overlooked.

**NK:** And, I remember you saying that there was other stuff in the meeting as well, that you guys practiced?

**RF:** Well, we practiced on securing the vehicles. So all vehicles were to be placed in the third floor of the garage. All the boats were to be secured and tied down. Just anything that could be a missile hazard was to be picked up, and with the timing, I think a lot of stuff just got overlooked.

**NK:** And, I, I wasn't here obviously to see the campus boarded up, but you guys had to go around to every window and literally board up the windows?

**RF:** Well, the windows were not boarded up, but there is some, that have uh, the security screens and some have the roll up shutters, that could of,been closed. But SSC or somebody that's designated, that has a key to get to some of the roof areas, were just either off campus or they left due the hurricane. (background noise)

**NK:** So, I know you mentioned that SSC, that is the company that delegates or deals with...

**RF:** They're the contractors on base that do, their Southeast Solutions that run most of the—changing light bulbs or any type of maintenance, or any work order that is submitted, they were to complete the, the job.

**NK:** So, they were the main people in charge in overseeing all of the responsibility's, or was that Phill, or was a mixture of both?

**RF:** It's a mixture of both. Um, the university and the contractors; um, they both collaborate and they take—of course they have their maintenance part, who issue the bags, which I think we probably could of issued those bags, maybe two days prior. And then just go around and just tightening things up, instead of having, you know, the last four hours on campus.

**NK:** And Phill is your supervisor?

**RF:** Yes.

**NK:** Were you speaking with him through this process? Was he advising you in things to do around campus, or was this solely placed into your hands? I'm assuming maybe you had contact with him, through all of this?

**RF:** I was with contact with a Phill—Phill was uh, scheduled to go on vacation. Um, the Dean felt that the storm wasn't as, as slow as it was moving, it was just a category two, so a category two's probably winds anywhere from sixty-five miles up. And, you know, they didn't think nothing was going to happen so, he went ahead and let Phill go on vacation. But during that time I was in contact with Phill, letting him know what I'd done, if there was anything else that I needed to do, and also, check in with the Dean.

**NK:** Okay. And was Phill giving you any kind of advice other than what you had from the Dean?

**RF:** Mostly just he told me, whatever the Dean—if the Dean requires to do something, do that cause um, Phill also, just like probably everybody else on campus um, probably hadn't been through a hurricane at the university.

**NK:** And how long did it take you to make the school hurricane proof? I know that you said that you had to be out by noon, as well as everybody else, um, but in total, how long did you, how long do you feel like it took you to get all these things accomplished? Was this...

**RF:** Probably seventy-two hours at three days. Um, but my last push was to, was the vehicles. So, that last day before we got out, um, probably eight till about noon, I went ahead—that was my last things to move, were the vehicles.

**NK:** Uh-hum, okay. And these were the vehicles that you were moving by yourself?

**RF:** Yes.

**NK:** Uh-hum, okay. On a personal level, were you effected by the storm after you left campus—you went home?

**RF:** I went home and I, that's when I decided to board up. I was going to ride the storm out, at the house. Um, I noticed, I kept watching the news and I felt that the storm was just going to get stronger, so I made, I, this decision probably about six o'clock and left the area Corpus Christi.

**NK:** This was Thursday night?

**RF:** Thursday night.

**NK:** Thursday night. Did your family, uh, feel scared?

**RF:** I think that's what made me—I knew, it's just me and my wife, um, my, we went to go see our daughter, we went to go stay with our daughters in Midland, Texas, which is about eight hours away. So finally did the decision to leave and it was about seven thirty. Uh, usually leaving from Corpus Christi, heading towards on 37, towards San Antonio—takes about maybe two hours to get there. That day leaving, it took five hours to make it to San Antonio.

**NK:** So there was a lot of traffic.

**RF:** A lot of traffic.

**NK:** Was it bumper to bumper or was it speeding traffic?

**RF:** No, probably, usually the speed limit's anywhere from seventy-five to eighty—people are driving. During that time maybe thirty-five to forty-five.

**NK:** Okay. So it took a long time. (laughs)

**RF:** Took a long time.

**NK:** And, you said you had to board up your house—did you live close by the water?

**RF:** No, lucky I don't live close by the water and uh, I think luckily people that didn't live—in my area we, we got lucky cause it didn't, it usually floods, but with the hurricane taken a northern turn, um, it really spared Corpus Christi.

**NK:** Okay, so I'm going to shift this interview and—let's talk about returning back to campus. So, at what point did you have to go ahead to come back to campus? Who contacted you to return to school?

**RF:** I was in contact with my Dean of the university, Dean Pezold. Uh, we're in contact, we're in contact, uh, through text messages, phone calls. I told him that I would make it back to campus on Monday. So, when I returned, I left Midland, Texas on Sunday to return Monday morning. As I was coming to the university, U, uh, UPD, which is the University Police Department, turned me away because there was no list, of, of—I was not on an access list to return to campus.



**NK:** So, the Dean called you to come back, but you were not allowed on campus? So, what did you do?

**RF:** Uh, as a man, as the police department was looking for a list for the College of Science and Engineering, this list was not either received or didn't get sent out. So, there was probably eight of us that were trying to return back that didn't access to the campus.

**NK:** So, when did you actually have access to the campus?

**RF:** Uh, Wednesday when everybody was, uh authorized to come back to campus, which was uh, probably three days later.

**NK:** Okay, so tell me what did you see? What was uh, the campus like? What was the first thing that you saw when you arrived?

**RF:** Just the debris, there was a lot of debris everywhere. Trees down, um, nothing like major damage or anything. I did notice—some of our, the pavilions that are close by the water, the structures, they were, they were down, they were torn down. Um now they're all deemed unsafe, so they're getting torn down. These are just little gazebos that are along the bike paths and stuff like that are torn that are being taken down.

**NK:** And, was there a lot of, um, vegetation on campus that was destroyed? I know there's little tropical areas, uh, especially in the alley that's termed Cat Alley—I know there's a lot of flowers and stuff, was that a mess in there?

**RF:** Most of those trees were, they were kind of covered with the, by buildings and stuff, but some that weren't, uh, were just uprooted, so those had to get cut down, and I think SSC, which is most of the guys that work at the—doing the lawn, lawn cutting and tree cutting, did a pretty, did an excellent job at cleaning up the campus in those two days.

**NK:** Anything broken?

**RF:** Didn't notice anything major, broken, uh, just some of the buildings might of took a couple windows. Um, nothing major.

**NK:** And, I know you said that the electricity went out in the College of Science and Engineering building? Is that the CI building?

**RF:** Yes, the, the engineering, the only backup generators that we have run on natural gas, so once the natural gas kicked on—once a category three hurricane, was, was determined that it was coming to Corpus Christi—the city of Corpus Christi shuts all natural gas and most of the electricity to the university, since we're on an island. We were on the last part of the water that hits the university and the natural gas finishes on this island, so once they shut the gas down, we probably have three hours of generator power until they run out of natural gas. And then we have none.

**NK:** And, so after everything was completed, did you have to, um, follow up with anything particularly on your part? I know you said that there were contractors that came in to do their main job—uh, was Phill still out of town at this point?

**RF:** Yeah Phill, once Phill knew that we had access to the university again, he drove, he couldn't get a flight out—of course there was no—Houston which is the main hub for the airlines was under water. So Phill took it upon himself and he drove probably twenty-four hours to get back to campus. Um, he just, you know, felt that he should have been here but, um, he probably would have been here on Monday also, but there was no flights, coming into Corpus.

**NK:** Because you would have had to stop in Houston?

**RF:** Houston was the stopping point and there was no flights even coming into, any, anywhere.

**NK:** Now Roy, was this your first hurricane to experience?

**RF:** No, I've experienced other's, um, like I said I was in the military, stationed in Ingleside, Texas. But every hurricane that came through, we just boarded, we boarded up the house and of course, uh, we had to leave the area within seventy-two hours. So, some were—no major hurricane hit the Corpus Christi, or it got into the Gulf, but we wouldn't, since being in the military, being in a ship, we had to leave the port.

**NK:** Okay. Would you say that this was the strongest hurricane that you've experienced?

**RF:** No back in seventy, uh, Celia was category five, and that one did hit Corpus Christi, and I think—I mean I was so young then, it just, I felt—that um, there was more housing now and that some of the houses' that were in the flood zone, flood areas, weren't built back then. So, we didn't see as much damage or destruction.

**NK:** Was downtown destroyed or hit pretty hard by Celia, from what you can recall?

**RF:** From what I remember, some of it was, but uh, the seawall, was uh, probably protected downtown a lot from all the water surge. Um, most of the flood areas now, which consist of, probably anywhere from where the university sits to Weber—Um there wasn't any, there wasn't that many houses built back then. It was mostly farmland. So, I think, that hurricane when it hit during that time, that's when you didn't hear about a bunch of destruction or maybe even death, cause, there was no houses in that area.

**NK:** There wasn't too many people around?

**RF:** Yes.

**NK:** And, so has there been anything that you have learned from this experience?

**RF:** I know to get the, probably some of the bags, if we need to get bags out—if people want to leave earlier than the four hours, to, so they won't get stuck in traffic, or if they wanted to go, just further away. Um, probably, that would probably be one thing I would change—would make it a seventy-two hour—everything that was done for twenty-four hours, I'd make it into forty eight hours and just move it up a day.

**NK:** So, just more practice? More preparation?

**RF:** More preparation.

**NK:** So, you feel that maybe the campus was caught off guard a little bit by it?

**RF:** Well, like I said, we take this as a learning experience since know—I think everybody that's been on campus had never been through a hurricane on this campus.

**NK:** All right, and this is very similar to the question before but, any advice for anyone preparing for a hurricane, whether on campus, in their personal life, any things, uh, you recommend that are a priority when preparing for a hurricane? And just in general, some things you should have at home?

**RF:** Probably now, since the hurricane did hit the area and knocked down power for five, six days—I know a lot of people went out and bought generators. Uh, generators are good, but once you run out of fuel, there not going to, you won't be able to charge your phones. But what I've noticed and what I bought myself, was um, was a battery-powered, um, it's basically you just crank up, it's like a radio; you can charge your phone on it and all you do is just crank it, and it will charge up to three hours of battery. So, I mean, you can just, if you feel you need to charge your thing, you just crank it and that's like that's the best thing I probably could of purchased.

**NK:** Did you run out of electricity at any point, or this generator, or radio die at some point?

**RF:** Well I, we were out of power for four days.

**NK:** Oh wow.

**RF:** So, I mean, not having any—coming back on Sunday, we didn't have power again until that following Thursday. Um, makes you think, I mean we had candles, had some batteries, but uh, we have basically have no contact. There was no TV, so you don't really know what was going on. I didn't have electricity for the radio, so we don't know what's going on—only the cell phone (interrupted) was the only thing that, and that was getting kind of—you had to go find electricity just to plug your cellphone, to keep it charged.

**NK:** Right. And did you have to leave any point to get gas, did you deal with the whole gas situation? I know it was running out, or it was not so much available.

**RF:** It, it was available, it was just, I guess a lot of speculation, maybe rumored that, they were going to, there wasn't going to be any gas. Then you see the people going to buy eight or nine gas tanks to fill them up. So that makes you think, you know, these people are going to have all the gas, and you know, they're going to start raising the gas or gauging prices, which was um, kind of, kind of pleased and kind of shocked at the same time that didn't really happen in our area.

**NK:** Do you feel like the media did a good job in helping the community prepare for this hurricane?

**RF:** They had the, they put out the information—the media did a good job of putting out information and also after. I know the radio, if you can, if you had electricity and you can hear the radio, the guys were on there twenty-four hours, seven days a week. They didn't come off the radio until they knew the hurricane was passed.

**NK:** I did hear about some of those people, um, out there during the storm, really toughing it out. It's pretty amazing if you think about it.

**RF:** It is amazing, um, they, not saying that they wanted to work, but they felt that there was their call to put out the information and word—they can get help, who needs help, they'd can, they'd say hey call the radio station, we'll get you help.

**NK:** All right, awesome. Well any questions for me?

**RF:** Um, no.

**NK:** Okay, well I appreciate your time, Roy. Thank you so much, uh, answering my questions and um, thank you for your advice. I think it's helpful to know this insight and anything anybody can take from this to be prepared for another storm, hopefully we don't have to encounter stuff like this, but I know being by the Texas Gulf, we're very um, vulnerable to these type of storms. But once again, thank you for your insight and, um, that's a wrap.

**RF:** Sounds great, thank you.

**NK:** Thank you.

*End of interview*