

Hurricanes

Keith Flint passed to us a copy of this letter, dated 27 September 1995. It comes from Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, but we do not know who wrote it.

Hurricanes Louis and Marilyn, which arrived about ten days apart, were quite different. Louis went east of us, so we got the wall from the west, which is basically the SW quadrant and the mildest in an anticlockwise cyclone. It came up Nanny Cay Harbour, where I keep *Ariel*, a 27 ft Swedish design sailboat, at about 80 mph, which made walking on heaving floating piers a bit difficult. The boats did quite well, and it was the docks themselves which had to be anchored and chained together. This exercise got everyone soaked to the skin, but here it doesn't matter as the rain and sea are both about 85°F (30°C).

In contrast, Marilyn went just south of us, so we got the wall in the SE and NE quadrants, which are the worst. The wind came straight out of the south at about 120 mph, with higher gusts. It didn't bother Nanny Cay, which is sheltered from the south, but here in this house it was like standing on Bletchley platform with the London-Carlisle express going by all the time – and with a steam engine at that. The British Virgin Islands are old world – not heavily populated and with good building standards. This house is built West Indian style, but with all mod. cons. inside, and didn't even shake. Many local buildings survived perfectly well, which from appearances should have taken off. Most of the damaged buildings were of modern styles, which may look well but are not hurricane-proof. Concrete/cement block buildings are much more hurricane proof than wood – except for the quite characteristic West Indian wooden buildings. Basically, it boils down to no roof overhangs and 30°-35° slopes of roof in every direction. Locally these are known as Dutch-hipped roofs. Winds at 100 mph plus drive rain in through every crevice, so there's always some mopping up to do with the rain coming horizontally and even upwards where it's being blown up a valley.

In both cases we didn't get the eye of the storm. This is the worst condition of all, when you get

the high-speed inner wall from one direction, then a lull, then the wall from the opposite direction. Both storms were fairly big, the eye being 30-40 miles across and the walls having winds of Beaufort Force 12 up to 100 miles from the centre. In our case with Marilyn we had the east wall for about six hours. Marilyn's eye went about fifteen miles to the west of us, heading in a NW direction.

Marilyn's eye went over the US Virgin Island of St Thomas, which is a hell-hole of mass tourism, junk building and crime. I was told that the sound was more like standing in the exhaust flow of an unsilenced fighter aircraft at take-off power. Last Wednesday I went there to see if I could help the Power Authority, with which I did a lot of work on generators in the early 70s, and whose Chairman I know from those days. I couldn't even get to the power plant. The roads were a mass of downed power and phone wires, trees, building junk and wrecked cars. Most of the taxis had no petrol, because the garages had no electricity to run their pumps. I estimate that it will be three or four months before St Thomas gets everything working, although bits of it are back already.

There is ongoing looting, because the idiot Governor only called out his own National Guard (Territorials), who obviously won't shoot their cousins doing the looting. They finally brought in some National Guards from the US mainland, but they're weekend warriors more concerned with duty-free booze than helping to pick up the wreckage.

In contrast, Dutch St Maarten (a tragedy in mass tourism which was not so a few years back) called in the Royal Dutch Marines. They promptly shot dead about thirty looters, so everyone went home and got on with clearing up the mess. In their case the damage was from Louis.

The French islands of Guadeloupe and their side of St Martin had no problems whatsoever. The French Government immediately flies in the Legion, or if necessary even drops in the Paras. Both would much prefer to shoot you than to talk to you, and everyone knows this.

New Vessels on the Squadron Register

*Cooinda	Adrian Achatz (New Owner)
*Dauntless	Brian Elsegood
*Irene's Endeavour	David Rawnsley
*Sea firey	Ian Power (New Owner)
*Solace	Geoff & Jill Wallbridge (New Owners)

*Denotes vessel moored in the pool

The French keep out all the media except their own. They are told what to report, so there's no fuss. All in all, that's the most sensible way to cope with the problems!

The BVI calls out Her Majesty's bobbies, unarmed and very polite, who simply ask and then insist that you go home unless you have good reason to be out when the wind is still blowing. Our telephones (Cable & Wireless Ltd) withstood the worst. The Government did shut down the power plant for safety reasons, but it was on again within twelve hours, and in fact our islands were all back together in less than five days. Today you wouldn't even know we've had two hurricanes in the last 2½ weeks.

One of the most startling aspects of both hurricanes was the effect on foliage. Apart from knocking down various trees and branches, the wind absolutely strips all foliage off everything down to grass level. It turns leaves into a sort of wet green-brown confetti, which is then plastered over everything downwind of it. The result is that you can actually see through the jungle, which presents all kinds of surprises,

like neighbours previously unknown! Luckily, when dry the leaf confetti blows away, but it doesn't help the paint it lands on. Equally astonishing, now after only two weeks the jungle is back in bloom. In about another month it will be as impenetrable as ever, which is an enormous blessing. It looked awful stripped of its foliage.

We have weather broadcasts, satellite pictures, Air Force hurricane-hunter aeroplanes, etc, which do help to give us some warning of what a hurricane may do in the next few days or hours. But in some instances the seamanship of some of today's crews would have Drake or Frobisher swinging them from his yardarm – and rightly so.

When Louis threatened, the sailors and fishermen of West End, Tortola BVI took care that their respective vessels were suitably moored or anchored in the harbour of Soper's Hole, West End. This is a tricky business, as Soper's Hole is deep, not the best holding ground and open to the west. Within a couple of well-warned hours of 80 mph winds from



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