

The Virginian-Pilot

Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, and Suffolk, Virginia, Tuesday, June 7, 1977

5 Killed in 98-m.p.h. Wind That Leaves Cities Stunned

8 Missing In Boat Overturn

Five people were killed and eight were missing after a charter fishing boat overturned Monday afternoon near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay under the fury of a thunderstorm that raked through Tidewater packing winds of up to 98 miles per hour and hail the size of golf balls.

Twenty-seven people were aboard the party fishing boat, Dixie Lee II, operated by Harrison Boat House, Inc., when the squall line hit it about 5 p.m. A passing boat, the Joyce Lee from Exmore, plucked 14 people from the water and brought them to Willoughby Marina. Survivors were brought to De Paul Hospital.

The Coast Guard cutter Point Arena, pulled three bodies from the water and a Navy helicopter hoisted in another. A massive search for the missing was continuing late Monday.

The bow portion of the boat was found near Tripble Shoals about 7:15 p.m., and a Norfolk police boat was en route to look for survivors.

A police diver retrieved the fifth body about 9 p.m.

The 40-foot Dixie Lee II left Harrison's Pier in Norfolk about 2:30 p.m. and was due to return about 8:30 p.m., according to Charles Woodard, night manager at Harrison's pier.

The storm damaged a wide area from Smithfield to Virginia Beach. It entered Tidewater from the west about 4 p.m. and rolled out to sea about 8 p.m. It knocked out electricity and water to thousands of homes, overturned trees, shattered windows, and sent portions of the roof of the old Atlantic Hotel in downtown Norfolk raining down on Granby Street.

The fishing pier at Ocean View Amusement Park collapsed. About 19 fishermen escaped injury.

Five people were rescued from three sailboats when they overturned off Virginia Beach near Sandbridge. The roof of the just-opened Virginia Beach Community Center in Kempville sustained heavy damage.

National Weather Service officials said late Monday that they had not determined whether any tornadoes hit Tidewater during the storm.

One man, who said he was familiar with tornadoes, believed that tornadoes did strike. While passing a lumberyard in Virginia Beach, he said, he saw wind rip the roof off a storage building. "It was being peeled back like a banana peel and just disappeared in the wind."

The storm caught Tidewater by surprise. Although the Weather Service had predicted thunderstorms, a severe thunderstorm watch did not go into effect until 3 p.m. At 4:15 p.m. a tornado warning was put into effect.

When the storm first crossed the Elizabeth River into Norfolk, where the heaviest damage occurred, it looked at first like a huge rainstorm, but quickly grew in size until it surrounded the area like a fog.

"It was a spectacular sight," said one man, who watched the storm from the 11th floor of Norfolk's City Hall building. "At first it looked like a dust storm, the rain didn't hit at first. The wind was blowing the trees almost to the ground, and elderly people were holding onto things to keep from falling down. Then it started to rain, and it got very, very dark."

From the inside of downtown buildings few people could see anything, as the storm dumped half an inch of rain. On the outside the temperature plummeted from a humid 92 degrees to 68 and the barometer from 29.41 to 29.29 in about 45 minutes.

The weather service measured a wind gust of 98 m.p.h. at Norfolk International Airport, and later gusts almost as strong. "It's the most wind I've seen here, and I've been here 10 years," said Andrew Trust of the weather service.

In Norfolk, the storm cut electrical power to an estimated 30,000 homes. The most outages were reported in the Ghent, downtown, and Ocean View sections. Trees and tree limbs littered the streets, blocking traffic in some places. Live electric power lines lay in some streets, and stoplights were out at many intersections.

Many stores closed for lack of power. The winds toppled and bent the fence around the tennis-court and swimming-pool complex at Ghent Square.

Windows on cars and stores were blown out by the high-velocity winds. As many as 50 car windows were damaged in the Hoi-

day-Inn Scope parking lot, according to Cindy Groome, a receptionist.

"I was out at 3 p.m., and it was sunny, and all of a sudden it got dark and you could hear the wind and you could see the hail. You can't describe it. It's such a eerie feeling to see it light one minute and dark the next. If the wind wasn't so hard, the hail wouldn't have caused so much damage. I have a very small flat, but the hail was about the size of my flat," Miss Groome said.

Windows at the Trailways Bus Terminal in Norfolk were blown out, sending passively customers running into a baggage storage room, McElroy Phemmer, a baggage agent, said. "Everybody was in a state of shock." No injuries were reported, however.

Several small planes at Piedmont's general aviation terminal at Norfolk International Airport were tipped over by the heavy winds, causing damage to some of them, according to Tom Ferguson, general manager of Piedmont Aviation. He urged that pilots with planes at the airport to carefully check their aircraft.

Commercial flights from the airport were held up for about 30 minutes because of the storm, and radar scopes went blank for about 30 seconds, Federal Aviation Administration officials said.

At least two radio stations temporarily went off the air.

Marine Cpl. Mike Dobbs of the 109th block of E. Lorenzo Avenue, Norfolk, said he was fishing from the Ocean View fishing pier when it collapsed. "I was down at the very end of the pier fishing, and I was facing away from the storm. I turned around and saw it coming, and about that time everybody decided to run. We ran into a building, and when we turned around the pier was under water."

Four Navy ships broke mooring lines in the gusting winds. The new nuclear cruiser California received a dent in its stern, the amphibious cargo ship El Paso sustained minor damage, and the amphibious transport Francis Marion also had only minor damage. Extent of damage to the other Waccamaw at Craney Island was unknown late Monday.

In Virginia Beach, the city's month-old, \$3-million recreation center lost a portion of its roof. Dick Nutter, director of parks and recreation, said that one of the children in the center was near the part that was damaged.

Several boats were damaged in Virginia Beach, and a police boat was caught in the storm temporarily at Broad Bay.

In the Great Neck section of Virginia Beach the storm knocked down the tops of trees, and neighbors cut limbs down to keep them from damaging houses where people were away.

In Portsmouth a man was trapped in a car on Deep Creek Boulevard near the K-8 grounds for about an hour when a large tree fell onto the car. Police and fire units, assisted by a crane, finally freed the man about 6:30 p.m. after he had been trapped for about 2 1/2 hours. He was being treated at Maryview Hospital.

Hot wires and power outages were reported throughout Portsmouth and Chesapeake. A truck overturned on the Nansemond River Bridge.

In Chesapeake an extra shift of police was called in to help during the emergency. Other emergency workers, including crews from Virginia Electric & Power Co., were expected to work through the night to restore power.

'One Big Wave'

Flipped the Craft, Crewman of Charter Boat Recalls

By APPY CHANDLER
Virginian-Pilot Staff Writer

NORFOLK—It was 2:30 p.m. and the Dixie Lee II, a 43-foot charter fishing boat, was making ready to leave Harrison's Pier in Ocean View for its third trip of the day.

Crew member Jay Gallagher, 21, had heard the forecast calling for thunderstorms and squalls. "It was windy as hell, but since it was my first trip when the captain says go, you get up and go." And so the Dixie Lee II set out. Capt. Harrison Lewis didn't return. Nor did 13 of the charter fishermen's guests.

The boat capsized about two miles east of Hampton Roads as it was hit by a squall with winds reaching 100 miles per hour.

Gallagher, teeth chattering and wrapped in a wet blanket, was one of 13 survivors picked up by an Exmore waterman and brought ashore at the Willoughby Bay Marina. He recalled: "It just came out of nowhere. It was all so fast. Can you get me a cup of coffee?"

Gallagher remembers asking Lewis if they would head in if it started to rain. He said the captain replied, "No."

Mike Shoup, 17, another crew member, was working as a baitman. One of the lucky 13, Shoup, his lanky blonde hair across his pale face, said that he was in the cabin when the wave hit.

"It was just one big wave—maybe 15 feet—and the boat flipped over. That's all."

The 23-year-old Exmore waterman who came to the rescue was Paul Holland. Barefoot and tired, he reeled in the disheveled cabin of his 43-foot white oystering boat, the Joyce Lee.

Holland said that he had been returning to Cape Charles from a day of crabbing off the North Carolina coast when he passed the Dixie Lee II.

When the squall struck, he turned his boat around to see whether everything was all right with the charter.

"I had done sailed past them a half hour," and by the time he made it back all he could see "were people floating away from the boat holding on to what they could."

Holland credited the torrential rain with making it possible to save anybody at all. "The sea wasn't so bad, 'cause the rain knocked it down. If it hadn't been for that, I don't know what I would have done."

Holland particularly remembers the bearded Gallagher. "He was shouting that the boat had gone down. Rain was so bad he couldn't see he was right close to the boat."

Moving slowly through choppy waves, Holland picked up all the survivors he could find—eight men and five women.

"All I could see was the cab (of the Dixie Lee II) and people holding on to her."

When he left the scene, Holland said, "I didn't see nobody or nothing."

ILLUSTRATION # 16