

= 1943 Surprise Hurricane =

The 1943 Surprise hurricane was the first hurricane to be entered by a reconnaissance aircraft . The first tracked tropical cyclone of the 1943 Atlantic hurricane season , this system developed as a tropical storm while situated over the northeastern Gulf of Mexico on July 25 . The storm gradually strengthened while tracking westward and reached hurricane status late on July 26 . Thereafter , the hurricane curved slightly west @-@ northwestward and continued intensifying . Early on July 27 , it became a Category 2 hurricane on the modern @-@ day Saffir ? Simpson hurricane wind scale and peaked with winds of 105 mph (165 km / h) . The system maintained this intensity until landfall on the Bolivar Peninsula in Texas late on July 27 . After moving inland , the storm initially weakened rapidly , but remained a tropical cyclone until dissipating over north @-@ central Texas on July 29 .

Because the storm occurred during World War II , information and reports were censored by the Government of the United States and news media . Advisories also had to be cleared through the Weather Bureau office in New Orleans , resulting in late releases . This in turn delayed preparations ahead of the storm . In Louisiana , the storm produced gusty winds and heavy rains , though no damage occurred . The storm was considered the worst in Texas since the 1915 Galveston hurricane . Wind gusts up to 132 mph (212 km / h) were reported in the Galveston @-@ Houston area . Numerous buildings and houses were damaged or destroyed . The storm caused 19 fatalities , 14 of which occurred after two separate ships sunk . Overall , damage reached approximately \$ 17 million (1943 USD) .

= = Meteorological history = =

A partial atmospheric circulation was observed over the extreme Southeastern United States and the eastern Gulf of Mexico as early as July 23 . However , an area of disturbed weather went unnoticed until July 25 , when wind shifts from southeast to northeast were observed in Burrwood and New Orleans in Louisiana , as well as Biloxi , Mississippi . Around 1800 UTC , a tropical storm developed approximately 110 miles (180 km) southeast of the Mississippi River Delta . Moving westward at about 7 mph (11 km / h) , the storm strengthened and became a hurricane late on July 26 . Early on the following day , the storm strengthened into a Category 2 hurricane on the modern @-@ day Saffir ? Simpson hurricane wind scale . Around that time , the storm also attained its maximum sustained wind speed of 105 mph (165 km / h) .

Later on July 27 , the first ever reconnaissance aircraft flight into a hurricane occurred . An eye feature with a width of 9 ? 10 miles (14 ? 16 km) was observed during the flight . Around 1800 UTC on July 27 , the storm made landfall on the Bolivar Peninsula in Texas with winds of 105 mph (165 km / h) . The system was described by the Weather Bureau as , " a small intense storm accompanied by full hurricane winds " . Around the time of landfall , a barometric pressure of 967 mbar (28 @. @ 6 inHg) was observed . Early on July 28 , the system weakened to a Category 1 hurricane , then a tropical storm about six hours later . Later that day , the storm began curving northwestward over east @-@ central Texas . Early on July 29 , it weakened further to a tropical depression . Around 0000 UTC on the following day , the storm dissipated near Whitt , Texas .

= = Hurricane hunting = =

This was the first hurricane to be intentionally flown into by a reconnaissance aircraft . During the morning hours of July 27 , British pilots were training at Bryan Field in Bryan , Texas and were alerted about a hurricane approaching the Galveston area . Upon becoming informed that the planes would need to be flown away from the storm , they criticized this policy . Instead , Colonel Joe Duckworth made a bet with the British pilots that he could fly his AT @-@ 6 Texan trainer directly into the storm . Duckworth requested that Lt. Colonel Ralph O 'Hair , the only navigator at the field , fly into the hurricane with him . Because neither Duckworth nor O 'Hair believed that the headquarters would approve the flight , they decided to proceed without permission . Thus , Duckworth and O 'Hair became the first hurricane hunters . O 'Hair later compared the weather

encountered during the flight to " being tossed about like a stick in a dog 's mouth " . After returning to Bryan Field , Lt. William Jones @-@ Burdick requested to fly into the hurricane with Duckworth , while O 'Hair decided to exit the aircraft .

= = Censorship = =

The hurricane occurred during World War II , with activity from a German U @-@ boat expected in the Gulf of Mexico . As a result , ship reports were silenced . At the time , the Weather Bureau relied primarily on ship and land weather station observations for issue storm warnings . Additionally , advisories had to be cleared through the Weather Bureau office in New Orleans , Louisiana , causing them to be released hours late ; moreover the advisories contained no forecast information , which would have allowed for preparation before the storm struck . The news media after the hurricane was heavily censored by the government due to national security , as information could not be leaked to the Axis powers about the loss of production of war materials . Reportedly , the Federal Bureau of Investigation shut down a telegraph office in La Porte after a telegram was sent containing information about damage from the hurricane . The only news of this storm was published in Texas and Louisiana . After the loss of life in this storm , the Government of the United States has never censored hurricane advisories again .

= = Impact and aftermath = =

In Louisiana , light winds were observed , with gusts of 36 mph (58 km / h) at both Burrwood and Lake Charles . Locally heavy rains were reported in some areas , with a 24 @-@ hour precipitation total of 7 @.@ 65 inches (194 mm) in DeQuincy on July 28 .

The storm brought strong winds to Texas , with gusts up to 132 mph (212 km / h) reported at the cooling towers at the Shell Oil Refinery in Deer Park and the Humble Oil Refinery in Baytown . Four towers were destroyed at the latter , while other damage there reduced production of toluene , which is an ingredient of TNT . Some towers were also toppled at the Shell Oil Refinery in Deer Park . As these were the primary refineries producing aviation fuel for World War II , it was decided that news about this loss of production should be censored . A number of other oil derricks were destroyed throughout Chambers and Jefferson counties . At Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base near Houston , strong winds blew off the top of a hangar , destroyed five planes , and injured at least 22 cadets . Thousands in the Houston were left without telephone and electrical service , which caused all three radio stations in the area to go off air . The nearby Houston Yacht Club also suffered heavy damage . At Point Bolivar , located on the Bolivar Peninsula , nearly all homes were destroyed by the high winds . The high school 's physical education building in La Porte , which was originally a three story building , was reduced to only one floor after windows shattered and the support beams toppled , causing the roof to collapse . At nearby Morgan 's Point , a water tower was knocked over . On Galveston Island , a number of brick businesses , buildings , and churches collapsed .

Heavy rainfall was observed in some areas of eastern Texas , with up to 19 inches (480 mm) in Port Arthur . There , numerous homes were flooded with 6 to 24 inches (150 to 610 mm) of water , which included damage to furnishings , electric motors and automobiles . In downtown Galveston , a number of streets were inundated with rainwater , though flooding damage was relatively minor . Two children 's polio hospitals suffered leaking roofs and water damage , forcing patients to be evacuated by staff and University of Texas Medical Branch students . About 90 percent of all house and buildings in Texas City suffered either water damage or complete destruction , including plant sites producing war materials . However , they were discouraged from going to shelters due to a polio epidemic there . In Galveston Bay , wind @-@ driven waves flooded the western and southern shores . However , northerly winds across the bay resulted in tides being extremely low . On Galveston Island , a storm surge of 6 feet (1 @.@ 8 m) was observed . Offshore , the United States Army Corps of Engineers ' s hopper dredge , Galveston , broke up after being smashed against the north jetty , causing 11 fatalities . The tug Titan began sinking offshore Port Arthur . Three members of the crew drowned after attempting to board a rubber raft , while another person

died before the remainder of the crew reached the shore . Overall , the storm killed 19 people and caused \$ 17 million (1943 USD) in damage to the Houston area .

Following the storm , residents were warned to boil their water and be cautious of potential food contamination due to electrical outages . The War Production Board regional office in Dallas offered relief to the victims of the storm . In La Porte , a makeshift hospital was set up in city hall . At Point Bolivar , where nearly all houses were destroyed , the now @-@ destitute residents were transported by the Galveston chapter of the American Red Cross to Galveston for housing .