

= Hurricane Charlie (1951) =

Hurricane Charlie was the deadliest tropical cyclone of the 1951 Atlantic hurricane season . The third named storm , second hurricane , and second major hurricane of the season , it developed from a tropical wave east of the Lesser Antilles . It moved briskly west @-@ northwest , passing between the islands of Dominica and Guadeloupe . It strengthened to a hurricane in the eastern Caribbean Sea , and it struck Jamaica with winds near Category 3 intensity . It strengthened to a peak intensity of 135 mph (215 km / h) prior to landfall on Quintana Roo , Yucatán Peninsula . It weakened over land , and it re @-@ strengthened over the Gulf of Mexico before it made a final landfall near Tampico .

In its path , Charlie caused more than 250 deaths . The hurricane produced Jamaica 's deadliest natural disaster of the 20th century , causing more than 152 deaths and \$ 50 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 in damages . The hurricane was described as Tampico 's worst tropical cyclone since 1936 , and it caused more than 100 fatalities in the surrounding areas . Many bodies were not recovered after flooding . The hurricane produced peak gusts of 160 mph (260 km / h) at the airport , and its strongest sustained winds were unmeasured in mainland Mexico , suggesting that it may have been a Category 4 hurricane at landfall .

= = Meteorological history = =

On August 12 , a tropical wave organized to a tropical depression about 930 miles (1 @, @ 495 km) east @-@ southeast of the island of Barbados . Operationally , the system was not detected until August 14 , and it was believed to have been an area of low pressure when it moved through the eastern Caribbean . It moved to the west @-@ northwest , and it slowly organized to a minimal tropical storm on August 14 . Although Hurricane hunters reported winds of hurricane force in squalls , the system was discounted as an easterly wave . On August 15 , Tropical Storm Charlie quickly intensified , attaining maximum sustained winds of 75 mph (120 km / h) after passing through the Lesser Antilles . The small center of circulation passed between Dominica and Guadeloupe in the early morning hours .

On August 16 , the hurricane moved steadily west @-@ northwest 140 miles (225 km) south @-@ southwest of San Juan , Puerto Rico . Hurricane Charlie continued to strengthen , and it reached Category 2 status on August 17 as it moved quickly westward across the Caribbean Sea . The cyclone intensified as it made landfall south of Kingston , Jamaica with 110 mph (175 km / h) sustained winds . The city reported peak winds of 110 mph (175 km / h) as the center passed 8 miles (10 km) to the southwest , so Charlie may have been a Category 3 hurricane in Jamaica . On August 18 , the hurricane left the island as a Category 1 hurricane , and it quickly re @-@ intensified over water . It passed south of the Cayman Islands with 105 mph (165 km / h) sustained winds . Grand Cayman reported gusts of 92 mph (150 km / h) . Later , it attained major hurricane status on August 19 . The hurricane peaked at 135 mph (215 km / h) just before hitting near Cozumel during the night , and it weakened as it crossed the Yucatán Peninsula on August 20 .

Upon reaching the Gulf of Mexico , Charlie had weakened to a 105 mph (165 km / h) hurricane . On August 21 , it remained a Category 2 hurricane while crossing the Gulf of Mexico until 18 hours before landfall . On August 22 , Charlie rapidly intensified , and it strengthened to a second peak of 135 mph (215 km / h) off the mainland Mexican coast . Later , Charlie made landfall near Tampico with 125 mph (200 km / h) sustained winds . The strongest winds were believed to have been north of the eye , and were unrecorded . The storm quickly weakened over land , and it dissipated on August 23 in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas .

= = Preparations = =

On August 15 , the Weather Bureau office in San Juan issued hurricane warnings for the eastern Caribbean from Martinique to Antigua , while storm warnings were released for the rest of the Leeward Islands . Later , hurricane warnings were also issued for the northern Leeward Islands ,

and northeast storm warnings were released for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands . In advance of the hurricane , flights ' scheduled departures for the Barbados region were delayed . On August 17 , the Weather Bureau noted that the hurricane would affect Jamaica , though it was not expected to strengthen significantly ; the agency also reported that the probabilities were equal for the cyclone to pass north or south of the island . Later , the cyclone was forecast to pass " over or just south " of the island ; Jamaica was urged to prepare for the cyclone , and the hurricane was expected to strengthen as the forward motion decreased . On August 20 , the cyclone was expected to affect the northern Yucatán Peninsula between Mérida and Campeche , and " extreme caution " was advised for the area .

The hurricane was also expected to re @-@ strengthen prior to its second landfall in Mexico , though the Weather Bureau also noted that there was a chance for the storm to affect Texas . Although the possibility never materialized , the agency expected rain bands and rough seas to affect southern Texas , and small watercraft were urged to remain in ports until the hurricane moved inland . On August 21 , the cyclone was expected to move ashore between Nautla and Tuxpan , though it eventually made landfall further north near Tampico . Local officials expressed concerns about residents in huts and other vulnerable structures . In the Harlingen Valley region of southern Texas , precautionary measures were taken and Red Cross divisions organized a meeting at the local city hall . City departments and facilities were ready for disposal if the cyclone moved closer to the area . The cyclone 's rains were also expected to impact unpicked cotton plants in the region . In advance of the storm , a Coast Guard plane dropped messages from the air to several vessels , advising them to seek shelter . In Tampico , oil industries erected barriers to protect fields , and authorities planned to evacuate residents from the surrounding low @-@ lying areas . Thousands of residents stayed in refugee centers on elevated ground .

= = Impact = =

The cyclone was compact when it moved through the Lesser Antilles , and the strongest winds on land in the eastern Caribbean islands did not exceed 35 mph (55 km / h) . In Jamaica , the hurricane produced heavy rainfall , peaking at 17 inches (430 mm) in Kingston , which caused numerous landslides across eastern sections of the island . Peak gusts were estimated near 125 mph (200 km / h) across the island . A hangar and installations were destroyed at Palisadoes Airport , and the facility received " extensive damage . " Consequently , " At Memphis , Tenn , Chicago & Southern Airline headquarters here reported that its north and southbound Constellation flights were unable to land at Kingston , bypassing the airport there on flights between Chicago and Caracas . " Several ships were sunk or overturned during the storm . Communications and power services were disrupted , suspending information from the island 's interior . The hurricane also cut communications from the island to radio stations in the United States . 70 ? 80 percent of the island 's banana crops were destroyed , in addition to 30 percent of other crops . 70 convicted felons also escaped from a jail when winds blew down walls . Flooding was expected in the island 's mountainous interior because of heavy precipitation . Heavy rains caused rock slides , damaging roads , railroads , and other sources of tourism . In Kingston , electricity was initially restored to essential services , including " hospitals , refrigerating plants , pumping stations and newspaper plants . " Charlie caused around \$ 50 million (1951 USD , \$ 380 million 2005 USD) in crop and property damage , 152 deaths , injured 2 @,@ 000 , and left 25 @,@ 000 homeless .

On the Yucatán Peninsula , Charlie destroyed up to 70 % of the crops , though no loss of life was reported in the area . Unofficially , one person was reportedly killed on the peninsula . Mérida reported winds of 70 mph (110 km / h) . The winds toppled several thatched homes on Cozumel . A wind gust of 160 mph (260 km / h) was measured at the airport near Tampico , though peak gusts in the city did not exceed 110 mph (175 km / h) . The storm was reported to be the worst in Tampico since 1936 . The winds uprooted trees and destroyed telephone poles , and damages to corn crops were believed to exceed \$ 500 @,@ 000 . At least 300 residences were " damaged or destroyed . " Outside the city , Charlie 's heavy rain led to bursting dams and flooded rivers , where upward of 100 people died . In the city , four people died , and property losses were estimated near

\$ 1 @, @ 160 @, @ 000 .

The hurricane 's outer fringes produced swells along the Texas coast , and swimmers were advised to be cautious because of hazardous conditions . The area was also experiencing rough swells and strong winds from an unrelated weather system , which produced peak gusts of 60 mph (95 km / h) . The conditions snarled marine operations in the area , and three fishermen were missing during the squall . On August 23 , Brownsville experienced gusts of 50 mph (80 km / h) when the hurricane struck the coast further south .

= = Aftermath = =

In the wake of this storm , Jamaica formed a new governmental entity known as the Hurricane Housing Organization . In 1956 , this organization merged with the Central Housing Authority to become the Department of Housing .