



PHOTOS BY MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

Living in the aftermath of Helene

ACROSS WESTERN N.C. — Anita Crowder stood in the warm October sun, her face weary, her shoes caked in mud, her blue eyes surveying a place she'd known all her life, but one that now seemed so unfamiliar.

"I buried my daddy two weeks ago," Crowder, 67, said outside the home in Swannanoa her father had shared with his wife, Betty, for more than a half-century. Six days after his funeral, on Sept. 27, the storm had hit and the river had swelled, devouring much in its path, including this small white house where Kenneth Crowder's daughter had spent Thanksgivings and Christmases for as long as she could remember.

"I called him every day. If I didn't call him, he called me," said Anita, whose 87-year-old stepmother waded to safety through the floodwaters with the help of neighbors. "It would have made him sick, seeing everything they worked so hard for washed away."

Now, as she navigated rooms where the water had flipped and mangled furniture, where mud

In North Carolina, life cleaves into the before and whatever comes after

This article is by Brady Dennis, Scott Dance, Dino Grandoni, Gerrit De Vynck and Brianna Sacks



FROM TOP: Mud marks the height of floodwaters, covering a family portrait. Anita Crowder and her partner, Steve Calloway, rummage through a muddy and mildew-riddled house in Swannanoa, N.C., that belonged to her parents.

Cleanup: Misinformation adds to the chaos and confusion. **A6**

Harris in N.C.: It's her second trip to storm-ravaged areas. **A6**

stuck to the walls and sat ankle-deep on the floor, she tried to salvage a few old photos and tools and documents. She thought about how so much had changed so fast — both in her life, and in so many lives across this region.

"Two different eras," she said. "Things will be totally different."

Barely a week after Helene barreled across the South, leaving a trail of suffering and loss hundreds of miles wide in its wake, its true toll has yet to fully come into focus.

The crisis here in Western North Carolina — as well as in parts of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia — remains far from over, and only the first flickers of recovery have begun. At least 229 people have died, a total that seems destined to climb higher as communities dig out from oceans of debris.

While the level of loss varies from community to community, and sometimes from street to street, almost everyone who endured this unprecedented storm agrees on this much:

SEE HELENE ON **A18**

Pager attack part of years-long plot to penetrate a foe

HIT ON HEZBOLLAH EMBOLDENED ISRAEL

Mossad designed devices packed with tiny bombs

BY SOUAD MEKHENNET AND JOBY WARRICK

TEL AVIV — In the initial sales pitch to Hezbollah two years ago, the new line of Apollo pagers seemed precisely suited to the needs of a militia group with a sprawling network of fighters and a hard-earned reputation for paranoia.

The AR924 pager was slightly bulky but rugged, built to survive battlefield conditions. It boasted a waterproof Taiwanese design and an oversized battery that could operate for months without charging. Best of all, there was no risk that the pagers could ever be tracked by Israel's intelligence services. Hezbollah's leaders were so impressed they bought 5,000 of them and began handing them out to mid-level fighters and support personnel in February.

None of the users suspected they were wearing an ingeniously

crafted Israeli bomb. And even after thousands of the devices exploded in Lebanon and Syria, few appreciated the pagers' most sinister feature: a two-step de-encryption procedure that ensured most users would be holding the pager with both hands when it detonated.

As many as 3,000 Hezbollah officers and members — most of them rear-echelon figures — were killed or maimed, along with an unknown number of civilians, according to Israeli, U.S. and Middle Eastern officials, when Israel's Mossad intelligence service triggered the devices remotely on Sept. 17.

As an act of spy craft, it is without parallel, one of the most successful and inventive penetrations of an enemy by an intelligence service in recent history. But key details of the operation — including how it was planned and

SEE HEZBOLLAH ON **A14**

In Lebanon: Israel widens strikes to Tripoli as death toll climbs. **A12**

Deterrence: Setbacks could push Iran toward nuclear weapons. **A13**

Deep beneath Gaza, Hamas built war machine of survival

BY JOBY WARRICK AND LOVEDAY MORRIS

AMMAN, JORDAN — Six months before the Oct. 7 attack, Hamas's top leader in the Gaza Strip was meeting with visiting Palestinian businessmen in the enclave when he made a shocking disclosure. Hamas was planning something big, Yahya Sinwar told his guests.

"There's going to be a surprise," he said, according to one of the participants in the meeting, which has not been previously reported. While offering no details, he intimated that preparations had long been underway in Gaza itself, within Hamas's network of underground fortresses. Of the allies and partners assisting the effort, he mentioned only one.

"God will help us," he said. Sinwar's secret plan would reveal itself on a Jewish Sabbath

morning one year ago as waves of attackers swarmed Israeli villages and military bases, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages. But the nature of Sinwar's preparations — how, exactly, the group armed itself for the assault while simultaneously engineering a sophisticated, multilayered defense against the inevitable Israeli military response — would become clear only gradually, in the weeks and months of heavy fighting that followed.

Evidence accumulated over the past year has brought new clarity to Hamas's operational planning before Oct. 7, revealing how and from where it obtained the means for both the attack itself and a carefully considered resistance

SEE HAMAS ON **A16**

One year later: Four Americans still held hostage by Hamas. **A15**

ELECTION 2024

Fresh chaos delivers election tradition: 'October surprise'

BY MATT VISER AND JOSH DAWSEY

Deadly flooding has cut off power and water in large swaths of the Southeast, and storm damage could hamper voting ahead of the election. A longshoremen strike briefly shut down ports along the East and Gulf Coasts, leading Democrats to panic. Bombs and assassinations have put the Middle East on the brink of a regional war. A judge unsealed a document outlining more details of the Jan. 6 assault.

With just over four weeks before Election Day, the country and the world have been consumed by chaos in ways that inject fresh volatility into a campaign season that has been filled with it, prompting both sides to seek advantage.

For nearly as long as presidential elections have been held, campaigns have lived in fear — or hope

— of late developments that might alter the outcome. The term "October surprise" was coined in 1980 by a Ronald Reagan campaign operative, who warned that President Jimmy Carter would orchestrate a last-minute release of hostages in Iran to help him win the election. (The hostages were not released until after the election and Carter lost, but the warning was a strategic way to dampen the effect of the news if it did occur.)

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast, which limited campaigning in Virginia and New Hampshire and allowed Barack Obama to showcase the powers of the presidency and an image of bipartisanship with by hugging then-Gov. Chris Christie (R-N.J.), a moment Christie struggled to live down within his party.

SEE CAMPAIGN ON **A8**

Butler, Pa: Trump returns to site where gunman tried to kill him. **A3**

In eagle nirvana, avian flu proves devastating

A new threat imperils the national bird's comeback from the brink of extinction

BY MARK JOHNSON AND DEMETRIUS FREEMAN



DEMETRIUS FREEMAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

A bald eagle flies at Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota, where scientists track nests.

INTERNATIONAL FALLS, MINN. — The research boat thumped over the waves on a crisp June morning, spraying William Bowerman as he peered into 136 square miles of lakes and a cerulean sky in Voyageurs National Park.

"This is my favorite day of the year, because I'm here in eagle nirvana," said Bowerman, a bald-eagle researcher who has been coming to these waters for half of his 63 years.

He spoke nostalgically of recent summers when you could scale a 70-foot white pine, peer over the edge of a massive nest and observe healthy brown eaglets. And from that perch, you could see the next eagle nest a mile away, and beyond it a third.

But as Bowerman and his colleagues monitored the status of the park's bald eagles on this perfect morning, they were finding no young birds — just empty nests and the occasional adult.

Seventeen years after the Fish and Wildlife Service removed the bald eagle from the endangered species list, signaling the comeback of an iconic species, a new enemy is stalking our national bird. Not lead from

SEE EAGLES ON **A10**

METRO
Domestic violence rise in Pr. George's epitomized by a mother's shooting.

SPORTS
The Commanders' O-line looked like a weak spot. It's become a strength.



BUSINESS
Inside the bro-ification of Mark Zuckerberg, from dork to an AI visionary.

ARTS & STYLE
Gabriel LaBelle channels Lorne Michaels with "dad energy" in SNL film.



BOOK WORLD
Craig Brown's "Q" is a view of Queen Elizabeth unlike any you've seen.

TRAVEL
Not falling for apples? In this Indiana town, the persimmon reigns.

\$115

SUNDAY COUPON INSERTS

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The Washington Post / Year 147, No. 53996

