

Tuesday, August 1, 1989

Divers search for workers on capsized rig

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Divers fought against time and near-hurricane conditions Monday in hopes of finding nine missing oil rig workers in air pockets on a capsized rig.

"The bunk rooms on these vessels probably have a water and air tight door," Lt. Steve Hardy said. "It should have been secured since the vessel was underway. That would give those inside a limited supply of air. But time is so critical."

The rig, which was leased by Chevron, is actually a self-propelled work barge with jackup legs. It was headed to shore early Monday when it capsized about 20 miles off the Louisiana coast near Morgan City, company spokesman Jonathan Lifa said.

Thirteen people were believed aboard. The Coast Guard originally reported that six had been picked up by fishing boats and a Coast Guard helicopter, but later said it could confirm only four survivors.

Rescue efforts were hampered by 12-foot seas, heavy rains and 60 mph winds from the fringes of Tropical Storm Chantal, Lt. Pat Philbin said. The rig was reported on its side in about 25 feet of water.

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Divers were unable to search the rig because of the storm, he said. The dive boat and a Coast Guard cutter stood nearby, but the bad weather forced helicopters back to shore.

An air bubble trapped in the sealed rooms would be the only oxygen for any survivors, Hardy said, but he did not estimate how long it would last.

"If people panic, oxygen goes real fast. If they stay calm they can make it last a long time," he said.

Three survivors were taken aboard the fishing vessel Spar Royale for a trip to Wine Island Pass, and one person was taken by helicopter to Grand Isle, Hardy said.

No identities were made public and the Coast Guard said none of the four was seriously injured.

The survivor taken to the Coast Guard sta-

tion at Grand Isle suffered minor cuts and slight exposure and was reported asleep most of the morning.

Petty Officer Rich Muller said the rig belonged to Lafayette Lift Boat and was managed by Avis Boug Co. of Folsom. Attempts to reach officials of both companies were unsuccessful.

The Avco 5 rig is leased by Chevron Oil Corp.

The barge had been in 50 to 60 feet of water, working on oil pipes on the seabottom. It was ordered to head to port because of the approaching storm, Lifa said, and probably had gone about 20 miles when the accident occurred.

The rig is about 72-feet long. The legs, which extend 100 feet when it is working, are lifted above the vessel when it is underway, Hardy said.

Number of state banks listed as troubled rises

AUSTIN (AP) — More than a quarter of state-regulated banks are classified as troubled in a report released Monday by the Texas Department of Banking, an increase from 18.6 percent at the same time last year.

The report, based on a rating formula used by banking regulators, said there were 185 problem banks among the 670 state-insured banks on March 31.

The year-ago numbers were 146 problem banks among the 783 state-insured institutions.

The report said the reduction in the number of state-insured banks reflect 51 bank failures, 51 mergers of state into national banks, 17 mergers of state into other state banks and five conversions of state into national banks. Eleven banks were added to state regulation.

Every region of the state experienced an increase in the number of problem banks, with the largest increases in the Austin and Dallas regions, the report said.

The Austin region showed 42 problem banks on March 31, 1988, and 54 a year later. In the Dallas region, the number rose from 50 to 66.

The comparison is based on CAMEL ratings, which assess capital, assets, management, earnings and liquidity. It excludes institutions that have been closed or merged during the year, and it does not include national banks.

Over the year, Texas banks' equity capital increased \$200 million, Banking Commissioner Kenneth W. Littlefield said. However, he said, total assets decreased \$16.9 billion and total deposits declined \$6.1 billion.

At the same time, an apparent \$4.6 billion reduction in problem asset indicators, such as other real estate owned and loans on non-accrual, is misleading, the statement said.

Approximately \$6 billion of this category of assets of the former First Republic banking system is carried as other assets on the books of its successor, NCNB National Bank of Texas, to reflect the FDIC assistance transaction.

Although times still are hard for banks, institutions seem to be working out their problems, said Kay Bruner, administrative assistant at the Banking Department.

"I think we're seeing some improvement," Bruner said.

Prof teaches students in Africa methods of Western music

LUBBOCK (AP) — A Texas Tech University professor is helping African students unaccustomed to written musical symbols venture into the world of Western music.

Don Tanner, a member of Tech's music education faculty, winds up the three-week program at the West Africa Music Conference in Lome, Togo, on Aug. 5.

The conference — designed to teach basic methods of notation and harmonizing in Western music — is the first of its type on the continent, he said.

"Much of their music is passed on orally from one generation to another, so they don't have to write it down," he said in an interview before the trip.

"And there are so many sounds that are used in African music that can't be notated, such as body noises," Tanner said. He then made a noise that resembled a grunted cough. "How do you write that down?"

For hundreds of years — and still predominantly today — Africans who were interested in music received oral instructions from elders in their tribes, Tanner said. He said, however, that an interest in Western techniques is beginning to surface there: African musicians increasingly desire to preserve their music in written form, and they want to know how

to perform songs from other cultures.

In response, a group of officials from several African schools and conservatories planned the conference to be hosted at the West Africa Advanced School of Theology. Tanner and two other Americans — an opera singer and a choral conductor — agreed to participate as instructors.

"We're going to emphasize creativity and improvisation," he said. "This will help them apply Western techniques to the advancement of their own music."

Tanner, working with interpreters where needed, is teaching sessions on notation, harmonizing and performing to about 100 students in a performance hall classroom equipped with an organ, grand piano, synthesizers and African instruments.

"The most difficult aspect will be getting the students to be patient enough to learn the symbol system sufficiently so that they can perform as they are accustomed," he said. "We'll have the problem of them learning to read and not just improvising and doing it by ear."

Pentatonic folk songs, a style familiar in Africa, are used in instruction rather than American songs.

First hurricane of season, Chantal, heads for Texas or Louisiana coast

MIAMI (AP) — Chantal became the first hurricane of the Atlantic season Monday, packing top winds of 75 mph as it pushed north toward the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana, forecasters said.

Hurricane warnings continued in effect from Freeport, Texas, to Morgan City, La.

"It's not going to be a major hurricane, but there will be beach erosion, tides 10 feet above normal in some places and 10 to 15 inches of rain over Mississippi, Louisiana and eastern Texas," said Todd Kimberlain of the National Hurricane Center.

m. CDT, the hurricane's center was near 27.8 degrees north latitude and 92.8 degrees west longitude, or about 165 miles southeast of Galveston.

The storm was moving north-northwest at 9 mph and forecasters expected it to continue to gain strength and follow that northwesterly path into midday Tuesday.

"This should bring the center over the upper Texas or western Louisiana coast tomorrow afternoon or evening," said Bob Sheets, the hurricane center's director.

Sheets said tropical storm force winds extend outward 150 miles to the north and 125 miles to the south of the center. A few tornadoes also were likely over portions of Louisiana and extreme eastern Texas Monday night and Tuesday, he said.

Squalls on the edge of the storm have already dumped heavy rain on New Orleans and forced closure of the 24-mile long causeway across Lake Pontchartrain.

About 2,500 people on Grand Isle, a tiny resort area just off the southeast Louisiana coast were asked to head north to the mainland. Mayor Andy Valence said he feared Louisiana Highway 1 — the only route off the island — would flood.

Churning waters on the storm's fringe hampered efforts to search for seven men feared trapped on a self-propelled moveable oil rig that overturned while being moved south of Morgan City. The Coast Guard flew divers to the rig despite the heavy weather, 10-foot seas and 35 mph winds.

Texas were girding for the storm, trying to determine exactly where the eye would touch land.

"The old bugaboo is where this baby is going to hit," John Jamison, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Galveston, said Monday. "It's tough to go out on a limb."

In advance of the storm, oil companies on Monday were moving hundreds of crews from rigs and platforms in the Gulf.

"We've evacuated everybody," said Conoco Inc. spokesman Michael O'Connor. "Our production is automated. We've set them on timers."

"We're planning for the worst and hoping for the best," said Doug Matthews, city manager of Galveston, an island city of 60,000 just south of Houston.

Chantal, the third named storm of the 1989 Atlantic hurricane season, formed Monday from the season's fourth tropical depression in the south-central Gulf.

Federal courts in South Texas face 'traffic jam' of drug cases

CORPUS CHRISTI (AP) — The four federal courts in South Texas handled 10 percent of the nation's federal drug cases last year, driven by a war on drugs that has pushed the caseload to "the brink of overwhelming," according to one judge.

U.S. District Clerk Jesse Clark of Houston said the federal courts in Corpus Christi, Brownsville, McAllen and Laredo are among the busiest criminal courts in the federal system.

"It's just like a traffic jam — too many cars and too little concrete," Clark told the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. "That's what's happening to us in the Southern District of Texas. Too many cases and too few judges."

Felony criminal filings this year are up 65 percent in the four South Texas federal courts, Clark said. Eighty percent of the cases involve narcotics allegations, he told the *Caller-Times*.

Narcotics seizures and arrests have increased steadily since the creation of Operation Alliance in 1986, when federal agencies began beefing up law enforcement in an effort to stem the flow of illegal drugs coming across the Mexican border.

In Corpus Christi, court officials are struggling with a criminal docket that may double in the space of a year.

"It's teetering on the brink of overwhelming," said U.S. District Judge Hayden W. Head Jr. of Corpus Christi.

To date in the coastal city, federal prosecutors have filed nearly as many 1989 criminal cases as they did

during the entire year of 1988, according to the district clerk's office. The grand jury has issued 304 criminal indictments in 1989 — 252 of them for felony narcotics violations. In 1988, there were 363 indictments in Corpus Christi, including 216 narcotics cases.

"Unless you instruct them to take no prisoners, it's up to the judiciary to punish the guilty and protect the innocent," Clark said.

He advocates adding five more judges in the Southern District of

Texas, an administrative region that covers 43 counties and 11 federal district courts.

While judges spend time on criminal pleas and trials, Clark said, their civil dockets cry for attention.

Head patted a 4-inch-thick file on his desk. It was a 3-year-old civil-rights dispute awaiting his attention. He estimated it would take two days to study the file and rule on the legal issues involved in the dispute.

Police break up cocaine ring with arrest of nine suspects

DALLAS (AP) — A North Texas cocaine ring, employing more than 25 people and planning drug distribution to several U.S. cities, was broken up with the weekend arrests of nine suspects in Los Angeles, federal officials said.

The ringleader and eight other suspects were found with 101 kilograms of cocaine, the officials said Sunday.

The ringleader was arrested as he met with two men believed to be the ring's California-based suppliers, said Phillip Jordan, special agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Dallas district office.

Investigators said the ring received about 150 kilograms of co-

North Texas, Chicago, Phoenix and New York.

The cocaine confiscated Friday had a wholesale value of more than \$1.7 million, Jordan told the *Dallas Morning News*.

Los Angeles police arrested nine people connected with the ring late Friday, Jordan said. Three Dallas-area residents believed to be employees of Ortega's operation were arrested in Texas late Saturday and early Sunday, he said.

All those arrested were to be arraigned in Dallas or Los Angeles today. All were to be charged with distribution of cocaine.

New club offers outlet for Aggies with children

Aggies With Kids, a new club at Texas A&M, will give students who are parents the opportunity to meet with other students in the same situation.

Nancy Thomas, coordinator of Off Campus Aggies and adviser for AWK, said the club was created by Students Over Traditional Age to serve as a support group for A&M students with children.

"It is very difficult for a parent to attend college while meeting the responsibilities necessary to take care of children at the same time," Thomas said. "That is why we felt that a group like AWK was necessary."

Thomas said AWK meetings will serve as an outlet for students who are parents.

"AWK meetings will give its members the opportunity to discuss problems as well as the opportunity to give suggestions to one another," she said. "In addition to the support group, we also will have a baby-sitting program where parents can exchange baby-sitting favors."

Thomas said faculty and staff members are encouraged to join AWK.

First European-bound beef since ban by EEC ready to leave Houston

HOUSTON (AP) — A container of Texas hormone-free beef was prepared Monday for shipment to England, the first domestic beef bound for Europe since the European Economic Community embargoed its sale there Jan. 1.

"From the onset, we at the Texas Department of Agriculture felt that more was at stake than steak, and a whole lot more was at stake than growth hormones," Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower said.

He appeared at a news conference at the Port of Houston, where 40,000 pounds of beef, worth \$100,000, was being loaded in a refrigerated container onto the Nedlloyd Hudson.

The shipment was scheduled to depart early Tuesday and arrive in Liverpool by Aug. 20.

European countries banned imports of hormone-treated beef because of health concerns over the

growth stimulant. The action cut off a \$100 million market to U.S. cattle producers.

The United States claimed Europe was using the hormone issue as a way to restrain trade and retaliated by setting \$100 million in higher tariffs on a variety of European products.

Since then, Hightower has tried to export hormone-free beef from Texas. His effort sometimes met resistance from federal trade officials who said Hightower was undermining their negotiations with European countries.

"This shipment is pretty much the test case," Hightower said of the export plan, which he thinks will find a new market for hard-pressed Texas ranchers.

The first shipment of the hormone-free beef is being processed by Cox Packing Co. in Devine, near San Antonio, and sent to TSW Meats Ltd. of Liverpool.

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