

Six Perish As Heavy Floods Hit Maryland

Fireman Drowns, 5 Die When Wall Of Water Knocks 2 Cars Off Road

Six Montgomery County residents lost their lives yesterday as heavy rains sent Maryland streams out of their banks, knocking out bridges and piling up debris on secondary routes in both the Rock Creek and Seneca Creek watersheds.

The Rockville Fire Department counted among the casualties its first loss of life in the line of duty since its organization in 1921.

The victim was Elwood H. Smith, 32, of 1915 Stanley ave., Rockville, drowned when flood waters disrupted a human chain of firemen in rescue operations at the Viers Mill rd. entrance to Parklawn Cemetery.

The five other area deaths occurred when a wall of water of Seneco Creek swept two cars off Brink rd. about 4 miles north of Gaithersburg. The victims:

Harold Plummer, 22, of Route 3, Gaithersburg; Mrs. Charles

Crash Kills 3 Boys, All Traffic Offenders

Three teen-agers convicted of traffic violations in the past were killed when their car crashed into an abutment near Ferndale, Md. Page A3.

H. Stuart, 36-year-old mother of four; John Henry Gray, 32; Leonard Eugene Beckwith, 22, and Anne Bailey, 32, all of Germantown, Md.

Smith lost his life about 3:30 a. m. after participating in the rescue of two men. The men were in one of two cars that had been swamped about 100 feet downstream from the Rockville bridge over Rock Creek. Albrej Jenkins of Frederick and his passenger, John F. Watkins of 1203 Crawford dr., Rockville, were pulled safely from one of the cars.

The human chain of about 12 rescuers then formed to investigate the second car nearby. Its driver had escaped, but the firemen were unaware of it.

As the men held on to a line and inched forward into swirling knee-deep water, one stumbled, throwing six into the current. William Coleman, 20, and William Lowrey, 36, were pulled back by those on higher ground. See WEATHER, Page B1, Col. 7

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SWIRLING WATER COVERS MILITARY ROAD AND BEACH DRIVE AFTER HEAVY RAIN MAKES ROCK CREEK RESEMBLE GREAT FALLS

By Wally McNamee, Staff Photographer

WEATHER—From P. 1

Nearby Maryland Floods Take 6 Lives

ground. Alfred E. Johnson, 37, of 1535 Brent rd., Rockville; Eugene Helbert, 27, and Smith, were caught in the current. Only Johnson had the line around his waist.

Saves Two, Misses One

He managed to grab both Helbert and Wood, but was unable to reach Smith. Smith's body was recovered five hours later 75 yards from the scene.

The men yesterday had high praise for Johnson, a seven-year veteran of the Montgomery County Police Department, and a volunteer fireman for about two years. Helbert, rubbing a large shoulder bruise, indicating the spot the policeman grabbed and managed to hold so tenaciously.

"That was as close as I ever want to come to dying," he said.

The drowned man, employed as a meat department supervisor in the Gaithersburg Safeway store, is survived by his wife, Grace, and their two small children. Johnson's police duties include his current stint as radio dispatcher at Rockville.

Others Are Rescued

Smith's death climaxed an evening of frenzied activity for the Rockville squad. Previously they hauled to safety four motorists whose cars were swept off Route 210 at Seneca Creek just above Gaithersburg. Two were taken from a car top, and two from trees in which they had taken refuge.

A third car was successfully evacuated by its occupants before the raging waters engulfed it near the scene of the five deaths.

Police said both cars in which the doomed people rode were swept 100 yards off the roadway and one was overturned. Two bodies were recovered in one of the cars, but the other three were swept out and caught in underbrush at points within a quarter of a mile downstream.

Friends and relatives told authorities the two parties were moving, one behind the other, south on Brink rd. after an outing. The Gaithersburg Fire Department removed all the bodies to the Snowden funeral home in Rockville.

The flood enlarged placid Seneca Creek to a torrent 75 yards wide and 12 feet above its normal channel depth to a crest which covered Brink rd. with about five feet of cascading water.

Bridges Knocked Out

Knocked-out bridges rendered Rt. 420 impassable near Goshen and closed the intersection of Davis Mill and Blunt rds. Washouts in the county closed, pending major repair, Snell's Bridge rd., Tucker lane, and Mink Hollow. Haviland Mill, Gold Mine and Jones Mills, highway officials reported.

The following Rock Creek highways were closed throughout the park most of yesterday, but reopened to traffic as the waters receded last night: Beach dr., from the Zoo northward; Waterside, Sherrill and Morrow drs.; Military and Park rds., and Piney Branch pkwy. Twenty-fourth st. also was closed to traffic at Calvert st. nw. for several hours.

Motorists reported several narrow escapes as the normally creek went suddenly berserk. Among them was Howard M. Johnson, 60, of 714 Erie ave., Takoma Park.

Johnson said he was driving homeward through slowly rising roadway water which drowned his engine in the vicinity of West Beach and Wise drives in the upper park.

Climbed to the Hood

"When it got up to the floorboards, I climbed out on the hood," he said. "When it started coming over the hood, I took off my shoes and the rest of my clothes. I balled them up around the shoes and threw the bundle as far as I could toward dry land. Then I jumped in in my underwear and half-swam, half waded to my clothes."

When reporters encountered Johnson, he was fully dressed but carrying his dripping underwear.

Bernard Frank, vice president of the Rock Creek Watershed Association, termed the flood the worst in the area's history in terms of the small amount of rain that fell.

Frank said rain gauges in the area recorded only 2.25 inches through the night, yet the run-off brought creek waters to within six inches of the East-West highway.

Worst flood the watershed has experienced since records have been kept, Frank said, occurred in 1889. On Aug. 24, 1933, however, it took an 8½-inch rainfall to produce flood conditions only slightly worse than yesterday's, he explained. Last flood to approximate yesterday's, Frank recalled, occurred Nov. 22, 1952, after a 5.25-inch rainfall.

Blames Denuding of Land

Frank blamed the rapid development of the area which denuded the land on which the watershed depends to soak up excessive rainfall, and a lack of flood plan zoning which would reserve low-lying portions of the watershed for park areas rather than for residential and other building.

"Today's flooding is peanuts," Frank warned, "compared to those we can expect unless some cognizance is taken of the Association's program for flood control."

The Montgomery County picture was only part of a Maryland flood situation which took heavy toll throughout the state in human lives and property. About 6½ inches of rain dumped its overload on drainage facilities in the vicinity of Hagerstown and surrounding communities were hard-hit.

In adjoining Prince Georges County, police were forced to close a portion of two-way U. S. Rt. 1 at Laurel out of deference to the rampaging Patuxent which also blocked for a period Rt. 602, Ft. Meade's main access road. The water at one point closed the bridge to Laurel's race track and overflowed to a depth of nearly a foot the track's parking lot.

13 Dead in Maryland

In all, Maryland counted 13 deaths, more than half of them in traffic crashes blameable on the storm. The Patuxent River went 25 feet above normal, marooning some 500 persons temporarily at Daniels, near Ellicott City. Little Antietam Creek also was up. A crew of National Park Service men battled all night to preserve newly-restored Antietam Bridge at Sharpsburg.

The Baltimore & Ohio and the Western Maryland Railway reported numerous washouts and schedule delays. The B&O was forced to turn back two trains bound for Charles Town (W. Va.) race track because of high waters.

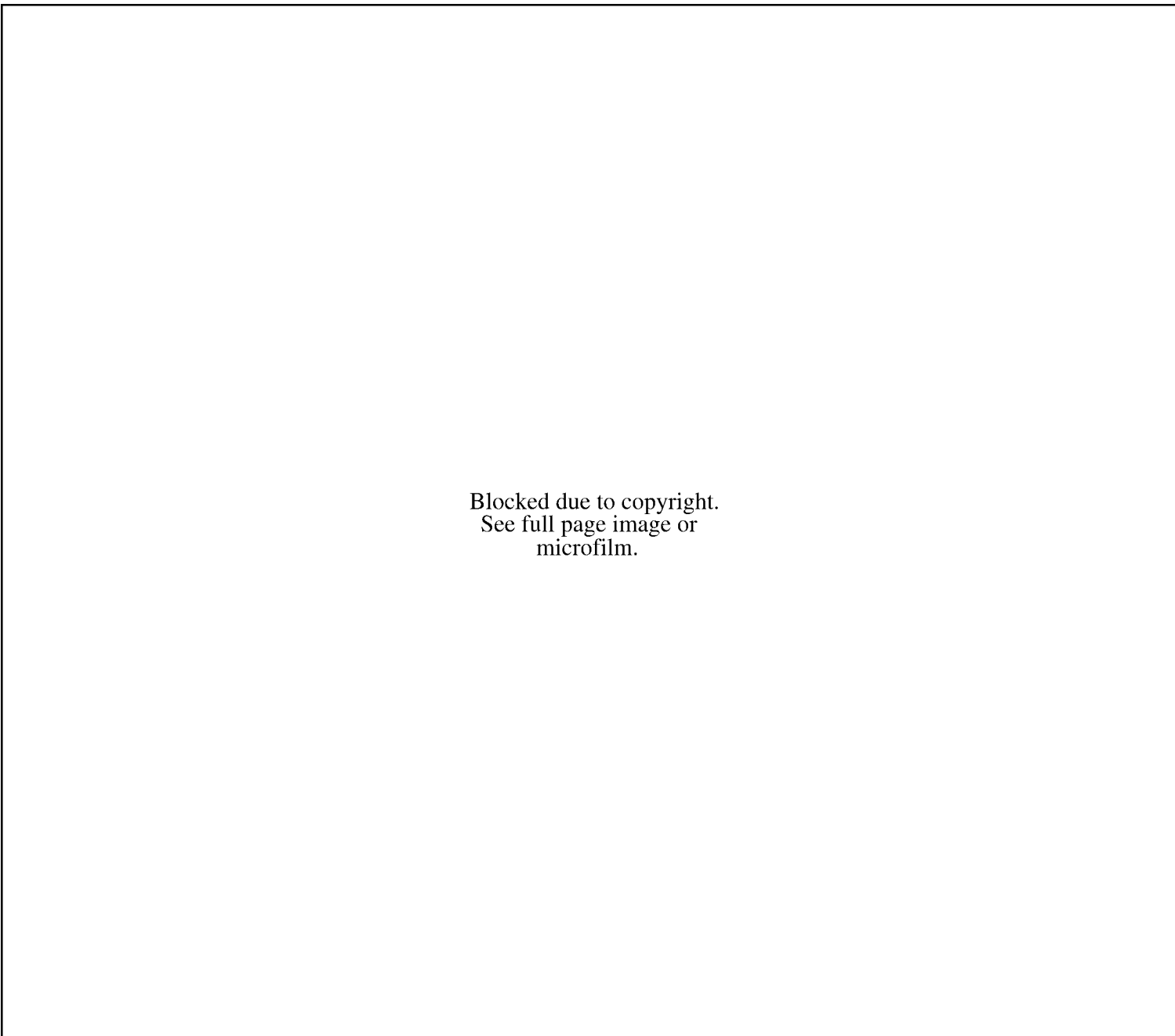
To the south, Falls Church mopped up its flooded basements and flushed down its muddied highways in the wake of heavy rains which made their effects felt hours earlier.

Between 8:30 p. m. and midnight Friday, Fairfax Fire Departments were called on to pump out nearly two score basements, a majority of them in the Jefferson Village and Pimmit Hills sections. Two bridges were washed out by flooded Pimmit Run on Westmoreland rd. and another at Harper's Bottom on Route 193.

Virginia Boy Drowned

Virginia attributed at least one drowning directly to the storm, which developed tornado proportions near Richmond. Five-year-old Thomas Morton lost his footing on a makeshift Charlottesville bridge and slipped to his death in the swollen creek which cuts through the center of the city.

The District itself took physical note of the torrential rains—aside from swollen Rock Creek—in the form of a two-foot rise in the Potomac River level. Prevalence of debris in the river forced removal of the Capital Power Boat Association races to the Washington Channel yesterday afternoon. Large trees and small sheds, collected by the Potomac's overflowing upstream tributaries, were deemed too much of a hazard.



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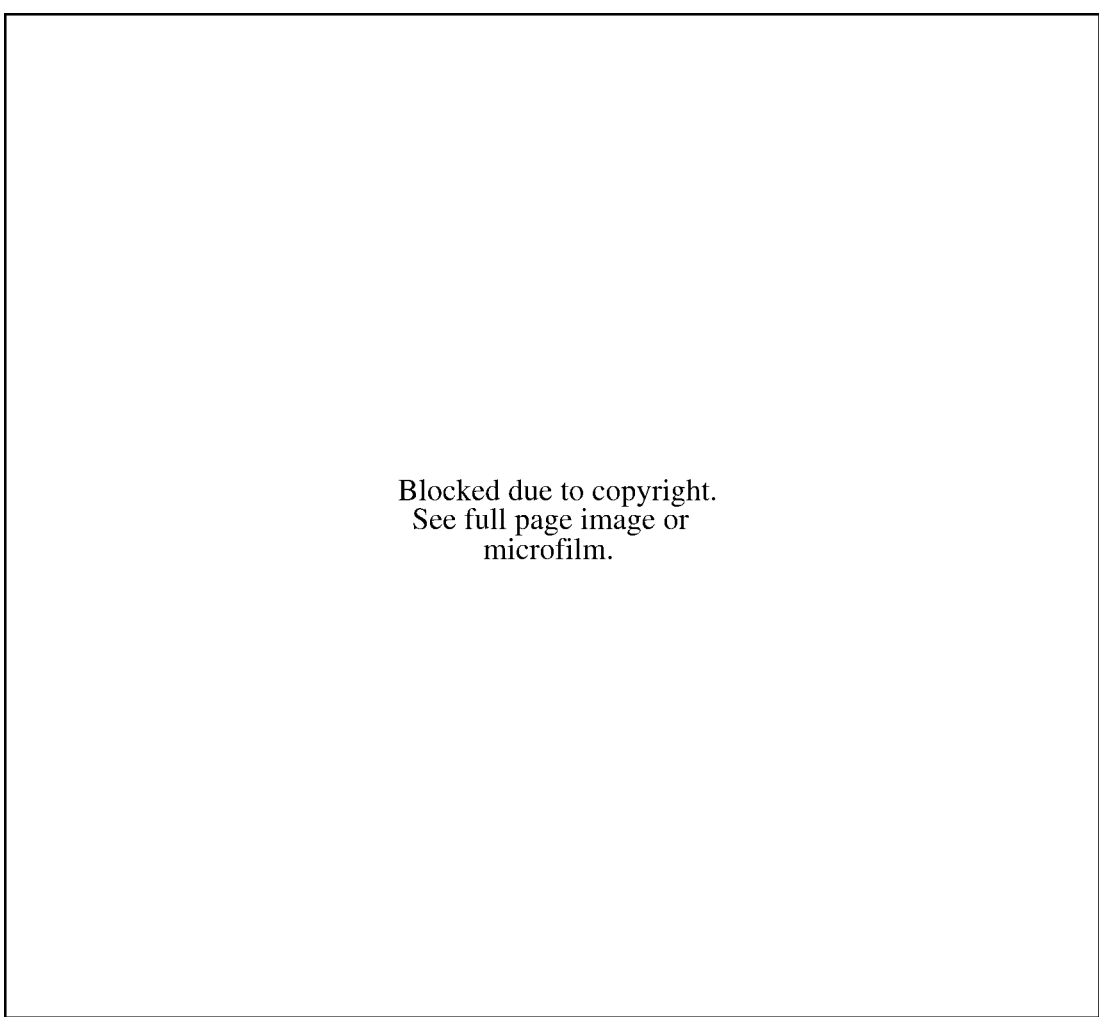
By Norman Driscoll, Staff Photographer
In a setting suggestive of a dank swamp (above), an automobile lies nearly submerged in Rock Creek near Parkside and West Beach drives.

Photo by Walter H. Hershey

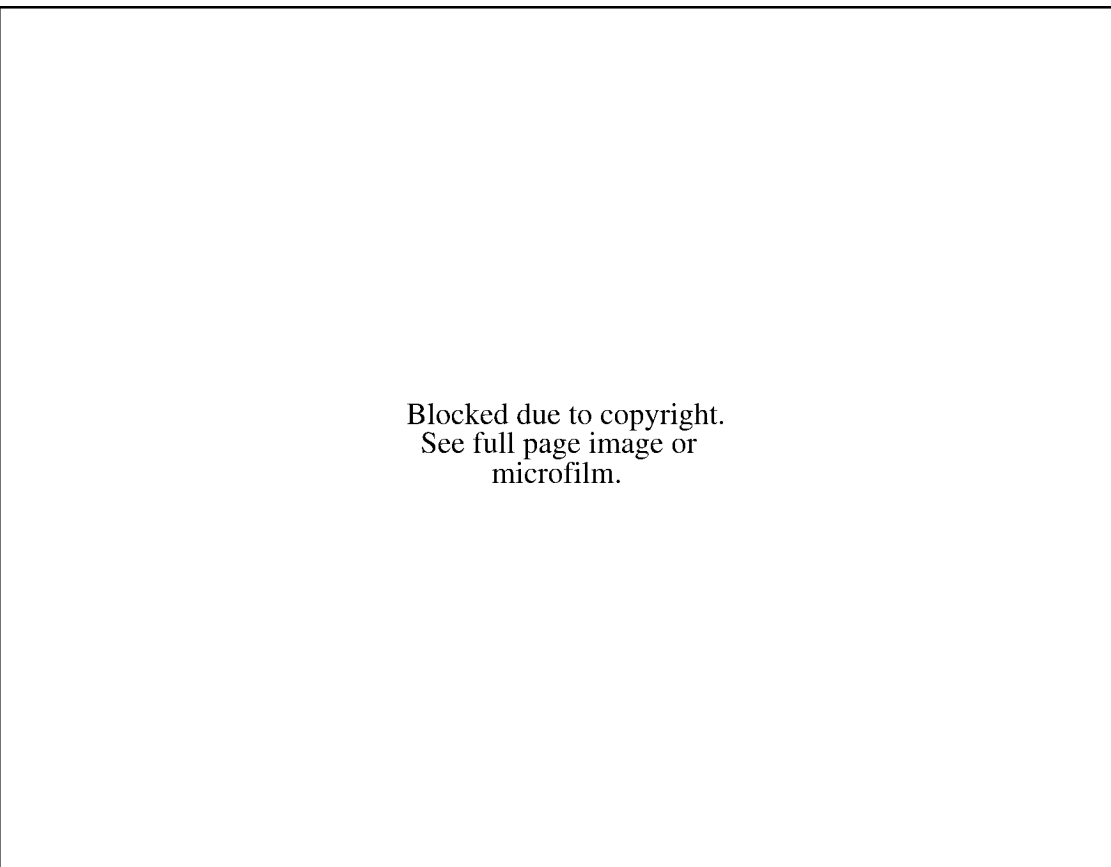
This was the scene (right) yesterday about four miles north of Gaithersburg after five persons lost their lives when a wall of water from Seneca Creek swept two cars off Brink rd.



ALFRED E. JOHNSON
... received high praise



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ELWOOD H. SMITH
... dies in line of duty
Photo by Martin Best.

Rescue workers are shown in rowboat after recovering the body of Elwood H. Smith, 32, who lost his life after participating in the dramatic rescue of two persons about 100 feet downstream from the Rockville Bridge on Viers Mill rd.