AFTER HURRICANE FRAN

Hunt: 'One of the worst'

Surge carries 3 Marines off highway; 1 dead

By MISTI C. LEE

Just before midnight, after the height of the storm had passed, three Marines headed toward the high-rise bridge leading into North Topsail Beach were swept off N.C. 210 into a raging sound by a wall of water.

The three tried to hold onto each other in the water, but two were carried away. At the time, authorities assumed they drowned.

The other man made it off the island and walked about a half mile to Dixon Middle School, where town and emergency officials had moved for the hurricane.

"He was panicky and wet," North Topsail Beach Rescue Chief Scott Grandgeard said.

Shortly afterwards, one of the other two Marines showed. Emergency workers spotted him clinging to the branches of a tree in about six feet of water around 7:30 a.m. He had been hanging about nine hours. Rescue workers retrieved him by boat, North Topsail Beach Mayor Marty Beatic said.

The other Marine's body was found in the marsh before noon Friday. A Pedro helicopter from Cherry Point air station recovered his body. He had apparently drowned.

Military officials have not released the men's names.

The blue Ford Mustang the group had been riding in was found about 20 feet from the road in a ditch between the ocean and sound, Chief Grandgeard said. On Friday afternoon, the car was covered in sand and muck.

"We found the car when the water went down enough to see the car," Chief Grandgeard said. "I was standing on the hood and my feet were ankle deep."

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With a crash, steeple topples into history

By VICTORIA CHERRIE

From the foyer of Carolina Apartments, 83-year-old William Lloyd heard a crash Thursday night while watching Fran's winds spew shards of glass down Market Street.

It wasn't until early Friday morning that he learned the sound had heard altered Wilmington's skyline.

Hurricane Fran's force toppled the 197-foot steeple at First Baptist Church just weeks after it was repaired from Hurricane Bertha.

Friday morning, thousands of red bricks, crushed beneath wooden beams

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Staff photo / TED A. FRICK

Staff photo / DONA ALLEN

The power of the storm: A gaping hole (above) and debris-strewn Market Street testify to Fran's strength. The steeple on the First Baptist Church in Wilmington had stood for 137 years. At left, neighbors stand on Anne Bannerman's porch in the Burgaw Creek community, because her house had the least amount of water in it. They were being ferried to dry land on N.C. 53.

Officials survey storm's swath

By KIRSTEN D. MITCHELL
Raleigh Bureau Chief

RALEIGH — Gov. Jim Hunt joined state and federal emergency management officials Friday in surveying by helicopter eastern North Carolina's patchwork quilt frayed and tattered by Hurricane Fran's forceful wind and furious rain.

"Based on what I have seen, the breadth of the storm ... makes it one of the worst storms and coastal storms," the governor said in Raleigh. Fran hit land near Kure Beach where Fran generated storms Thursday night, claiming 12 lives.

"I've heard as high as 31, but that's not confirmed," said Mark Van Sciver, a spokesman for the State Emergency Response Team.

The storm also left more than 1.5 million people, including 625,000 CP&L customers, without power.

President Clinton, meanwhile, declared 10 counties federal disaster area, setting into motion the flow of federal disaster assistance to storm victims.

The counties are Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Robeson and Sampson.

"We're looking to go to work on that," said Billy Ray Cameron, the state director of emergency management.

Emergency management officials estimated that it could be a day or two or five days before electricity is restored statewide.

"There will be isolated areas in the rural counties where it could take weeks," Mr. Cameron said.

Damage estimates could take days as officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency move in cards through the storm wreck.

Fran packed a punch on the coast and continued inland, leaving Raleigh looking like a war zone.

FEMA director James Lee Witt said help is on the way for victims.

"The best thing they can do is be patient," he said. "We will be there."

After touring by helicopter Brunswick, Pender and New Hanover county beaches, where dozens of homes were reduced to splintering homes, the governor suggested that some coastal areas should not be allowed to be rebuilt.

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Storm brings memories — old and new

By CELIA RIVENBARK and MAILE CARPENTER
Staff Writers

Charlie and Lura Lechel don't know the man who brought them huge cups of hot coffee as they stood in front of the spaghetti remnants of their mobile home.

"Just wanted to help," the man said, handing over the coffee and walking away.

Mr. Lechel numbly drank his coffee and shivered between smiling and tearing up.

Of the four mobile homes surrounding the Lechels' 15-year-old mobile home on peaceful Pedro Point Road in the Myrtle Grove community were also destroyed. Family photos, Christmas lights and a grinning Frosty the Snowman were scattered across the yards with couches, chairs and tufts of yellow insulation.

The Lechels had stayed at the Super 8 Motel in Wilmington, knowing that when they left Thursday afternoon, they might not have a home when they came back.

They had been lucky with Bertha, but even as Charlie Lechel looked in his rearview mirror and saw surging rolling ahead, he thought everything would slip away.

They took the essentials: family photo albums and "some videotapes of the grandkids, the kind of stuff you can't replace," said Charlie.

"I came this morning at daybreak," he said, slowly. "I left my wife at the motel. I didn't want her to see this until I'd seen it."

Bertha had nibbled at the undermining of the mobile homes on Pedro Point Road, but Fran had polished them off, leaving the remains aside like the bones from a fish.

Farther down this narrow, picturesque road which winds down to the Intracoastal Waterway from Monkey Junction, the mobile homes share a million-dollar view with pricey new homes across the street.

Or they did until Fran visited.

"Three-hundred-sixty-four days a year, it's beautiful out here," said Charlie with a wry smile.

Across town, the mood was almost giddy at The Pantry at Market Avenue and 17th Street. Perhaps because it is on the "hospital grid," the convenience store had electricity, working gas pumps and plenty of coffee.

Out-of-state customers loaded with bottled water, ice, batteries, canned vegetables, but it was short on D-cell batteries and some other supplies, said manager Jill Fenney, who stayed in the store with about 12 others during the storm. They planned to open at 2 p.m. Friday.

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Staff photo / DONA ALLEN

Matt Woods (left) and Jason Kane survey damage at the Scotts Hill Marina on Friday. Boats were strewn across roads and yards. **More on boat damage, Page 5B.**

As storm roars through, a few stores stay open

By JOSIAH CANTWELL
Business Editor

Holly Mandela and John Ballard didn't let a little thing like Hurricane Fran close S-E Food Mart #1, the Exxon station and convenience store at Market Street and Kerr Avenue.

They stayed open until about midnight Thursday, serving customers who battled shrieking winds and stinging rain to get beer, cigarettes and snack foods.

"We had people lined up in here last night," Ms. Mandela said, despite water that covered the floor in one corner.

The gas pumps went with the power at about 6 p.m., and the pair tallied sales by hand.

They were back at work and doing a thriving business Friday morning, although the gas pumps were still useless and the tally sheet was getting longer.

Any store open Friday did a good business. Only a handful of gas stations actually were closed Friday morning, though some were making plans to open.

The Harris Teeter at South College Road and Wilshire Boulevard had bottled water, ice, batteries, canned goods and fresh vegetables, but it was short on D-cell batteries and some other supplies, said manager Jill Fenney, who stayed in the store with about 12 others during the storm. They planned to open at 2 p.m. Friday.

Most Wilmington businesses were closed and dark. Some pulled trucks in front of their large glass windows.

Lowe's was open without power and let customers individually to buy lumber, post-storm items chain saws, plywood lumber.

A line of 200 people stretched in the parking for one thing.

"This is the generator line," said Jim Powell of Carolina Beach, who rode out the storm with his wife and one child in Town. He's still waiting to get his repaired after Hurricane Bertha.

Lowe's was selling 5,000-watt generators for $499, and Sam's Club planned to open as soon as they could get a delivery.

Lowe's sold one shipment Friday morning and expected another shipment later in the afternoon. Although the chain's supply of all the generators Dorothius can procure, store manager Lee McConnell was sure he could meet demand, because the storm caused damage in many of the chain's markets.

He did expect to get enough batteries, flashlights and other staples to meet demand, although he was out of some of those items Friday morning.

Lowe's employees were preparing Friday morning to move storm-related merchandise to a makeshift sales area in the parking lot, because the hurricane tore off the

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AFTER HURRICANE FRAN

Stores

Continued from page 1B

feet of the store's metal roof. Yesterday, workers scrambled to get the power inner workings of cameras, and store employees were cleaning up and trying to clear the floor of ankle-deep water.

Manager Nancy Anderson estimated the store lost $1.5 million in merchandise to water and wind damage, including most of its computers, televisions and other electronic equipment. The bill for the damage totaled $2.5 million.

"Down College Road in front of the Best Products store, Donnie Crosby of Greensboro was selling Multiquip generators out of the back of a rented truck for much higher prices: a 2,300-watt model for $1,295, a 6,000-watt generator for $2,645.

"He is selling them at the list price of The manufacturer," he said. Chris Gérard, a sales representative for Multiquip in Carson, Ga., confirmed that.

Local officials are worried about price-gouging by outsiders.

Jackie Oakes, a spokesman for Carolina Beach, said the county Emergency Operations Center received a fax from a Raleigh hotel offering to rent a room for one to two area for 24 cents a mile.

Wilmington officials set up a temporary office to issue business licenses to people from outside the city. But Mayor Don Betz said the city has not checked out the businesses, and people should be cautious when buying supplies from them.

Staff Writer Bettie Fennell contributed to this report.

Hunt

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"I think that is a possibility," he said. "But we have to see what crops they have under the current law."

Federal officials say there will be little help in rebuilding the beaches.

"We don't have any emergency authority," said former U.S. Rep. Martin Lancaster, assistant secretary for civil works for the Army.

"We can only do projects that have been authorized by Congress."

Gov. Hunt also said federal aid of crop damage after severe storms should be upgraded.

"You have to have a 30 percent loss to make a claim," he said.

"As a farmer myself, it's not satisfactory. We've got to totally redo federal agriculture assistance."

By Thursday afternoon, 1,500 National Guardsmen had been deployed to provide water, security and emergency generators to storm victims.

Fran ripped roofs off several hog and poultry houses, but there was apparently no severe environmental damage.

"I did not see a single case of lagoons overflowing," Gov. Hunt said.

"They were right up there at the top. We're going to need a lot of days like we have today — sunny hot and windy."

Staff photo / KEN BLEVINS

Trailer homes lie scattered on Topsail Island on Friday after Hurricane Fran devastated the North Carolina coast.

Staff photo / TYLER BRAUN

A car lies partly buried in Carolina Beach. At right, Drew and Vickie McDaniel ride their bicycles Friday past a home that was knocked 200 feet from its foundation into Canal Drive.

DIDN'T WE JUST DO THIS?

Storm has area talking trash again

By PHILIP HERVEY
Staff Writer

This has got to be getting old.

The legacy of Hurricane Bertha had dwindled this week to a few stumps and piles of brown branches on the side of the road. But Hurricane Fran blasted ashore a mere weeks on the road picking up and tracking away the debris as residents and workers were then over the time it took to do the tedious work.

Then came Hurricane Fran.

Bertha may have weeded out some old trees and fragile limbs. But it was clear Friday that Fran, which packed a more powerful punch, left behind tree-filled neighborhoods.

"The week before last, they got Bertha's debris. Now we've at it again," Shelton Stanley said. He was working with his son, Steve, cutting limbs that fell from an old pecan tree behind his house in Wilmington's Carolina Heights neighborhood.

The city and county have extended their contracts with D&J Enterprises, an Alabama company hired to pick up Bertha's debris. About 30 workers from Charleston, S.C., are in town to lend a hand.

Friday, officials weren't thinking about the mess in people's yards. Rather, the focus was on clearing the roads and restoring electricity.

"We're trying to get it out of the road," said Ed Faro, director of public services and facilities.

The county said crews could start picking up roadside debris this morning. Mr. Faro said don't expect that to start in the city until early next week.

A tour of the area indicated widespread tree damage.

Bertha may have cleaned out the old or dead limbs, but Fran knocked down numerous trees that will be more difficult to pick up.

"There's a lot more than last time," said Ray Church, the county director of environmental management. "There's no estimate yet, but just the areas I have seen, there's probably three to four times more than last time. A lot more huge trees are down than last time."

Mr. Church asked that people be patient with workers.

He estimated 35,000 tons of debris was picked up after Bertha. Multiply that by three or four to get an idea of the job ahead, he said.

People are asked to do as they did after Bertha.

Debris should be placed by the curbside in two piles: a pile of vegetation and another of other hurricane-related debris, such as shingles and metal.

Keep the piles out of the street, he said. Then, the city will use the same grid pickup schedule followed after Bertha, meaning the highest-traveled streets first.

Mr. Faro wasn't sure how another hurricane would affect morale of the cleanup crews. "Adrenaline is flowing. It's hard to say," he said.

The county received complaints during the Bertha cleanup about the speed and thoroughness of the cleanup crews. But Mr. Church said people need to expect more of the same because picking up so much debris is messy work.

"There will be damage to the area where they put the debris out — tire tracks, dead grass," he said. "It's just one of those things that happens. You can't do this amount of cleanup without doing damage."

GETTING THROUGH THE AFTERMATH

ISLAND ACCESS

New Hanover County
Carolina Beach - Closed
Wrightsville Beach - Closed

Brunswick County
Caswell Beach - Open
Holden Beach - Open
Long Beach - Open
Oak Island - Open
Ocean Isle Beach - Open
Sunset Beach - Open
Yaupon Beach - Open

Pender County
Topsail Island - Closed

CURFEWS

Governments in areas heavily hit by Fran have instituted curfews to discourage people from leaving their homes at night.

New Hanover County — From 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. **Wilmington** and **New Hanover County** residents are asked to stay in their homes except for emergencies or to get to and from work.

New Hanover beaches — A 24-hour curfew has been put in place for New Hanover County beach communities including Wrightsville, Carolina and Kure beaches. Residents who stayed on the islands through the storm should stay on their own property until further notice.

Brunswick - No curfews

Pender - A dusk-through-dawn curfew is in place countywide until futher notice.

Burgaw — 9 p.m to 6 a.m. curfew

Staff photo / TYLER BRAUN

Carolina Beach police patrol the boardwalk area Friday afternoon. Fran's surge piled sand window deep in some businesses.

SHELTERS

Emergency officials said shelters that are open would remain open as long as they're needed.

New Hanover County — Laney High School in Chase and open for Trask Middle School, 2960 N. College Road; Noble Middle School, 6520 Market St.; and Johnson Elementary School, 1100 McRae St.

Pender County - Pender High School in Burgaw and Topsail Elementary School on U.S. 17 at Hampstead are open.

Brunswick - All shelters are closed

Columbus - All shelters are closed

FOOD SITES

Red Cross kitchens will begin feeding people today at Long Leaf Mall and the First Baptist Church Activity Center on Independence Boulevard in Wilmington. Other Red Cross feeding stations will be set up after volunteers arrive from other areas.

The Salvation Army is using mobile units to provide food in areas hit hardest by the storm. Locations: Wrightsville Beach Police Department; Wilmington city annex, Fifth Avenue and Chestnut Street; Carolina Beach Town Hall; Kure Beach Town Hall; a fourth site, not yet to be determined. To donate to that effort, call (800) 695-6463.

DEBRIS

In Wilmington, storm debris should be placed in the curb-side area, behind the curb, for collection. Material should not be placed in the street. Debris should be separated, one pile for vegetation, and one for anything else.

A learning ban has been initiated in Wilmington and New Hanover County.

New Hanover officials suggest that county residents pile storm debris separate from other trash and take it to the landfill on U.S. 421 North. The landfill will be open today and Sunday.

INSURANCE CLAIMS

- Contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.
- Prepare an inventory of damages; take pictures if possible.
- Make temporary repairs to prevent further damage; keep receipts.
- Do not make permanent repairs
- Anyone who experienced storm damage can call (800) 462-9029 to register for help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Insurance companies provided these contact numbers:

Ti F Hartford - (800) 243-5860
Travelers automobile and home - (800) 252-4633
Travelers business - (800) 842-8496
Aetna - (800) 238-6225
USAA - (800) 531-8222
Allstate - (800) 255-9125
State Farm - (800) 732-5246

AIRPORT

All three airlines — Midway Express, USAir and ASA The Delta Connection — resumed normal flight schedules Friday afternoon.

BOAT TRAFFIC

The Cape Fear River entry was closed, but boat traffic was allowed on the rest of the river during daylight hours, the Coast Guard said. The NOAA vessel Whiting, docked in downtown Wilmington, will survey the Cape Fear River channel today to determine, whether the storm shifted shoals, destroyed markers or left other navigation obstructions, said spokesman Ginger Gerne.

POST-STORM NOTES

Don't eat food that was opened or damaged in any way by the storm.

Use only bottled water until officials declare water systems safe.

Avoid loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately.

Check for gas leaks. If you hear hissing or smell gas, turn off the main valve and call the gas company.

Beware of snakes, insects and animals driven to higher ground by flood waters.

A four-way stop is required at any intersection where the traffic lights aren't working.