Quake, Tsunami Kill 32 in Tohoku, Hokkaido

69 Still Missing, Feared Dead; Akita Suffers Most Casualties

A killer earthquake that registered 7.7 on the Richter scale hit northern Japan Thursday, touching off tsunami (tidal waves) that caused the worst tsunami-related casualties since those caused by a 1960 earthquake in Chile.

The National Police Agency said that as of 10 p.m., the death toll stood at 32 including 26 in Akita Prefecture, four in Aomori Prefecture, and two in Hokkaido. In addition, 54 were listed as missing in Aomori Prefecture, 12 in Aomori Prefecture and two in Hokkaido for a total of 68, the NPA said. Sixty persons were injured.

It was feared that the toll would rise further as little hope was held for the survival of those listed as missing.

The initial quake occurred shortly after noon, registering a maximum intensity of five on the Japan Meteorological Agency's seven in Akita and Musu, Aomori Prefecture.

The mortality of four on the same scale was recorded over wide areas of northern Honshu and southwest Tohoku.

The Meteorological Agency located the focus of the quake about 40 km below the Sea of Japan about 160 km west of Akita.

Shortly after the quake, a series of tsunami about one meter high lashed the shores of Akita, Aomori and Hokkaido, sweeping people and boats away on the sea and in coastal areas.

Damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami spread over eight prefectures including Hokkaido.

Noshiro and the Oga Peninsula in Akita Prefecture and Jusanko in Aomori Prefecture, all along the Sea of Japan coast, accounted for most of the casualties.

Great tsunami warnings were issued for the coastal area 15 minutes after the first quake and tsunami began lashing them shortly afterward.

Workers at a thermal power plant construction site were engulfed by waves rising higher than two meters.

Seven of them were confirmed dead and 17 others were listed as missing.

Most of the victims were thrown overboard from work vessels that capsized after being hit by a high wave.

Students on a trip from two primary schools in Akita Prefecture were having lunch on the tip of Oga Peninsula. Two of the children drowned and three others were in critical condition after they were engulfed by tsunami. Seventeen others were still unaccounted for.

At a coastal aquarium in Oga, a Swiss woman, identified as Magdalena Brandenberger, 38, died after she was swept away by the high waves.

Her husband, Walter, an engineer at Japan Roche, was also swept away but managed to reach safety, aquarium officials said.

Telephone and railway services were disrupted temporarily and some of Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s oil storage tanks caught fire.

The Meteorological Agency designated the earthquake as the "1963 Central Sea of Japan Earthquake."

The government established an emergency relief headquarters and immediately began implementing relief measures.

After shocks and tsunami continued intermittently late into the evening in quake-struck areas.

The casualties caused by subsequent tsunami were the worst since tsunami triggered by the Chilean earthquake in 1960 caused 119 confirmed and 26 presumed deaths.

The Akita, Aomori and other prefectural governments set up emergency headquarters to coordinate rescue and relief operations.

The Maritime Safety Agency sent out 57 patrol boats and 12 aircraft to search for those listed as missing but the search ran into difficulties as night set in.

According to Akita and Aomori prefectural police headquarters, 59 houses were damaged. 100 others flooded and 1,200 roads were damaged in their prefectures.

The JNR said train services remained suspended on portions or all of 19 different lines, including the Aomori-Akita section on the Tohoku Line.

The Meteorological Agency lifted tsunami warnings for all areas except for the Sanri region at 9 p.m.

According to the NSA, a total of 154 vessels were either overturned or washed ashore by tsunami as of 6 p.m.

Seventeen of them belonged to Hayama residents. 30 of them to those living in areas from Aomori to Akita and 6 to those living in Chiba.

Telephone circuits linking the Tohoku region to other areas were jammed with inquiry phone calls.

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corp. declined to comment on percent of general phone calls to Aomori and Akita prefectures for emergency calls.

However, NTT said none of its offices or telephone exchanges were affected by the quake or tsunami.

A huge earthquake triggered several fires, including one at a power plant of the Tohoku Electric Power Co. in Aomori Prefecture, police said.

In neighboring Aomori Prefecture, the quake broke a crude oil pipeline at an oil refinery in Kokuma, police said.

At a building of the Akita Prefectural Agricultural and Geographical Survey, 100 windowpanes were shattered.

Takashi Akiyoshi, a female cooperative official, told Kyodo News Service: "Suddenly the world began shaking. I immediately turned under a nearby desk but I was too scared to move any further."

"Even when the earth came down and a bookcase fell," another official reported.

Commercial banks, including the headquarters of banks in Akita and Aomori broke down due to the earthquake.

Most of them were restored by Thursday night and there was no shortage of cash for customers, Finance Ministry officials said.

Thursday's quake caused the greatest number of casualties since May 16, 1968, when a fairly strong quake hit southern Hokkaido, causing 52 deaths.

A seismologist said that Thursday's earthquake, which occurred on the coast of Aomori Prefecture was the biggest one on record in the prefecture.

Kazuto Inagawa, a seismologist at the University of Tokyo's Earthquake Research Institute, also said that some seismologists noticed two years ago that Oga Peninsula became more vulnerable and was more prone to being triggered by earthquakes.

The Meteorological Agency announced that a network of underground seismographs was installed in the region.

Takashi Akabane, a seismologist at the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, said that the seismographs were installed to monitor the region's seismic activity.

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Huge Waves Clobber Coast

41 Dead, 61 Missing in Japan

Fri., May 27, 1983
San Francisco Chronicle

Tokyo

Rescue workers picked their way around buckled roadways and smashed sidewalks as the death toll mounted yesterday in the wake of Japan's devastating earthquake.

At search efforts halted for the night, the toll stood at 41 dead, and 61 missing and presumed dead, after the temblor, 7.7 on the Richter scale, struck northern Honshu Island yesterday at noon, setting off tidal waves that washed many people out to sea.

More than a dozen elementary school students were among the dead and missing. They had been in a party of 45 youngsters playing on a beach when a rush of water suddenly engulfed them on the Oga Peninsula in northern Honshu.

"I saw children floating among the waves," said a farm worker. "Souno, of the children clung to overgrown floats and boats and they were saved first."

Souno, an agricultural worker, said one wave was followed by a second wave.

"I saw children floating among the waves," he said. "Some were on floats and boats and they were saved first."

waves three to 16 feet high smashed the shoreline at noon, and throughout the afternoon rescue crews recovered bodies and looked for the missing. Officials assume that the number of confirmed deaths will rise when the search resumes today.

If the toll approaches 100, as seems likely, it would be the worst disaster of this sort in Japan since 1950, when giant waves from an earthquake killed 118 people.

The disaster dominated news reports throughout Japan, where soldiers rock the ground almost every day. Many office workers, mindful of the 1923 earthquake that killed an estimated 100,000 people in Tokyo and Yokohama, keep little disaster kits by their desks.

Yesterday's earthquake originated about 100 miles off the northern Honshu coast in the Sea of Japan. Aftershocks could be felt hours after the initial tremor, which was so strong that it caused buildings to sway in Tokyo, 260 miles to the south.

Nearly all the damage, however, was confined to the northwestern Honshu corridor, primarily a region of ricefields and fishing villages.

In many places, sidewalks heaved and cracked, and roadway surfaces were quickly made to look like washboards. Nearly 400 houses were reported to have been destroyed or damaged. Telegraphs were knocked out and service was temporarily halted on a new "bullet train" line. In Akita, tremors set off a fire at an oil-storage tank in an electrical power plant.

Witnesses said the tidal waves moved surprisingly fast. A Swiss woman visiting an Oga aquarium was found dead after she had failed to climb nearby rocks for safety.

Huge waves "approached at a speed much faster than we expected," said an aquarium official.

There were no reports of other foreigners injured or killed in the disaster.

Fourteen minutes after the initial earthquake was recorded, the Central Meteorological Agency warned of imminent tidal waves. But by then the first waves had already struck the Oga Peninsula. People on the beach and in boats had no time to flee.

Because yesterday's seismic sea wave occurred on the coast of the Sea of Japan, rather than on the Pacific side of the islands, no effect was anticipated in Hawaii or on the American mainland, according to the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii.

The phenomenon that occurred, commonly called a tidal wave, is more properly designated by its Japanese term tsunami, a Japanese term. A tsunami is a series of tidal waves, caused by the motion of an underwater earthquake.

A tsunami develops when an earthquake suddenly changes the depth of the ocean floor. The response of the overlying water generates a wave that, in the open sea, may be only a few inches high while spreading over a vast area. It can cross an ocean at speeds as high as 600 miles per hour.

As such a wave piles up against a coast, its height increases rapidly. Where there is an indentation in the coast, the wave can reach heights in excess of 35 feet, as occurred at Hilo, Hawaii, following a 1960 earthquake in Chile.

Tsunamis from the Alaska earthquake of 1964 cost 36 lives along the coast of Alaska, British Columbia and as far south as Crescent City.

Associated Press

Residents of Akita stood on a pier damaged by waves.

Fishing boats lie on a pier in Akita, Japan, after tidal wave.
Quake Rips N. Japan
35 Dead, 74 Missing
7.7 On Richter Scale

A strong earthquake and subsequent tidal waves hit the Sea of Japan coastal areas of northern Japan Thursday afternoon, causing heavy and extensive damage. At least 35 persons were killed and 74 missing, as of Thursday night.

The death toll was expected to increase.

The quake occurred shortly after noon on Thursday in Akita Prefecture. The magnitude was 7.7 on the Richter scale, the Meteorological Agency said.

The agency named the earth tremor “Japan Sea 1983 Earthquake.”

The intensity registered 5 on the Japanese scale of 7 in Akita and Mutsu, Aomori Prefecture, 4 in extensive areas in the rest of Tohoku and part of the northern island of Hokkaido.

The jolt in Akita shattered window panes in many buildings. Many pedestrians stopped in fear and squatted down.

An employee of the Akita Agricultural Cooperative told the press later that “The earth began to shake suddenly. I quickly took shelter under a desk but I was too scared to move any further.”

Some people were reported hurt when the ceiling of a department store in Akita collapsed, trapping several shoppers.

After schools continued for two hours in Akita and other places in the Tohoku district.

The earthquake triggered several fires in Akita and one at a Tohoku Electric Power Co. plant in Akita Prefecture, the National Police Agency said.

In neighboring Aomori Prefecture, the quake broke a crude oil pipeline at an oil refinery in Kamaishi, causing a leak.

Telephone services and roads were severed in many places in Akita and Aomori prefectures.

More than 30,000 homes were reported without electricity in Akita, Aomori and Yamagata prefectures.

Services of the Tohoku Shinkansen bullet trains were suspended temporarily.

About 17 boats captured in the Sea of Japan after the main jolt. In Akita, 30 workers were killed and 41 others reported missing in Noshiro, Akita Prefecture, Thursday afternoon, when their boat capsized in a tidal wave following the strong quake. They were engaged in shore-protection work.

In Oga City, Akita Prefecture, 155 elementary school children and their teacher were washed away by tidal waves and became missing. The incident happened when they were at a beach on a school excursion.

Many residents in the Japan Sea coastal areas evacuated to safety after the Meteorological Agency issued a tidal wave warning.

The National Land Agency asked the Defense Agency Thursday afternoon to mobilize Air Self-Defense Force aircraft to ascertain the damage caused by the earthquake.

102 Dead, Missing in Japanese Quake and Huge Waves

By SAM JAMESON, Times Staff Writer

TOKYO—The toll of missing and dead reached 102 early today from Thursday’s major earthquake in northern Japan and the 16- to 18-foot-high waves that followed. Little hope was held out that any of the missing will be found alive.

The intensity of the earthquake, which struck at noon with a force of 7.8 on the Richter scale, was calculated to be in the Sea of Japan, about 100 miles west of the coast of Akita Prefecture (state). Akita is in the northwestern part of the main Japanese island of Honshu.

Three hours later, tsunami—tsunamis, seismic waves—hit the eastern coast of South Korea. At least one person was reported dead and two were missing. More than 100 Korean fishing boats were swamped and overturned.

Rescue workers in Japan continued to search for bodies this morning after the national police said 35 people were confirmed dead and that 70 were reported missing in the coastal area along the Sea of Japan. Another 77 people were reported injured and damage was reported in eight of Japan’s 47 prefectures.

On the coast, the waves rushed in too quickly for many to escape. Although Japan’s meteorological agency issued a wave warning only 14 minutes after the quake struck, it was too late for many people because the first waves were reported to have hit the coast just 10 minutes after the shock.

The worst incident occurred in Noshiro in Akita Prefecture, where laborers were at work on construction of a seaport power plant. Seventeen of them died and 27 others were missing after a wave roared into the harbor where they were working.

Some workers were tossed off a crane into the swirling waters and others were thrown off boats that capsized.

On the Oga Peninsula in Akita Prefecture, two microbuses carrying 45 primary school children arrived at a beach in a fishing village just before the earthquake struck. The children, two teachers and the team driver had just begun to eat box lunches on the beach when the quake occurred.

A giant wave crashed up on the beach minutes later and engulfed the party. Residents who witnessed the scene rushed into the water in a rescue effort, and some of the survivors were found clinging to small fishing boats.

Police reported this morning that six of the children were found dead and seven others were still missing.

On the same peninsula, an employee of a seaside aquarium told of escaping about 100 tourists out of the building and up a rocky hill. As the party was making its way up the hill, the aquarium employee said the first wave came in and shouted warnings, through a battery-powered hand microphone, to people fishing from rocks on the coast below.

At least five houses were swept into the sea and killed at the site, including Magdalena Brandenberger, 39, a Swiss national who was visiting the scenic peninsula with her husband, Walter, an engineer working for a Japanese company. He was reported to be safe.

More than 150 boats were capsized or washed ashore by the waves, and cars parked near the sea also were tossed onto the rocky shoreline.

Window panes broke, water pipes cracked, telephone wires were cut, highways and railways were torn by fissures and cement-block walls were toppled throughout the three prefectures of Akita, Aomori, and Hokkaido, where the quake’s force was felt most strongly.

Service on the northern section of the route of the new high-speed Bullet Train, which opened last summer, was suspended during the afternoon but later restored. Six conventional railway lines remained out of service this morning and repairs are expected to take several days.

In the region’s cities, residents grabbed pillows in office buildings and crawled under desks and tables in an effort to protect themselves. In private homes, many reportedly wrapped themselves in futon mattresses. Many household cooking turns were blown off, and stoves were rushed to turn off gas stoves, as action that presumably accounted for the relatively small number of fires reported.

People in the cities of Akita and Aomori rushed from multiistory buildings into the streets after the initial shock. Residents said it was important to walk during the quake itself. The most serious damage reported on land occurred when part of a third-floor ceiling in a department store collapsed, sending shoppers plummeting to the floor below in a pile of rubble. Two of them were reported seriously injured.
Japanese search for 54 missing since quake

TOKYO (UPI) — Thousands of soldiers and sailors searched Japan's north coast Friday for 54 people missing since a powerful earthquake and a series of tidal waves ravaged the area, killing at least 48.

Another three people were killed and 100 boats damaged or sunk when a tsunami or wall of water triggered by the earthquake Thursday thundered into South Korea, authorities said.

Japan's National Police Agency said 48 people were killed by the quake, which registered 7.8 on the Richter scale, and a series of tidal waves smashed the northwest coast, causing $1.62 billion in damage in seven provinces.

The agency said 54 people, among them children, construction workers and fishermen, were still missing and 77 others injured in the aftermath of the quake centered 100 miles off Akita, a port city 275 miles northwest of Tokyo.

Throughout the day, the state-run NHK television network broadcast aerial footage of swamped and overturned fishing boats, fence-cracked highways, twisted railways and widespread damage in residential areas.

Police said the tsunami and tidal waves destroyed 658 houses, sank 561 boats and ruptured highways at 461 places. Seismologists reported more than 320 mild aftershocks.

A spokesman for Japan's Self-Defense Forces said thousands of soldiers and sailors and dozens of boats and helicopters were searching for the missing.

Divers Hunt Quake Victims

NOSHIO, Japan — Divers and helicopter crews continued to search late Friday for more than two dozen construction workers swept from a massive offshore concrete wall by an earthquake-spawned tidal wave earlier this week.

Divers brought in the bodies of eight of the workers before nightfall; 56 remained missing.

South of Noshiro, in a holiday cove on the stubby Yagi peninsula,

...[text continues...]

The Denver Post Saturday, May 28, 1983

2 new quakes rock region of Japan where 100 lost

TOKYO (UPI) — Two earthquakes, one measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale, jolted the Pacific coast of northern Japan on Monday, five days after a destructive tremor and ensuing tidal waves left more than 100 people dead or missing.

The National Police Agency said it had not received any reports of casualties or property damage, but called the jolts "potentially destructive.

A official at the Meteorological Agency said the first quake hit Tokachi areas of Hokkaido at 5:44 a.m. The agency said the epicenter was 43 miles below sea level just off the Pacific shore of Tokachi, a sparsely populated fishing town.

It was followed by another quake registering 5.2 on the Richter scale that struck the Aomori district in the northern part of the main island of Honshu at 7:02 a.m.

Along the Sea of Japan coast, anxious families maintained a vigil in fishing villages, hoping for divers brought in the last bodies of 13 schoolchildren who were drowned in the same giant wave Thursday.

Altogether, authorities counted 47 dead and 55 missing Friday after a full day of air and sea search operations along coastal areas.

Damage to property throughout the quake area was still being assessed, but late information indicated that 2,000 houses were destroyed or damaged, roads were damaged at 139 points and 1,300 boats were lost or damaged.

Quakes panic Japanese

Sacramento Union June 10, 1983

TOKYO (UPI) — Two major earthquakes jolted northern Japan within minutes of each other Thursday night, spreading panic among residents recovering from a quake that killed nearly 100 people two weeks ago.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or extensive damage. Officials issued tidal wave warnings along the western Japanese coast, where sea water levels rose more than two feet, but the warnings were lifted an hour later.

Japan's Meteorological agency said 10 quakes were centered in the Sea of Japan about 62 miles off Akita, the same area as the May 26 earthquake that measured 7.8 on the Richter scale.

The agency said the first quake, registering 8.6 on the Richter scale, struck at 9:49 p.m. followed at 10:44 p.m. by a quake measuring 6.9.