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 Akita Prefecture, 13 in Aomori Prefecture and two in Hokkaido for a total of 69, 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 Japanese scale, seven in Akita and Mutsu, Aomori Prefecture.

The casualty figure of four on the same scale was recorded over wide areas of northern Honshu and southern Hokkaido.

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 tsunamis 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 rescued 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, 28, was reported dead 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.

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

The casualties caused by subsequent tsunami were the worst since the tsunami triggered by the Chilean earthquake in 1960 caused 119 confirmed and 29 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 numerous roads were damaged in their prefectures.

The JNR said train services remained suspended on portions or all of 10 different lines, including the Aomori-Akita section on the Oa Line.

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

According to the MSJ, a total of 155 vessels were either overtaken or washed ashore by tsunami as of 6 p.m.

Seventeen of them belonged to Hong Kong residents, 25 of them to those living in areas from Aomori to Akita and 65 to those living in Shimane.

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

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corp. declined to disclose the percentage of general phone calls to Aomori and Akita prefectures.

The quake caused damage triggered several fires, including one at a power plant of the Tohoku Electric Power Co. in Akita Prefecture, police said.

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

At a building of the Akita Prefectural Agricultural University, one student was injured in central Akita. About 100 windows were shattered.

Kazuhiko Shiokawa, a female public safety official, told Kyodo News Service: "Suddenly the world began shaking. I immediately ran under a nearby desk but I was too scared to move any further."

"Even using a coach took a while. No one came down and a bookcase fell," another official reported.

Commercial banks in Akita and Aomori broke down due to the earthquakes.

Most of them were restored by Thursday night and there were no reports of problems 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 occurred near the coast of Aomori Prefecture was the biggest one on record in the prefecture.

Kazuhiko Fushimi, a seismologist at the University of Tokyo's Earthquake Research Institute, also said that some seismologists noticed two years ago that Oga Peninsula in Akita, which was normally not a very seismically active area, was becoming more active.

The Meteorological Agency announced that the focus of the earthquake was 100 km north of Akita Prefecture and at a depth of 40 km.

Kazuhiko, however, said judging from the fact a tsunami that followed the earthquake reached the coast in a short time, the focus might have been nearer than the spot pointed out by the agency.

Two passenger cars lie crushed under fallen concrete blocks in Akita City after a strong earthquake hit the city around noon on Thursday.
Huge Waves Clobber Coast

41 Dead, 61 Missing in Japan

San Francisco Chronicle

Fri., May 27, 1983

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 43 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. "Some of the children clung to overturned floats and boats and were saved first."

Tadashi Tsuwa, an agricultural worker, said one wave "going to a height I have never seen before," crashed down on the schoolchildren.

Also missing were 40 construction workers who were swept into the Sea of Japan from small boats they had boarded to reach a power station being built near the town of Akita.

The force of the quake knocked down the ceiling of a department store in Akita, killing one shopper and injuring four others. Concrete walls in the city toppled, crushing autos under their weight.

Akita police listed 24 dead of drowning in the tidal waves.

The quake also touched off fires, twisted railroad tracks and played havoc with electrical power in the Aomori district of the main island and southern Hokkaido Island.

Maritime officials reported 155 ships, mostly fishing boats, captured, damaged, or run aground.

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 1952, when giant waves from an earthquake killed 130,000 people.

The disaster dominated news reports throughout Japan, where televators 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, 280 miles to the south.

Nearly all the damage, however, was confined to the northwestern Honshu corridor, primarily a region of rice fields 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. Telephones were knocked out and service was temporarily halted on a new "bullet train" line. In Akita, tremors set off a fire at a 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 to 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 Japan Meteorological Agency warned of imminent tidal waves. But by then the first waves were already striking 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 - or seiche wave, because, strictly speaking, tidal waves are what take place twice daily in the movements of high tides around the earth.

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, although spread 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 the 1960 earthquake in Chile.

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

By the agency named the earthquake “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 Kohama, 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 capsized in the Sea of Japan after the main jolt. In Akita, 30 workers were killed and 45 others reported missing in Nosho, 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, a 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 an tidal wave warning.

The National Land Agency asked the Defense Agency Thursday afternoon to mobilize Air Self-Defense Force aircraft to ascertain in 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 it. 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 sea waves—hit the eastern coast of South Korea. At least one person was reported dead and two were missing as 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 28 people were confirmed dead and that 70 were reported missing in the coastal area along the Sea of Japan.

Another 37 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 Nosho in Akita prefecture, where laborers were at work on construction of a seaside power plant. Seven of them died and 27 others were missing after a wave rushed onto 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 microbes carrying 45 primary school children arrived at a beach in a fishing village just before the earthquake struck. The children, two teachers and the truck 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 saw the first wave coming and shouted warnings, through a battery-powered hand microphone, to people fishing from rocks on the coast below.

At least five boats 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 lines 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 housewives cooking lunch were been hurried 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 multi-story 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 glass and 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 40.

A 12-hour search for 54 people missing since a powerful earthquake and a series of tidal waves swept northwestern Japan claimed at least 38 more lives Thursday. The twin disasters struck near the Soviet border, killing over 250 people and leaving 50,000 homeless.

A spokesman for the National Police Agency said 48 people were killed by the tremors and tiidal waves which destroyed 658 houses, sank 561 boats and ruptured highways at 601 places. Seismologists reported more than 100 aftershocks.

A new earthquake registering 5 on the Richter scale jolted the Pacific coast of northern Japan four days after a destructive tremor and tidal wave left more than 100 people dead or missing. The quake struck the same area and killed nine people.

Divers Hunt Quake Victims

NISHIRO, Japan — Divers and helicopter crews continued to search for the bodies of 54 schoolchildren who were drowned in the giant wave.

The National Police Agency, which had not received any reports of casualties or property damage, but has called the disaster “potentially destructive.”

An official at the Meteorological Agency said the first quake hit the northeastern coast at 3:34 a.m. Thursday. The agency said the epicenter was 35 miles below sea level just off the Pacific shore of Tohoku, 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.

Two earthquakes, one measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale, jolted the Pacific coast of northern Japan on Monday. Five days after the 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.”

An official at the Meteorological Agency said the first quake hit Tohoku areas of Hokkaido at 5:34 a.m. Thursday. The agency said the epicenter was 135 miles below sea level just off the Pacific shore of Tohoku, 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.

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