Major Quake Hits Mexico; at Least 5 Persons Die

BY LEONARD GREENWOOD
Times Staff Writer

MEXICO CITY—A major earthquake shook central Mexico at dawn Wednesday, followed by 18 aftershocks. At least five persons were reported killed.

The quake, which struck at 5:07 a.m. and lasted 45 seconds, rocked the skyscrapers of central Mexico City, cracking walls, smashing windows and causing pictures to fall from walls.

At least 20 large buildings were seriously damaged and thousands of terrified Mexicans and tourists ran out into the street in their night clothes.

The Seismological Institute here said the quake registered 7.0 on the Richter scale.

However, the National Earthquake Center at Golden, Colo., measured the quake at 6.9, which would make it the world's strongest quake this year.

Seismographs at UC Berkeley measured the quake at 7.5.

Of the five persons reported dead, two were buried by fallen masonry, two died of heart attacks and one fell off a building in Chilpancingo, in the Pacific Coast state of Guerrero, close to the epicenter. About 20 persons are believed to have been injured.

There were reports of extensive damage in isolated areas of central Mexico. Felix Mayen, secretary of the town of Petatian, in Guerrero, told reporters that almost all the houses in the nearby shantytown of La Chaveta had been destroyed. It was not yet known if there were victims under the rubble.

Reports from Zihuatenejo, a tourist center on the west coast, said that many commercial buildings there suffered extensive damage, and that large numbers of casualties did not occur only because no one had been in the buildings.

In the capital, major damage was reported at the Ibero-American University in the suburb of Churubusco south of the city center. Witnesses said two buildings, housing the library, various classrooms and some administration offices, collapsed "like a pack of cards."

If the big quake had come a few hours later, the building would have been crowded with staff and students.

Mexico City Mayor Hank Gonzales said that officials were checking the extent of the damage before people would be allowed to enter some buildings.

City in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Guerrero. The disturbances were felt as far away as Monterrey, more than 1,000 miles to the northeast and 100 miles from the U.S. border.

Mexico City's main avenue, the Reforma, was the scene of panic as scores of visitors staying at the city's leading hotels rushed out into the street.

The Hilton Hotel was among the damaged buildings and hundreds of its guests stood outside in the cool dawn air, talking excitedly.

One tourist, Jane Shaw of California, said she had arrived Tuesday night intending to spend two weeks in Mexico but that she would fly back to the United States "on the first plane I can get out of here."

One big hotel, the Maria Isabel Sheraton, attempted to calm its frightened guests by opening the bar a few minutes after the first tremor.

Thousands of government workers were given the day off while officials waited for experts to examine office buildings to see if it would be safe for people to go inside.

The quake broke some gas and water pipes and police cordoned off the buildings to avoid accidents.

It also caused electrical blackouts lasting several hours, creating havoc in Mexico City's normally difficult traffic with hundreds of traffic lights out of order.
Major Earthquake Shakes Mexico City

By GORDON D. MOTT

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A severe earthquake damaged buildings and sprayed broken glass over the streets of downtown Mexico City before dawn today. The Red Cross said a 14-year-old girl was killed and 20 persons injured.

A three-story building collapsed at Ibero-American University, a private institution in the southern part of the city. Most of the windows at the university were broken.

Police said many private homes were heavily damaged. But life quickly returned to normal, and traffic filled the streets during the morning rush hour.

The Seismological Institute in Mexico City reported the quake measured 7 on the Richter scale and the epicenter was 186 miles southwest of the capital city.

The U.S. Geological Survey in Golden, Colo., called it a major quake with a Richter reading of 7.9 and the epicenter 100 miles northwest of Acapulco, on the Pacific coast or a short distance at sea. The Feb. 28 quake in Alaska and Western Canada registered 7.7 on the scale.

Scientists there said that reading would make it the strongest quake in the world this year.

No damage was reported in Acapulco, a popular resort, but the highway to it from Mexico City was blocked by landslides.

Lights went out in several sections of the capital of 13 million people when a strong aftershock hit almost exactly an hour after the main shock rolled through the capital shortly after 5 a.m.

The facade fell from a bank building on Juarez Street in the heart of the city. It appeared at least one upper story of the building had collapsed into the ground floor.

Tourists gathered in small frightened knots in front of the towering hotels on Paseo de la Reforma Boulevard. Glass from broken windows littered the sidewalk.

Electricity was cut in many parts of Mexico City. The subway system stopped briefly, but was running normally two hours after the quake. Florida Omens, 80, of Galesburg, Ill. said the locked door of her hotel room flew open. "I went outside and part of the inside of the hall fell down," she said. "You couldn't stand up."

"I got up and saw my clothes swaying in the closet. I went to the door and the wall split. I went into the hall and saw the fire extinguisher hose fly out," said Dale Wright, 54, of Westlake, Calif.

Lothar Konietzko, 53, of Wayne, Mich., said, "I tried to grab my pants and fell down."

Radio broadcasts said the quake was felt in Monterey, 100 miles from the U.S. border, and in Oaxaca, some 250 miles south of Mexico City. There were no reports of damage in those cities.

The Richter scale is a measure of ground motion as recorded on seismographs. Every increase of one number means a tenfold increase in magnitude.

An earthquake of 7 on the scale is considered a "major" earthquake, capable of widespread heavy damage; 8 is a "great" quake, capable of tremendous damage.

The San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which occurred before the Richter scale was devised, has been estimated at 8.3 on the Richter scale.

Wednesday, March 14, 1979, The Anchorage Times

UNIVERSITY'S BUILDINGS FALL

Jose Jimenez, Constantino Diaz de la Luz and Francisco Tavera, three night watchmen at the Universidad Ibero-Americana were making their final rounds in the administration building this morning when Mexico City was jolted by an earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale. None of the men was hurt although 60 percent of the university buildings fell.
Talkeetna Quaked Again

By BARBARA ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

For Talkeetna pilot Jim Sharp, Wednesday's major earthquake in Mexico City was nothing new. He'd been through one there before.

If the early-morning earthquake in Mexico had hit a few hours later, the death toll could have been much higher, Sharp said from Mexico City Wednesday.

Sharp, en route back to Anchorage from a several-month-long flying trip to South America, said the initial quake was the hardest he had ever experienced.

"And I was here (in Mexico City) when the 1957 earthquake hit and split the Hilton Hotel in half. I slept through that one."

Sharp lived in Mexico City with his parents in 1957. The family opened their home to earthquake victims then, he said. He was in junior high school at the time.

Wednesday's earthquake registered 7.0 on the Richter scale. Eighteen aftershocks were recorded after the first quake. The death toll stands at four people.

(Related story on Page 12.)

Sharp said he and his brother, Joe Sharp Jr., were sleeping Wednesday when the shock hit shortly after 5 a.m. "We jumped up and got under the doorways," he said.

The owner of Talkeetna Air Taxi said the apartment building where his party is staying suffered little damage. "In fact the plumbing, which wasn't working before the earthquake, is now working."

Sharp arrived in Mexico City three days before the earthquake hit. And he planned to leave for Queretaro today.

He expects to be back in Anchorage by the end of the month.

He left Alaska last fall on what he calls the "Talkeetna to Tierra del Fuego Fun Run." Flying a Cessna 185, Sharp arrived in Tierra del Fuego in late January and now is on his return trip.

Tierra del Fuego is the southernmost point in South America.

Sharp said he has added one passenger, a crewman on an Antarctic research vessel. The man, Rear Adm. Franklin, plans to fly with Sharp to Alaska and then head on to the North Pole.

"My co-pilot and navigator, Christy Northrup, bailed out in Panama," Sharp said. "She's going to Nepal to do a film with ABC (American Broadcasting Co.) on climbing."

Sharp has had few problems on his trip, although he has had to make three forced landings. "I've been treated very well. In one case, the Argentine Army sent fuel to us by helicopter."

He said he almost flew the Cessna in Antarctica. "They (Argentinian officials) were going to put in on a Herc (C-130 cargo plane) and fly it down there, but they had real warm weather (in Antarctica) and the runway melted so the Herc couldn't land."

He also flew close to a waterfall for a Hollywood film company on location at Iguaçu Falls, Brazil. "I got water on the windshield of the airplane, I got so close," he said. "It was pretty fun."

The flight was cleared by officials, Sharp said. "It was safe, but the film looks spectacular."

Sharp, who purchased his air taxi certificate from the widow of famed Bush pilot Don Sheldon, in June 1977 was the first pilot since Sheldon to land at the 14,300-foot level of Mount McKinley. And he was the first pilot ever to land at that level in a Cessna 185.

Earthquake In Mexico
Kills Four, Injures 400

By KEVIN M. KELLEGHAN
MEXICO CITY (AP) — The powerful earthquake and aftershocks that jolted Mexico left four persons reported dead, 32 injured, 400 treated for hysteria and widespread damage, including 150 toppled homes, officials said today.

The Seismological Institute said the quake hit shortly after 5 a.m. Wednesday, registered 7.0 on the Richter scale and was centered near Acapulco. Eighteen aftershocks registering as high as 5.0 continued for hours and lesser ones lasted into the night.

Police said a 14-year-old girl was killed by falling debris in Mexico City. Ham radio operators reported two deaths in remote areas, and a girl was reported crushed to death by a crumbling wall near the center of the quake.

Twenty-six persons were treated as out-patients and six required hospitalization, the Red Cross said. Police said 400 persons were treated for hysteria, adding more would have been hurt had the tremor struck during a busy hour.

At the Inter-American University in southern Mexico City a three-story administrative and classroom building collapsed and five more buildings were condemned, police said.

Earthquake In Mexico
Kills Four, Injures 400

By KEVIN M. KELLEGHAN
MEXICO CITY (AP) — The powerful earthquake and aftershocks that jolted Mexico left four persons reported dead, 32 injured, 400 treated for hysteria and widespread damage, including 150 toppled homes, officials said today.

The Seismological Institute said the quake hit shortly after 5 a.m. Wednesday, registered 7.0 on the Richter scale and was centered near Acapulco. Eighteen aftershocks registering as high as 5.0 continued for hours and lesser ones lasted into the night.

Police said a 14-year-old girl was killed by falling debris in Mexico City. Ham radio operators reported two deaths in remote areas, and a girl was reported crushed to death by a crumbling wall near the center of the quake.

Twenty-six persons were treated as out-patients and six required hospitalization, the Red Cross said. Police said 400 persons were treated for hysteria, adding more would have been hurt had the tremor struck during a busy hour.

At the Inter-American University in southern Mexico City a three-story administrative and classroom building collapsed and five more buildings were condemned, police said.

12 The Anchorage Times, Thursday, March 15, 1979

Earthquake In Mexico
Kills Four, Injures 400

By KEVIN M. KELLEGHAN
MEXICO CITY (AP) — The powerful earthquake and aftershocks that jolted Mexico left four persons reported dead, 32 injured, 400 treated for hysteria and widespread damage, including 150 toppled homes, officials said today.

The Seismological Institute said the quake hit shortly after 5 a.m. Wednesday, registered 7.0 on the Richter scale and was centered near Acapulco. Eighteen aftershocks registering as high as 5.0 continued for hours and lesser ones lasted into the night.

Police said a 14-year-old girl was killed by falling debris in Mexico City. Ham radio operators reported two deaths in remote areas, and a girl was reported crushed to death by a crumbling wall near the center of the quake.

Twenty-six persons were treated as out-patients and six required hospitalization, the Red Cross said. Police said 400 persons were treated for hysteria, adding more would have been hurt had the tremor struck during a busy hour.

At the Inter-American University in southern Mexico City a three-story administrative and classroom building collapsed and five more buildings were condemned, police said.