

College and Research Libraries

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Compton Comment

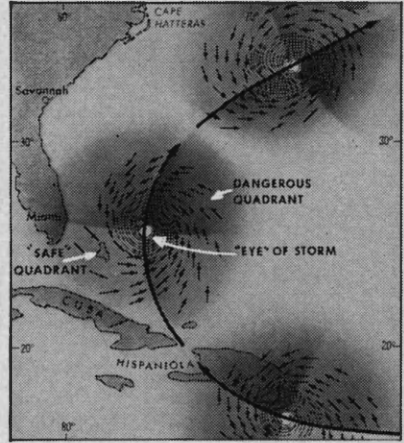
IT is late August. Chicago and the rest of the Middle West are still sweltering in the longest heat wave in the history of the Weather Bureau. As a conversation piece Hurricane Connie has been superseded by her treacherous sister Diane, who was personally responsible for the tragic floods now ravaging parts of six northeastern states.

Yesterday I decided that as long as most of my waking thoughts were concerned with weather and storms I might as well do an all-out job and read about them too. Today is the deadline for this column—and what am I writing about? Storms, of course, and weather too if space permits, which it probably won't.

The Compton article on *Storms* starts with thunderstorms—old friends of mine, since I was brought up in the Black Hills where they have humdingers. For my money there is nothing more exciting and awe-inspiring than a thunderstorm in the mountains where an echo snarls back viciously at each peal of thunder.

Anyway, the article has a good graph showing how thunderstorms start and progress. The text runs along interestingly for a column and a half and ends with the astonishing statement that, according to the estimates of meteorologists, there are 1,800 thunderstorms going on in the world at any given moment!

After that bolt the article goes on to cyclones and tornadoes. If you have a set of Compton's close by—and you should—look at the stunning full-page photograph of a Nebraska tornado in action. In South Dakota one Saturday afternoon such a one rolled up the sheet-iron roof of my hotel as neatly as a cowboy rolls a cigarette, carried it across town, and deposited it tidily in a vacant lot.



This shows how hurricanes *recurve* in moving out of the tropics. Mariners try to avoid the right front (dangerous) quadrant, where winds are strongest.

Hurricanes get a lot of attention—four graphs including the small one shown here and a lot of text. Our hurricanes, of course, come mostly from the West Indies and move counterclockwise. In the Southern Hemisphere they move clockwise. In Pacific waters the term usually used is "typhoon," which is from a Chinese word. Around the Philippines the name is "baguio." Scientists, it seems, have no certain knowledge of how hurricanes are formed although there are some widely accepted theories. The behavior or lack of behavior of hurricanes is better known and is thoroughly described in the article.

I have never been in a hurricane on land, but after following newspaper and television reports of last year's Carol and Hazel and this year's Connie and Diane, I think I prefer one at sea. If your ship holds together and you live through it, the episode is over. The ocean buries its memories—carries no scars. Perhaps that is why sailors love the sea.

L. J. L.

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