

CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN.

Friday, June 27, 1930.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Two red flags with black centers, flown one above the other, is the U. S. Weather Bureau signal a hurricane is coming. We are not going to run up those flags. We just want to warn you. Here comes old Ob. Server. From the way he is breezing in, he must have a gale on his mind, at least; if not something stronger. -----Well, Ob. What's new in weather, this time? -----

More and better weather reports! -----

That seems to be the motto of the U. S. Weather Bureau.

Right now, the prospects look good for our getting reports direct from the 'home of the hurricanes.'

Mr. Charles L. Mitchell, the hurricane expert, has just been telling me about this most recent development.

It seems those terrible tropical blows which sometimes hit our South Atlantic and Gulf States in the summertime come a long way. We call them West Indian hurricanes. But Mr. Mitchell has been going through old weather reports from ships. He has traced most of the big hurricanes of the past to their starting points. He has found that they generally start near the Cape Verde Islands, just a little way off the west coast of Africa.

Portugal owns those islands, and maintains two weather reporting stations and one short wave radio station there. Now, the Weather Bureau hopes to make arrangements by which we can get weather reports from the Cape Verde islands, from which our forecasters can detect the very beginning of tropical cyclones which may strike our coast a few days later.

The Cape Verde Islands ordinarily have a very even temperature, the direction and speed of the wind there is remarkably uniform. There are no rains during the greater part of the year. When any little change happens near the Cape Verde Islands, Mr. Mitchell says, it is time to watch out. A hurricane may be starting west on a rampage, swinging a little to the north as it goes.

Ordinarily, we don't get word of a hurricane until it gets near the Windward Islands in the West Indies. That is plenty of time, for warning folks in the Gulf States or the South Atlantic coast. The winds which form these great wirlwinds blow at a terrific rate around the center of the storm, but the storm as a whole travels forward in low gear, as it were.

However, for our folks in Porto Rico and some of the other outlying islands, radio weather reports from the Cape Verde Islands off Africa will

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be a big help. Those reports made possible by Portugal will also increase the area of observation for our weather men. They may add much to our knowledge of the ways of hurricanes in general.

Once a tropical cyclone gets near the West Indies, it has to run the gantlet of Weather Bureau stations located on nearly every important island in the great chain of islands extending from Florida to South America.

Besides these fixed stations from Trinidad and Barbadoes to the big islands of Haiti, and Jamaica, and Cuba, many ships plying the waters of the Caribbean send in regular weather reports.

From all these reports the forecasters can locate the center of the hurricane, and plot the direction and rate at which it is moving.

The least air pressure and the strongest winds are recorded by weather instruments nearer the center of the hurricane. That often makes it easy to locate the heart of the hurricane from a very few reports, and sometimes from a single report.

Predicting the exact path this terrific whirlwind will take as it slowly moves on its destructive way is not so easy. Figuring out the curves the path of a tropical cyclone will make, Mr. Mitchell tells me is an agonizing job.

We know in a general way that most of our so-called West Indian hurricanes move west-northwest and then generally recurve to the north and east. But each storm path is different. Just where or when, the cyclone will change its direction depends on the conditions it meets at the time. The forecaster must be armed not only with the facts in the region of the storm itself, but must have before him the weather map showing what is ahead of the storm, and what will be ahead twelve to forty-eight hours after he makes the forecast.

As we said, a hurricane ordinarily travels west-northwest then swings north and east. Last year, however, one of these highly individual cyclones was moving along in the orthodox way. Then it turned in its tracks and went southwest through the straits of Florida. That was something no hurricane was ever known to do before. To make matters worse for the forecaster, the wireless station at Nassau went down in the storm, and there were no other reports from near the center of the big blow. The forecasters had to practically feel their way to the probable path of that erratic hurricane in order to warn people who might be in the way. There were no ship reports to be had. Although the Weather Bureau gets regular reports from a great many ships, when the hurricane is in progress, there are very few ships near the storm path, to report. Most of them take warning from the forecasts and either stay in port or change their courses so as to dodge the storm.

One of the big difficulties often faced by the forecaster is in not having enough reports. That is especially true in cases where the hurricane

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keeps on going west into the western Caribbean Sea before it swings north. After the storm passes through that chain of stations in the eastern Caribbean, it is harder to follow. There are fewer island or land stations west of Cuba by which to map its movement.

The big hurricane months are June to October, with most of them starting from the Cape Verde Islands in August. In fact, Mr. Mitchell has found that no tropical cyclone of hurricane intensity has ever reached our Gulf or South Atlantic coast in any of the other seven months of the year.

And it is interesting and important to note that no State has an average of one hurricane a year. But, as we all know, one hurricane can spread a lot of death and destruction in its path. Warnings sent out by the U.S. Weather Bureau from twelve to forty-eight hours in advance, however, enable many to get themselves and their goods to places of safety. Much of the loss of life often comes from folks just "taking a chance" in spite of warnings. Other unnecessary losses come from failure to build houses strong enough to stand the pressure when the wind gets up to 100 to 125 miles an hour. Few well-constructed buildings collapse in a hurricane. The flimsy ones are the dangerous ones.

However, as our exposed southern coast is fast growing in population, and more houses are built, and more ships ply the waters nearby, the great hurricane warning system of the U. S. Weather Bureau is becoming increasingly important. Each hurricane's path must of necessity be forecast on the basis of reports of conditions at the time. The responsibilities are tremendous. As Mr. Mitchell says, the hurricane forecaster doesn't occupy any bed of roses.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Let's hope that any hurricane which starts our way will spend its energy in rain before it hits us. We want to be on hand to get these chats with the weather man. They come once every two weeks. In presenting them, Station _____ is cooperating with the United States Department of Agriculture.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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