

TRAGEDY ON THE CONDAMINE

TOOWOOMBA, February 8.

Seven persons lost their lives in the flood waters of the Condamine River, near the township of Condamine, yesterday, when a boat containing a party of eleven struck an obstacle and capsized.

The list of dead is as follows:—

Mrs. William Kocho, aged about 30 years.

Tom Kocho, son of Mrs. W. Kocho, aged 3 years.

Patrick Kocho, son of Mrs. W. Kocho, aged 2 years.

Miss Patsy O'Shea, niece of Mrs. W. Kocho, aged 13 years.

Mrs. Fred Kocho, aged about 30 years.

Edna Liddle, aged 10 years.

Ronald Liddle, aged 8 years.

The remainder of the party, four children, were rescued from a dangerous position in a tree in the middle of the river. They were:—

James Liddle, (30), and his son Colin, (8).

Belrne Kocho (12), a son of Mrs. W. Kocho, and Evelyn Kocho, (19).

The accident occurred about 6 p.m. At a late hour last night none of the bodies had been recovered.

SANK IMMEDIATELY.

The party had been up the river, and were returning down stream with the swiftly running current when the boat struck a tree with great force and, it is believed, sank immediately.

The terrified occupants were flung into the water, and had little chance of reaching safety, owing to the great force of the surging torrent.

How Mr. Liddle and the three children managed to scramble into the tree from which they were rescued is a miracle. It is believed that swept on by the force of the stream they clutched at the branches of a partially submerged tree, and were able to retain their hold.

Liddle was clasping Colin, his three-years-old son, when found.

THE RESCUE.

Immediately the news of the disaster got abroad plans were made with feverish haste to form a rescue party. Owing to the flooded condition of the locality, however, serious obstacles had to be overcome. With the river running 15 feet over the bridge and flooding out over the surrounding country, it was only possible to reach the scene of the disaster by boat.

The nearest rowing vessel belonged to a man who lived 10 miles down the stream. A message was carried to him with all speed, but it was feared that if the boat had to be rowed against the stream on the 10 miles journey there would be little prospect of saving the lives of Mr. Liddle and the children.

AT POINT OF COLLAPSE.

A motor tractor was secured and the boat was loaded upon it. A party of five eventually reached the imprisoned party and effected the rescue. Liddle and the children were almost at the point of collapse when assisted into the boat. It was a fearful ordeal and one that taxed the strength of Liddle to the utmost.

The police and a big party rushed to the Condamine in 10 motor-cars, one of which carried a small rowing boat and grappling irons. The party gave assistance in endeavouring to recover the bodies of the

party gave assistance in endeavouring to recover the bodies of the drowned.

Up to an early hour this (Tuesday) morning none of the bodies had been recovered. The scene of the tragedy is almost within a stones throw of the township of Condamine. Liddle was trying to turn the boat when a collision took place with a tree.

Bridges, it is reported, are covered by flood water, and it is not likely that the bodies will be recovered for some days.

TOOWOOMBA, February 8.

At 10.30 this morning the Roma police reported that they had been advised from Condamine that the body of one of the Mrs. Kochoa had been found at Miles, and that the Condamine police, with civilians, are still prosecuting the search for the other six bodies.

Miles reported this morning that the Condamine River is running strongly about 10 miles an hour, and that there is a likelihood of the bodies being washed down to Goondiwindi, many miles distant. The town is staggered by the awfulness of the calamity.

EXCITING EXPERIENCES

TOOWOOMBA, February 8.

A resident of Millmerran said that the flood in the Condamine River was the worst experienced for a quarter of a century. A man named Putman had an exciting time getting to Millmerran. Arriving at Pampas from Ipswich by train, he came along the line, but was stopped by the flood at the river bridge. In company with Councillor Rademey, who was returning from a trip to the north, they waded through the water to Mr. Handley's residence below Yandilla. Obtaining a boat there, they arrived at Yandilla, where Putman obtained a horse and continued his journey to Millmerran. He reported that the roads are in a dangerous state. Trees and timber have been washed down the roads, and huge washouts and torrents of water abound everywhere.

A Mr. Specht, a grazier, of Dunmore, had a narrow escape. He was riding into Pittsworth, and when crossing a flooded bridge horse and rider were swept into the torrent. Specht grasped the bridge and reached safety. The horse with the saddle and bridle on, was found dead, having been carried away by the water to the Condamine Plains, some miles distant.

TOOWOOMBA, February 9.

Further particulars of the drowning tragedy in the Condamine River, when seven people lost their lives, reveal the terrible ordeal to which the four survivors

were subjected. It was five hours before they were rescued from branches of trees by a boating party and when hanging to the branches they were nearly eaten by mosquitoes and insects. In the tree to which little Vernon Kocho was hanging was also a big brown snake just below his feet.

As is usual for Condamine people in flood time, Mr. James Liddle had taken a party for a row up towards the traffic bridge leading from Miles. When about 100 yards south of the bridge the boat got into midstream and was washed against a big gum tree and swamped. Some of the occupants tried either to get out or to right the boat when it suddenly overturned, throwing the terrified occupants into the raging torrent.

Mr. Liddle went down under the

boat and after what seemed minutes he reached the surface only to see the other occupants struggling further down stream. He succeeded in rescuing his little son Colin and Evelyn Kocho and then drifted to a tree and clung on for dear life with his two little burdens.

Vernon Kocho, after making a heroic but futile attempt to save his younger brother, managed to grasp a branch and climb to safety. Several of the Condamine residents were soon on the scene only to be helpless witnesses.

Fred Raynor made an attempt to reach one of the victims, but owing to the force of the current failed. The boat had been swamped about 150 yards from the bank.

RESCUE PARTIES FORMED.

Immediately news of the disaster was telephoned all over the district, and rescue parties were hastily formed. Serious obstacles had to be overcome owing to the flooded nature of the locality. With the water running 15 feet over the bridge, the only possible chance of rescue was by boat.

As soon as news of the accident reached Miles police and civilians proceeded to the scene of the tragedy, carrying with them a generous supply of ropes. Many attempts were made to reach those in the tree, but without success.

In the meantime cars were despatched to Miles and Riverlea for boats. A boat from Riverlea arrived after a gruelling trip by motor tractor and car. Once the boat was launched the survivors were quickly brought to safety.

SEARCHED IN VAIN.

An exhaustive search was made of the banks within a mile, with the hope of discovering other victims who may have clung to trees or other debris further downstream. This was without result.

A feature of the tragedy was the endurance of Mr. James Liddle, who held two children in the branches of a small tree in the surging torrent for four hours. Vernon Kocho, who is only 12 years old, showed wonderful pluck in refusing to be rescued until the remaining survivors were brought to safety.

It being useless to commence a search for the bodies in the dark the cars returned to Miles, and early yesterday morning some of the Miles people again went out to help in the search for the bodies. During the morning the body of Mrs. Wilfred Kocho was found some distance down the stream, hanging in a branch of a tree in midwater. The body was taken to Condamine.

Up to a late hour last night only one boat had been available for the use of the searchers, but it is hoped to have at least three more by this morning, when the search for the bodies will be resumed.

A sad feature of the terrible tragedy is that Miss Patsy O'Shea was only at Condamine on a short holiday with her aunt, Mrs. F. W. Kocho. It is believed that her parents reside at Sandgate.