



Category 5: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane

Thomas Neil Knowles

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A frightening account of the first Category 5 storm to strike the U.S.

“A gripping account. . . Winds were so strong that they tore babies from the arms of their parents. Over four hundred people lost their lives, including over two hundred veterans of World War I. It was a tragedy that did not have to happen.”--John Wallace Viele, author of *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers*

“Makes for fascinating reading about a period of time when science, politics, and nature converged, resulting in disaster.”--Rodney E. Dillon Jr., Vice President, Past Perfect Florida History, Inc.

In the midst of the Great Depression, a furious storm struck the Florida Keys with devastating force. With winds estimated at over 225 miles per hour, it was the first recorded Category 5 hurricane to make landfall in the United States.

Striking at a time before storms were named, the catastrophic tropical cyclone became known as the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane, and its aftermath was felt all the way to Washington, D.C.

In the hardest hit area of the Florida Keys, three out of every five residents were killed, while hundreds of World War I veterans sent there by the federal government perished.

By sifting through overlooked official records and interviewing survivors and the relatives of victims, Thomas Knowles pieces together this dramatic story, moment by horrifying moment. He explains what daily life was like on the Keys, why the veteran work force was there (and relatively unprotected), the state of weather forecasting at the time, the activities of the media covering the disaster, and the actions of government agencies in the face of severe criticism over their response to the disaster.

The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 remains one of the most intense to strike America's shores. *Category 5* is a sobering reminder that even with modern meteorological tools and emergency management systems, a similar storm could cause even more death and destruction today.

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