

Premonitions of the Yugoslav Earthquake!

How can you explain these strange incidents in which survivors sensed the impending disaster before it struck? By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

“WHENEVER there's a disaster, there are premonitions!”

That's the opinion of Dr. Zarco Hantchef, chief medical officer for the International Red Cross, who was sent to Skopje, Yugoslavia, the day after an earthquake destroyed that capital of Macedonia and killed almost 2,000 persons on July 26.

I interviewed Dr. Hantchef in Geneva, Switzerland, shortly after he returned from the disaster scene. A medical doctor, former university lecturer, and Red Cross executive since 1949, he told me of three widely diversified incidents to prove his point.

“While the most intricate seismographs gave no indication whatsoever of the coming earthquake,” Dr. Hantchef said, “the wild animals in the zoo were the first to sense approaching tragedy. Shortly before midnight they became terribly excited. The lions started to roar, elephants trumpet, jackals squeal. One water buffalo swayed crazily from side to side as if he were going mad. This had never happened before, and the keepers were mystified.”

But the animals weren't the only ones to sense the danger.

“There was a 17-year-old girl whose bedroom was on the second floor of a three-story apartment house,” Dr. Hantchef told me. “Shortly aft-

er midnight she rushed into her mother's bedroom on the street floor and complained she couldn't sleep, that something terrible was about to happen. She said she would feel safe only if she could stay with her mother.

“The older woman wasn't about to put up with such nonsense and ordered the girl back to her own room. Mind you,” Dr. Hantchef pointed out, “European children are brought up to obey, yet the girl refused to do as she was told. Finally, the mother had no choice but to let the girl stay with her.

“Five hours later the first rumble shattered the house. The building collapsed, and every human being in it died—except the mother and daughter. Their room alone escaped destruction.”

PROBABLY the most amazing account of premonition that Dr. Hantchef related to me involved a Belgian wife who woke up in her room at the Macedonia Hotel four hours before the quake, got dressed, and left the building. She walked up and down the street for a while, feeling something was terribly wrong. Suddenly she rushed back to her room on the second floor and excitedly shook her husband awake. She begged him to get dressed and leave the hotel because there was going to be a quake. He told her she was silly and to get some sleep.

She tried, but half an hour later got up and

again walked out of the building. When she returned, she again awakened her husband and pleaded with him to get dressed.

The scene repeated itself once more, but this time he offered a compromise: since they'd planned to leave the hotel about 8 o'clock the next morning, he agreed to set the alarm for 6.

At 5:10 the wife got up for the fourth time. She went into the bathroom, but no sooner had she entered when something made her race back to the bedroom and shake her husband awake. “Let's get out of here,” she screamed.

He sat up in bed and upon his wife's insistent prodding reached for his clothes—just as the quake struck! Seconds later the hotel crumbled into a pile of debris. Out of 180 persons who were staying there, only 55 survived.

“Had the woman remained in the bathroom,” Dr. Hantchef recalled, “she would have been crushed to death. Had she followed her original intuition, she and her husband could have avoided the ordeal of being buried under the debris for almost 60 hours before being rescued.”

What caused these premonitions? As a Red Cross official, Dr. Hantchef has visited the scenes of many disasters. And it is always the same: some of the survivors, animal and human, had sensed beforehand the approach of sudden death. Yet nobody has ever learned the source of their frightening glimpse into the future.



Dr. Hantchef (left) and a Red Cross colleague stand amid Skopje rubble. Muted railroad station clock (right) records the moment of disaster as 5:14 a. m.

COVER:

Richard Fox, 13, who delivers the *New Haven (Conn.) Register-Courier*, has an ardent helper—sister Mary Lou, 8. They were caught by Ozzie Sweet to salute *National Newspaperboy Day* next Saturday.

**Family
Weekly**

October 13, 1963

LEONARD S. DAVIDOW President and Publisher
WALTER C. DREYFUS Vice President
PATRICK E. O'ROURKE Advertising Director
MORTON FRANK Director of Publisher Relations
Send all advertising communications to Family Weekly,
133 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

Address all communications about editorial features to
Family Weekly, 60 E. 56th St., New York 22, N. Y.

© 1963, PROCESSING AND BOOKS, INC., 133 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. All rights reserved.

Board of Editors

ERNEST V. MEYN Editor-in-Chief
BEN KARTMAN Executive Editor
ROBERT FITZGERALD Managing Editor
PHILIP DYKSTRA Art Director
MELANIE DE PROFT Food Editor

Rosalyn Abrevaya, Arden Eidell, Hal London,
Jack Ryan, Peer J. Oppenheimer, Hollywood.