

737 smashes into D.C. bridge; 81 feared dead in icy Potomac



The Associated Press

An unidentified survivor of the crash holds on to the safety of a life ring as she floats in the Potomac after the jet rammed into the bridge

Survivors describe moments of terror

 By Robert B. Cullen
 The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — "The plane started to shake and the next thing I knew I was in the water," said Kelly Duncan, a stewardess on Air Florida's Flight 90.

Duncan was rescued from the icy water by a passerby, Lenny Skutnik, 28, of Lorton, Va., an employee of the Congressional Budget Office. He swam 20 feet to reach her. She was taken to a Virginia hospital where she told Dr. Richard Schwartz what she remembered of the seconds before the crash.

Schwartz quoted Duncan, of Miami, as saying she was in a jump seat in the tail section of the plane.

Duncan was listed in serious condition, suffering from hypothermia.

A passenger, instrument-rated pilot Joe Stiley of Alexandria, Va., said, "I had a pretty good indication things weren't going right when we started down the runway . . . that we did not have takeoff speed. I knew we were out of runway."

Stiley, a businessman who was headed for St. Petersburg, Fla., said he turned to his secretary, Patricia Felch, when the plane lifted off and said, "We're not going to make it." After the plane hit the water — about 20 seconds later — Stiley and Felch crawled through a hole in the fuselage. He tried to hold on to her and another woman when a line was dropped from a rescue helicopter, but they slipped from his grasp.

The secretary was later pulled to shore by rescuers in the water, and was hospitalized in critical condition. The fate of the other woman was not known.

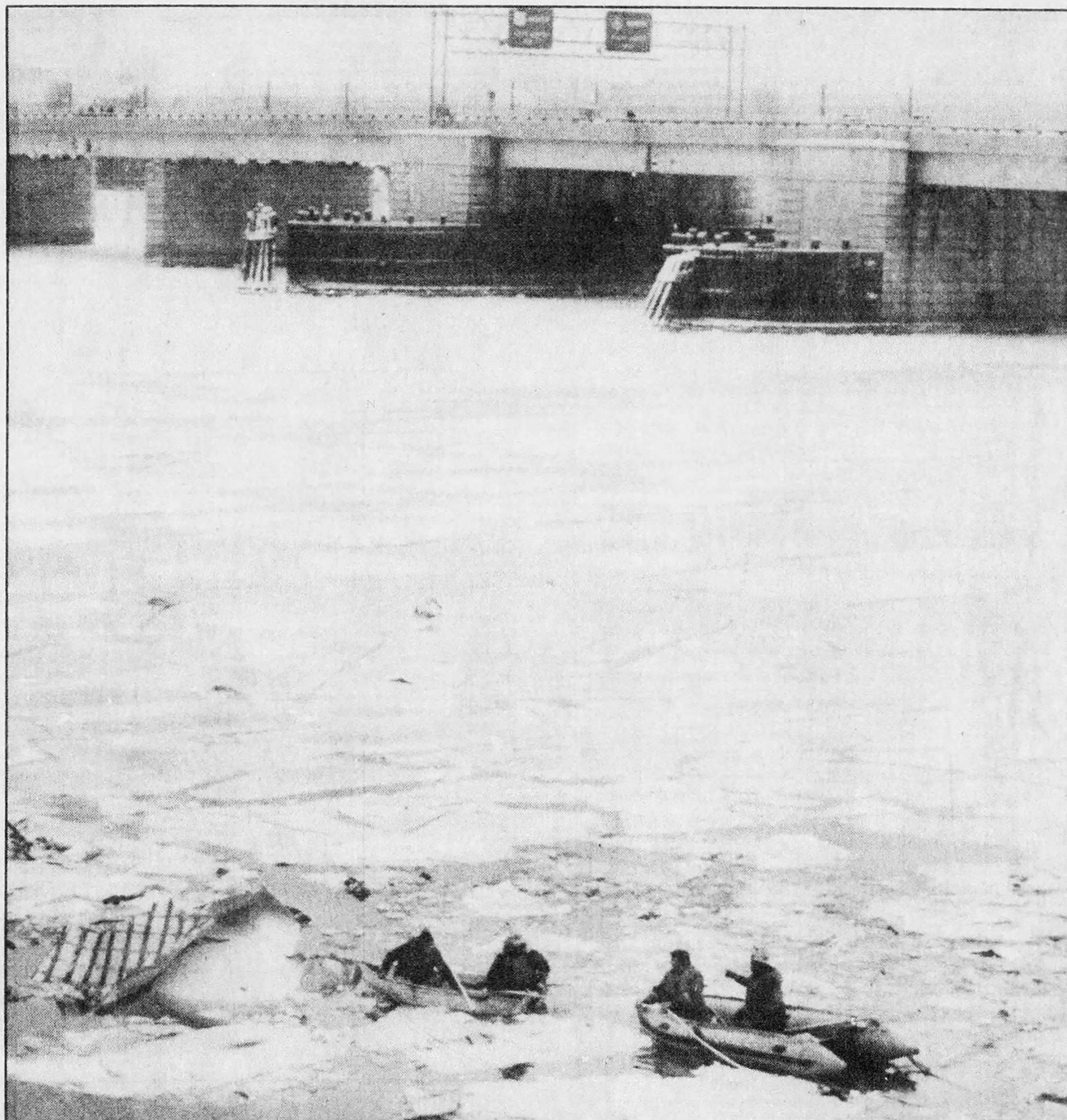
Motorists on the ramp approaching the bridge jumped from their cars and formed a human chain down the river bank to haul out five or six of the plane passengers who crawled across the ice to safety or were still belted to seats outfitted with flotation cushions, eyewitnesses said. One woman motorist, swept from her vehicle, dangled from the bridge until onlookers pulled her to safety, a police spokesman said.

"She was pretty glassy-eyed," an officer said.

Asked if the plane was on fire as it descended, Lloyd Creger said, "I couldn't see anything wrong with the plane at all. . . . It just dropped out of the sky."

But another witness, John Noble, told The Washington Post

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The Associated Press

Rescue workers near a portion of the jet, framed against the river and the bridge

Weather

Safe to wash your car. Sunny skies are forecast today, but tonight will be near freezing. A high near 63 and a low near 34 are expected. Yesterday's high and low were 53 and 32.

Yesterday's national temperature extremes were 25 below zero at International Falls, Minn., and 82 at Miami, Fla. Details on Page 4A.

South shivers on. Thousands seek shelter in emergency centers as blackouts caused by storms add to the Deep South weather-related troubles. Nearly a million homes are without electricity in the region. Page 9A.

News

Bad day for ERA. The Equal Rights Amendment suffers major setbacks in the legislatures of Oklahoma and Illinois. Page 9A.

Thanks for the cuts. Secretary of Health and Human Services Richard S. Schweiker tells Tucson Republicans that he's grateful for President Reagan's cuts in his department. Page 1B.

Money

A piece of the action. Out-of-state banks or holding companies are buying shares of Arizona banks, apparently because of the state's growth potential and to have a foot in the door should interstate banking be approved. Page 1F.

Entertainment

Jazz trio needs more. Music critic Larry Harnisch says the Jimmy Smith Trio, appearing at the Doubletree Hotel, played only instrumental tunes, and the program was the weaker for it. He faults repetition and unmelodic improvisations. Page 1D.

Legislature

Creationism bill. A Mesa legislator is drafting a bill aimed at stopping the teaching of evolution as fact and at offering the theory of creationism in Arizona's public schools. Page 5A.

Relief for homeowners. A Senate bill would hold tax increases on Arizona homes to 2 percent by reducing qualifying tax rates in school districts. Page 2B.

Anti-abortion measure. A bill that would, with few exceptions, impose manslaughter penalties for purposely terminating a pregnancy is introduced in the Senate with the bipartisan blessing of 27 lawmakers. Page 4B.

Fighting 55. Rep. Lew Macy, R-Tucson, introduces a bill aimed at circumventing the federal speed limit of 55 mph on primary Arizona highways — and providing for heavier fines for driving over 65 mph. Page 2E.

Lifestyle

Menopause myths. Planned Parenthood staffers say a series of workshops they're preparing on menopause will alleviate women's fears and stress positive aspects about that time of life. Page 1C.

Sports

Promotion sought. Len Gordy and Gary Heintz, assistants to departing University of Arizona basketball coach Fred Snowden, say they will apply for Snowden's job. Page 1G.

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Don Dale, The Arizona Daily Star

Horse sense — Tina Shearman likes everything about horses, even their giant toenails. At her Cochise County ranch, she uses hammer, nail and experience to help the animals travel. Story in Neighbors, Page 4H.