

Quetta, Baluchistan

0240am May 31st, 1935

A fissure started in the corner of the dome of the ancient mosque and dislodged a wedge of plaster which pattered on the floor far below in a cascade of dust.

Simultaneously an almost imperceptible rumble permeated the hot stillness of the night

Maybe it was distant thunder; or the Loo gathering strength as it blew it's hot and dusty breath across the arid plains?

From afar a forlorn bell tolled arrhythmically, and with a crescendo of flapping wings, roosting birds were startled into flight from the trees along the avenues and squares.

The rumbling was louder now, permeating the streets and forced its way into every crevice of the densely packed hovels in the old town.

The ground started to tremble.

A candelabra hanging from the top of the dome in the mosque started to swing jerkily and the fissure lengthened, ejecting more plaster onto the tiled floor below.

It was the middle of the night; the inhabitants were mostly asleep in their mud brick houses unaware of the impending catastrophe.

The infrasonic vibrations intensified to a deep boom which echoed from the surrounding hills. Over a period of thirty seconds the ground started moving from the West to the East in a wave which struck the mountains to the East and was reflected where it met a succession of Eastward waves, colliding with catastrophic force. The city was built on a valley floor of alluvial soil washed from the surrounding barren hills with water channels

flowing underneath it. The mixing of the clay and water liquified the ground which was unable to support the foundations of the poorly constructed buildings.

The merchant houses in the commercial area were the first to collapse in a flurry of bricks and splintered wood. The ancient bazaar which had stood for centuries slowly crumbled into anonymity. The steeple of the Wesleyan church toppled gracefully to the ground and shattered, the bell finally falling silent.

Unabated, mayhem continued, nothing in the old city escaped the maelstrom. The Law Courts, The Residency and the Town Hall were raised to the ground. The large hanger at the nearby Air Force station collapsed.

A sleepy-eyed caretaker stumbled into the mosque and looked up. His eyes widened with horror as the dome above collapsed onto him.

In the space of a few minutes between 20,000 and 60,000 people perished.