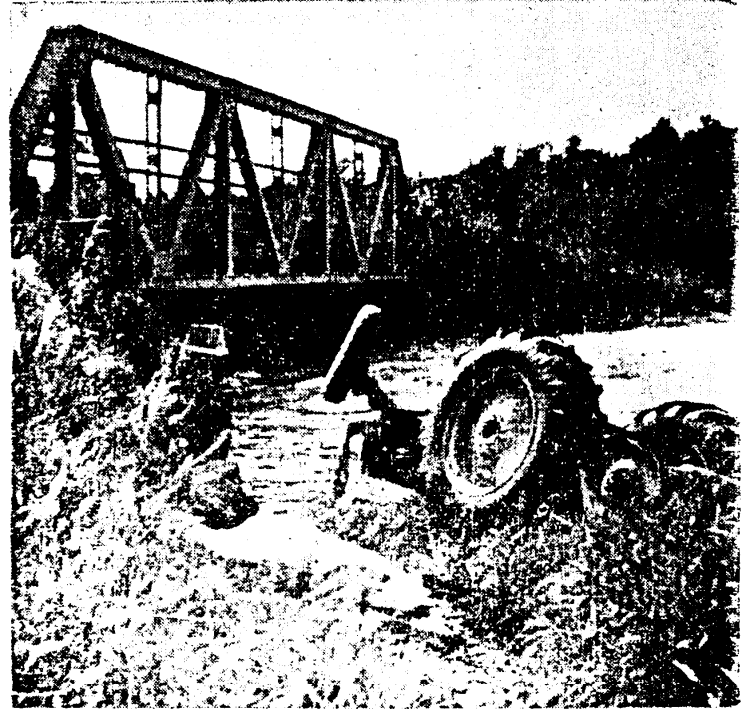




Ben Esmeyer, 77, lies dead near his overturned tractor after a tragic accident Friday afternoon at Rock Creek Lake. Esmeyer was mowing weeds on the east approach to the bridge across the lake when his tractor slid into the deep water near the bridge pilings.



The elderly park employee was thrown out into the lake, where he stayed afloat while two cars ignored a witness' pleas for help. When finally pulled from the lake, Esmeyer was dead.

# Tragic Death at Rock Creek

A man died needlessly in a tragic Friday afternoon accident at the bridge across Rock Creek Lake.

Ben Esmeyer, 77, of Newton, was pronounced dead at the scene as he lay on the shore of the lake next to his overturned tractor. He died as a result of a 4:10 p.m. accident in which the International tractor with which he was mowing the east approach to the bridge nosed slowly into the water and overturned. But, Esmeyer was not killed in the accident itself.

A witness to the fatality, Mrs. Herbert Mathes of Newton, says that the elderly employee of Rock Creek Lake State Park had finished mowing the approaches on the west end of the bridge and had just started on the north bank of the east approach when the tractor slid into the deep water a few feet from the bridge abutments.

## Not Pinned Under Tractor

"He wasn't pinned, though," Mrs. Mathes in response to reports that Esmeyer

drowned while pinned under the tractor. "He was a ways off shore, in the deep water of the channel."

Even though the waters off the bridge are deep and the banks near the bridge pilings are always covered with people fishing, there is no lifesaving equipment in the vicinity. Neither Mrs. Mathes nor her husband, who was fishing off the west side of the bridge, can swim, so Mrs. Mathes tried to flag down cars for help while Herbert Mathes extended a fishing pole to Esmeyer in the hopes of pulling him to shore. Neither met with much success.

"I tried to flag down two cars, but they wouldn't stop. They kind of laughingly waved back and drove on." Finally two cars did stop, and an unidentified man pulled Esmeyer from the lake. By then it was too late.

## "Wasn't Under Water"

When he fell into the lake, says Mrs. Mathes, Ben Esmeyer's head came right up out of the water, and "he hollered. He wasn't even under the water." Esmeyer's back

seemed to be bruised, and Mrs. Mathes says that he didn't seem to be able to get his arms out of the water.

"His head was above the water for quite a while. Then his face kind of tipped forward.

"If there'd been some help, we could have gotten him out."