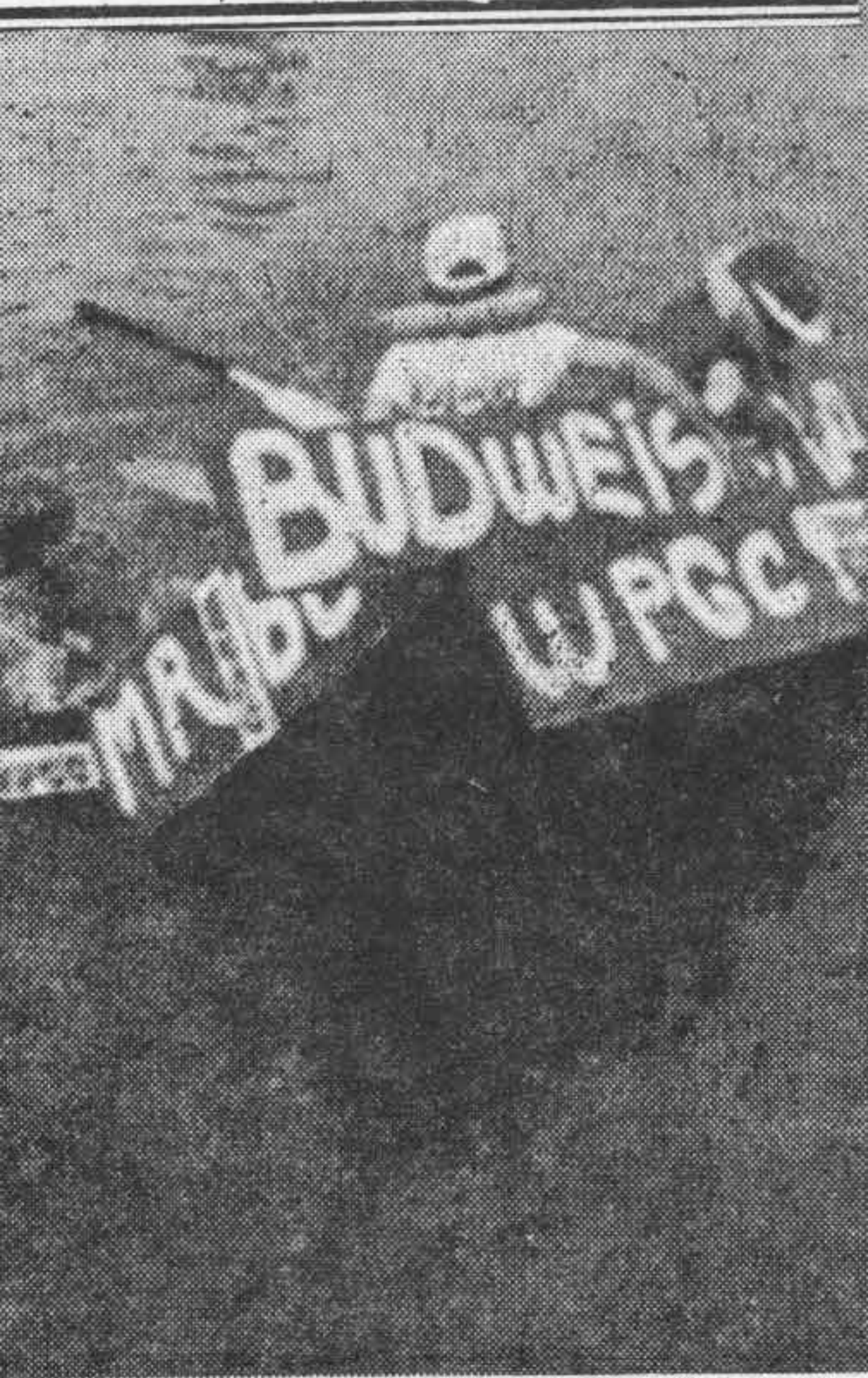


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Boat Race Is Rafts of Fun

By Sue Mullin

Special to The Washington Star

It was once more into the brink as well as the drink yesterday at West Potomac Park when about 6,000 over-aged Huck Finns showed up for a 1.8-mile raft race.

Some of the logos on tee-shirts worn by participants said it all: "I'm here for the beer." The event, called the Budweiser Ramblin' Raft Race, was sponsored by radio station WPGC, the Anheuser-Busch Breweries Inc. and the American Rafting Association.

So many people ended up in the water, capsizing or simply trying to beat the heat, that one observer said, "We'll know the Potomac is now safe for swimming if these people live."

Any type of non-motorized raft was eligible to compete and 1,200 did. One was moved by a hand-operated paddle-wheel but most were powered by oarsmen and oarswomen.

SOME DISCOVERED after capsizing several times, that if they turned their crafts over, they stayed afloat better.

One craft sported a telephone, and a crew member jumped into the water with it for a make-believe call. Another craft attracted attention with its fire-engine siren.

No one seemed too intent on getting to the finish line. Spirited waterfights ensued en route and some rafters just eased along saying "we're here for the duration."

Participants began arriving in the wee hours of the morning, some building their rafts on the park grounds.

There were many contingents from area military bases, including the 11-member Riff-Raff crew of 11, all stationed at the Coast Guard Oceanographic Unit in the District.

The mast was strung with empty beer bottles. The crew said the contents were consumed in the three weeks it took to put it together.

Some craft had lawn chairs mounted to them, some decks were covered with Astroturf or carpeting, one had a doghouse complete with a dog in a life preserver, but on many crafts the crew just straddled barrels or boards.

LT. T. M. McGLYNN of the Metro Harbor Police said he anticipated about 750 rafts in the water. He said there were four police boats, four Coast Guard Auxiliary boats, one police helicopter and nine civilian volunteer rescue boats on the scene.

"By mid-afternoon, they'll all be drunk and in the water," he said, but added that his department wanted everyone to have a good time and would be guarding the perimeters of the racing scene in case they were needed.

The crowd, including spectators, was estimated at