

THE LUBBOCK TORNADO



\$2





The Color Photos

Front cover, Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Wanda McClure); Back cover, tree amidst Mesa Road area ruins (Jay Harris); inside back, flag over ruins; opposite, home cleaning; inside color, crumpled car, wrecked planes; aerial view homes (Pauline Warner); Fields Living Center (Joe Don Buckner); wrecked home.

(The staff of The Lubbock Tornado is grateful to The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal for its permission to use A-J photographs in preparation of this publication.)

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THE LUBBOCK TORNADO

THE LUBBOCK TORNADO, A unique picture magazine providing a graphic account of Lubbock's most unforgettable moment, May 11, 1970, compiled and edited by the men and women who survived its deadly blow and followed its path through the days that followed as newspaper reporters and photographers. Published June 1, 1970, by Boone Publications, Inc., 4007 Ave. A, Lubbock, Texas, and copyrighted by the staff listed above and by Boone Publications, Inc. Printed in USA, 1970.

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MAY 11, 1970...

A Killer On The Prowl

BY DAVE KNAPP

In one frightful, seemingly endless swoop, a killer tornado packing fringe winds of 200 mph gouged a \$200 million path of destruction through the heart of Lubbock at 9:46 p.m. May 11, 1970, ultimately killing at least 26 persons and injuring 2,000 by conservative count.

Striking swiftly and without warning, the massive twister — later estimated by experts to be 1½ miles wide at one point — made a barren wasteland out of 25 square miles.

The devastation stretched from 19th Street through downtown, the Guadalupe neighborhood, the region around Lubbock Country Club and on to West Texas Air Terminal.

Six hundred single family residences, 450 apartment units and another 8,800 family units were destroyed or damaged, leaving hundreds homeless.

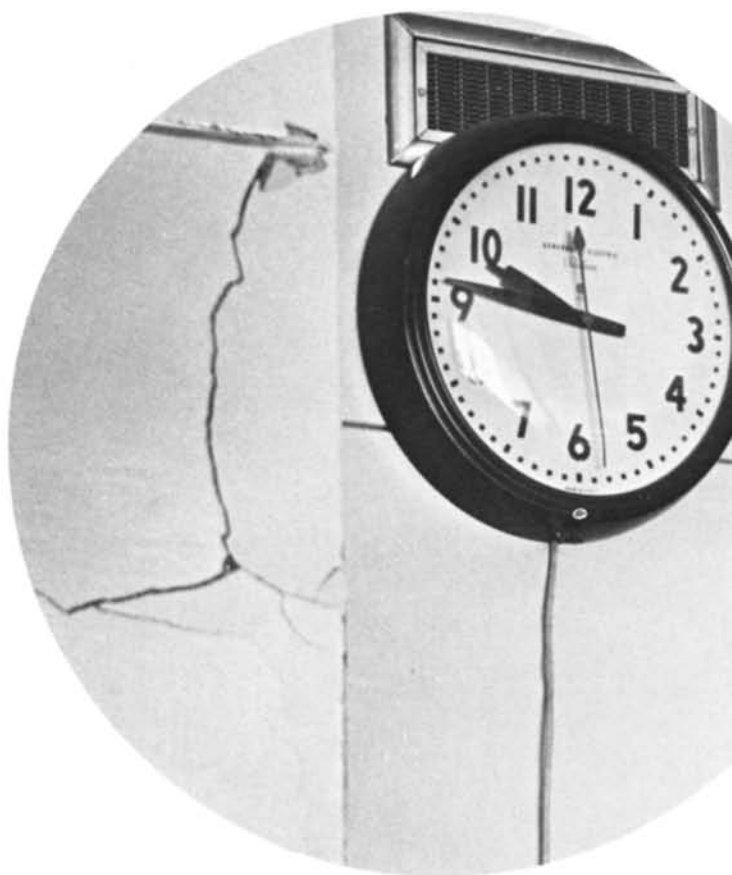
At least 250 businesses were heavily damaged or were wiped out.

There was the stately Great Plains Life Building, long a South Plains land mark, battered and pocked so badly some said it was doomed. Engineers, however, say it will stand another 100 years. Unofficial sources set damage at \$2 million.

And nearby, the First National Bank-Pioneer Gas Building, a structure closely resembling the United Nations Building in New York, appeared to have been shelled by cannons. The glistening facility, said to be one of the most unusual in the nation with thousands of dollars worth of objects of art scattered throughout its interior, sustained \$1,750,000 in losses.

Motels, businesses, industries and houses were in a shambles. Many familiar places were piles of rubble. Others indicated scars that would take a long time to heal.

The wonder was that the death toll did not soar many times higher than it did.



"Unbelievable" was the single word most often used to describe Lubbock's plight.

National Guardsmen, reservists and Texas Highway Patrolmen were rushed into the Hub City to help Lubbock police maintain some semblance of order in the storm-ravaged areas. Off-duty local law enforcement personnel worked almost around-the-clock.

Tight security immediately was thrown up around homes and stores, their once-glittering fronts now gaping holes, with merchandise laid open to looters.

Miles of power lines were downed, and 25,000 telephone stations were kayoed by the gigantic twister — most destructive in Texas' history. Long distance lines also were snarled. And as word raced around the world

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***"... a \$200 million path of
destruction through the heart of
Lubbock at 9:46 p.m. ..."***



A Night of Terror... Tragedy

of the disaster, communications delays became another factor.

There were other problems.

The storm knocked out the city's main water plant and it took more than eight hours for a fresh supply to reach Lubbock from the sandhills area near Muleshoe. In the interim, residents were urged to conserve what few trickles remained in the lines.

Lubbock was two worlds that night.

Residents slept well that night in parts of the Hub City spared by the storm. The horrible nightmare was just beginning to register in the minds of those who survived it as dawn came . . .

"Unbelievable" they said again and again and again.

Sifting through what remained of their homes and businesses, residents could not envision the tornado smashing its way through eight miles of the Pride of the Plains.

In hospitals throughout Lubbock, injured storm victims still were being treated. The death toll climbed. In the early hours of the morning it stood at 17. Then 19, 20. Later, 24, 25 and 26.

The dead included people from 'all walks of life.

A temporary morgue was set up in Smiley Wilson Junior High School, manned by police.

"All we can do," observed one veteran officer, "is tag the bodies, fingerprint them, give them a number and shoot a picture."

Most of the victims had slivers of wood driven into their bodies. Head injuries from flying debris were numerous. The victims were young and old and in-between.

Two truckers passing through were caught in the storm and died on the highway. A woman racing for a storm cellar was killed when a pickup truck was hurled through the air, striking her and crushing her to death. And there was a migrant family that stopped for a red light. Whoosh. The storm had claimed another victim and injured several more.

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"The death toll climbed. In the early hours of the morning it stood at 17. Then 19, 20. Later, 24, 25 and 26."

Aerial photo presents view of downtown Lubbock from the north (opposite page) showing areas hit, missed by twister. At right, resident picks bricks off his crushed automobile.





Emergency hospital is set up in Lubbock Municipal Coliseum (top) to care for the injured. Below, city resident wades through debris strewn by the storm.



A Night of Terror... Tragedy

A dozen schools were hit. Hundreds of students got an unexpected, and in this case, an unwelcome vacation. All business activity was suspended in the downtown area, where skyscrapers absorbed the full blast of the tornado.

"Parts of Lubbock resembled a battlefield. Heavy shelling couldn't have caused more damage."

More than 10,000 motor vehicles were destroyed or sustained heavy damage. Hundreds of them were found buried in debris. One was left standing V-shaped in the Country Club area, framing what was once a home.

The city's only newspaper suffered a heavy blow, but the next morning's editions rolled off the presses of the Amarillo Globe-News, a sister publication, never missing a lick in telling its readers of the storm. After one day, the newspaper's presses were rolling again.

And then, many still couldn't believe it.

"Unbelievable," they continued to say.

Parts of Lubbock resembled a battlefield. Heavy shelling couldn't have caused more damage.

As the sun climbed a little higher in the sky, President Nixon was asked to declare the area a national disaster area. Storm damage survey teams fanned out to assess what The Lubbock Tornado did.

Aid started pouring into the Hub City.

And there was two-way trouble, City residents were attempting to contact loved ones in other towns, and the loved ones also were trying to find out, "Is so-and-so okay?" It was several days before all of these questions were answered.

The Texas Highway Department sent crewmen in from a 17-county area to help clear debris. Trucks from throughout the South Plains—lent by businesses, citizens, county and municipal governments and other sources—started tackling what seemed to be an insurmountable task.

continued



PARKING ONLY
NOTICE
UNAUTHORIZED
VEHICLES WILL BE
TOWED AT
OWNERS EXPENSE





Draperies in Great Plains Life Building were blown into next office as force of the tornado separated ceiling from wall.

...it was unbelievable

The homeless were housed in an assortment of temporary shelters and in Municipal Coliseum. The Red Cross, Salvation Army, city, state and federal agencies moved to provide whatever assistance they were capable of giving in time of need.

Aid funds cropped up everywhere.

The Small Business Administration and insurance companies sent in field representatives and special offices were set up. It was a day of despair, hope and work. But the survivors—some left with nothing but the clothes

on their backs—turned to the future.

And as the day wore on, there were new dangers. Tornadoes flitted about the South Plains, coming close to the Hub City, but mercifully pulling up short.

Lubbock went to bed May 12 still in a daze.

Weary disaster workers struggled to keep up with mounting problems the following day. But there were brighter sides. President Nixon formally declared the city a national disaster area and storm relief funds picked up.

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***"It was a day of despair . . .
of hope . . . of work."***

...like a giant sledgehammer

Portions of the downtown area were reopened for business but lacked one major thing—customers. The cleanup was making progress, heartbreak was still there, but Lubbock was coming back.

And a 24-hour curfew was clamped on the worst sections of the disaster.

Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes, Sen. John Tower, U.S. Rep. George Mahon and Sen. Ralph Yarborough all came for themselves to see what the tornado had done.

"This is the worst I've ever seen," Tower said.

Lubbock's displaced residents started relocating in federally-owned housing in the city. Hospitals caught up with the workload. The cleanup continued.

City officials worked closely with state, federal and other agencies to keep the monumental rehabilitation effort. There were times when the problems seemed to get the upper hand, but Lubbock was getting up off the floor. There was no 10-count.

There will be hundreds of stories untold, many over-exaggerated, thousands told a jillion times through the years as Lubbockites recall May 11, 1970.

But even as memories of the horrible night still remain vivid, there is talk of a new Lubbock, a brighter Lubbock, a city with some of those things it didn't have when The Lubbock Tornado struck.

Then the word "Unbelievable" still might be in order.

"This is the worst I've ever seen."



Aerial view shows Fields & Co. Luxury Living Center on Avenue Q that was crushed by the tornado.



All that remained of the First Cumberland Presbyterian Church was the wall behind the altar (above). Across the street a neighborhood grocery fared little better.





It Was Like Another World

BY JAY HARRIS

It looked like another world . . .

A savage tornado—believed to be the most massive and destructive ever to hit a major metropolitan area in the U.S.—had struck out of blue-green, muggy skies to leave death and destruction across a city that for more than 70 years had somehow escaped the terrible twisters which often dotted the nearby landscapes.

But it had finally happened . . .

And those who survived would remember it forever

. . .

From the moment that awful roar—and the sound of 10,000 fists sending their savage might smashing into skyscraper and slum alike—struck terror across the city, it was a city at the mercy of the elements.

It seemed as though it would never end . . .

On and on and on, the exploding walls and glass and crashing trees and poles and tumbling cars . . .

And the dead and dying and the injured.

Then, the almost sudden, deathly pause . . . and quiet

. . .

And then it was another world . . . a nightmare come true.

The tornado itself—some said there were two, three, even four or more marching side by side—cut a mile and half wide swath eight miles along.

Actually, it appeared to be one massive funnel squatting low on the ground and sending damaging winds outward over a wide area. The main blow took three minutes or more to pass, but damaging, hurricane-like winds with speeds estimated up to 100 or more miles an hour battered the stricken area for another 5 to 8 minutes!

As the winds and rain and hail subsided, the people came cautiously into the streets . . .

There was little or no panic. Instead, an almost unbelievable calmness as those in the severely damaged downtown area surveyed the scenes about them . . . and quickly set about the torturous task ahead.

Out in the residential sections of the city, spreading to the west and northwest and north and northeast from the devastated downtown area, there was almost complete, utter desolation.

Splintered wood and dreams . . .

In many instances, the work of a lifetime was gone in less time than it takes to tell about it.



Jon Fulton of Abernathy, who pitched in to help with the cleanup work, finds gum machine, but the gum was all gone.

One of the Southwest's most bustling cities lay crippled by a monster it knew existed, a monster which had often taunted it but never struck before.

Now, the eerie quiet was broken as survivors shouted questions, ran to dig at piles of debris, to the Emergency Operations Center in the basement of the damaged City Hall, hurried from homes to aid the injured, rushed from still standing but damaged buildings as word of a new blow was reported, or walked, or drove toward the scene of disaster.

The shambles which greeted the eyes of those who survived and the hundreds who came from the spared sections of the city was beyond comprehension.

Cars lay flattened to within two or three feet of the pavement, almost hidden by debris . . . Power lines, telephone poles, draperies from coffee shops and the 15 story First National-Pioneer Gas Building dangled in the damp breeze . . .

The 20-story Great Plains Life building—Lubbock's tallest—seemed to sway, gaping holes had been torn in its windows, a severe gash showed about six stories up.

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"... the sound of ten thousand fists sending their savage might smashing into skyscraper and slum alike . . ."



National Guardsmen manning grader scoop debris from residential streets. The guardsmen pitched in to help until contracts for clearing could be completed.

...a city cleaning up

Nearby, West Texas Hospital, almost in the heart of the damaged area and now badly needed to succor the victims, was battered, without outside power, an emergency center with an emergency of its own.

There were few if any phones still operating in the storm-damaged section, but somehow, mercifully, Southwestern Bell's huge downtown complex came through the blow in comparatively good shape—as did the massive First Methodist Church, which stands watch over the downtown area.

But it appeared that some enemy army had massed its cannon and blasted gaping holes in the modern-

istic First National-Pioneer structure, towering into the tortured sky like a wounded ship adrift in the night.

The huge block-sized structure, which in some respects resembles the United Nations building in New York City, stood out even more starkly in the blacked-out stricken section because emergency power from the nearby gas company's parking building complex was available. Billed as the world's "most unusual bank" and showing art works worth a fortune, the bank's beautiful new lobby was in ruins, with a two-story high statue standing in the entry like a lone sentinel.

	DATE OF BIRTH	HT
	COLOR HAIR	COLOR EYES
	A-5	
	BEARER'S NAME	AGENCY
EMERGENCY OFFICIAL The Person Described on this card has been assigned essential emergency duties		

...and a city fighting back

Within minutes after the storm had passed, the downtown area was a beehive of activity, including unfortunately a few looters.

Ambulances, their wails piercing the night, and emergency lights flashing, cautiously plowed their way through debris-littered streets as the dead, dying and injured were brought out by rescuers who sometimes dug with their bare hands to reach the victims.

Major hospitals over the city were quickly taxed. Doctors, nurses and others who could help—on or off duty—quickly rallied.

As lightning continued to flicker in the background, emergency generators pumped their power into probing lights and makeshift operations around the storm torn area, which in many ways resembled a busy battlefield.

And although many in the city did not immediately realize it, another grave danger had emerged. The storm had swept through the Lubbock Power and Light Company's main downtown power plant, then roared on into the Mackenzie Park area to add new devastation to city facilities.

Power lines of Southwestern Public Service went down as poles snapped like matchsticks.

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***"... the dead, dying
and injured were
brought out by rescuers
who sometimes dug
with their bare hands."***



City Manager Bill Blackwell, left, and Mayor James Granberry, center, discuss disaster aid with U. S. Rep. George Mahon as the city began digging out from under the rubble.



U. S. Sen. John Tower, left, and Hilary Sandoval Jr., administrator of the Small Business Administration, right, and aide survey damage left by the twister.





Lightning knifes over damaged Great Plains building as setting sun and new storm clouds paint an unusual picture of Lubbock's skyline. The area was hard hit by tornado.

...everyone pitched in to help

The storm battered section was licking its wounds in the dark.

But worse, the storm had knocked out power to a major portion of the city's water pump system. A critical water shortage soon developed and as city officials issued warnings for strict rationing and saving of water, faucets throughout the city went dry.

Irrigation wells and others which had been drilled in and near the city suddenly became vital—and their owners broadcast offers to share the priceless liquid.

It wasn't until late in the afternoon that full water use became available.

As dawn broke over Lubbock Tues-

day morning, it was as if the city was existing in two worlds.

From 19th Street and University Avenue where the storm started sweeping in at a damaging near roof-top level on north and east, the scene was one of increasing destruction—until finally one gazed on scenes reminiscent of those in photos of

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***"... it was as if the city was
existing in two worlds."***



...and a prayer for tomorrow

bombed European cities. The major residential sections south of 19th Street and west of University escaped. Had the thundering twister dipped sooner, the death toll easily could have been in the hundreds.

The storm itself had boiled up south of the city an hour or more before dusk. Then building, the boiling clouds shifted slightly to the southeast and before dusk the U.S. Weather Bureau was issuing warnings of severe weather for Lubbock, Floyd and Crosby counties.

Within minutes, the ominous "hook" was appearing on the Bureau's radar scope. Then as the storm intensified, reports of baseball sized hail south of the city started. The storm seemed to shift slightly to the southeast with a northeasterly direction, perhaps lulling many into a feeling of false security.

An off-duty policeman twice reported that a huge funnel had been sighted not too far south of Tahoka traffic circle.

By 9:20 p.m. rain and hail—still golfball to baseball sized—had started moving into the southeastern portions of the city.

While almost everyone had been concentrating on the storm which many obviously thought would move northeast of the main part of Lubbock, the southern arm of the storm continued to boil like a volcano—and new thunderstorms had rapidly formed to the west and southwest.

By 9:35 p.m., the clouds to the south seemed to shift slightly, even as the new storm system from the southwest moved in.

At 9:35 p.m., the Weather Bureau informed the EOC in City Hall that

a tornado "hook" had been located in the clouds in the vicinity of Brownfield Highway and 19th St.

At the offices of The Avalanche-Journal, the second half of the night shift had been at work 15 minutes. It was 9:45 p.m. and the rain and hail was pouring down on the long, modern building with its communications lines reaching out across the world. A newsman talking to an Associated Press editor in New York City told him "I have to hang up now, we are going to have a tornado . . ."

Clocks in the downtown area stopped. They read a fraction past 9:46 p.m.



The city was at the mercy of the storm . . . and in deep trouble . . .

Then came the quiet . . . and the unbelievable ruins . . .

Now, many more nights and days have passed and a city brought together in tragedy rebuilds for tomorrow . . .

As an editorial in The Avalanche-Journal summed it up . . .

" . . . This will go down in history as a time in which Lubbock was at its best . . . The shock of this disaster will remain for a long time, but so will memories of the manner in which so many hands pitched in to make it right again in their city . . ."

***" . . . memories of the manner in which
so many hands pitched in to make it
right again in their city . . ."***



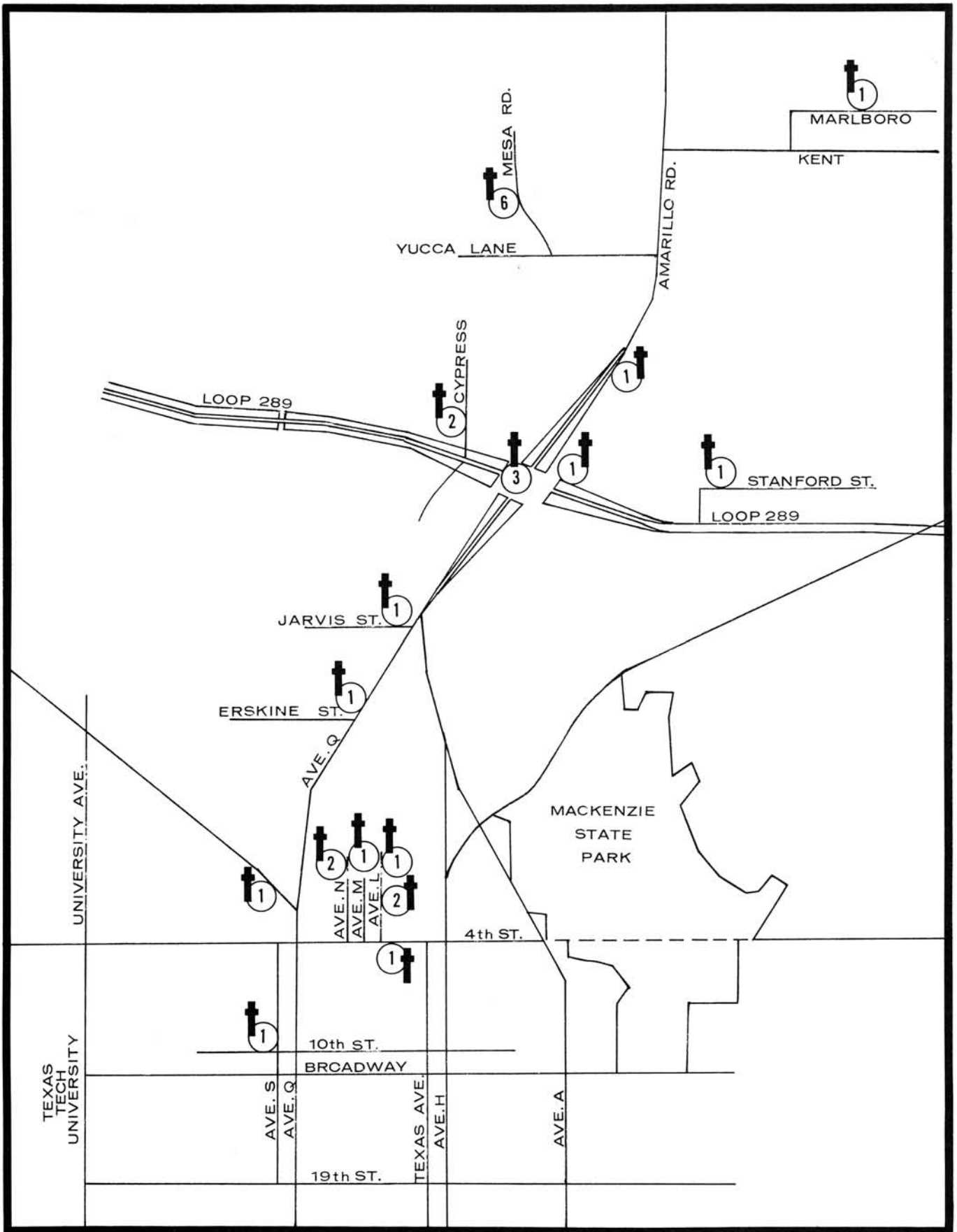
These Texas Tech coeds were planning to leave when school was out, even before the storm wrecked their home (above) but owner of the auto below was apparently planning to stay.





Airplanes and hangars on the east side of West Texas Air Terminal, top, were turned into twisted metal by the tornado, but they fared as well as the automobile, below, that became a casualty as the storm passed through the Country Club area.





THE VICTIMS...

How and Where They Died

BY JACK GOLDING

May 11 began just as a hundred before it.

Hot winds had dried the Plains most of Mothers Day, but Monday was cool and a gentle breeze pushed across the city.

By mid-afternoon there was a slight chance for thunderstorms, but too slight to mention in the forecast.

At dusk a bright sun pierced its rays through dark clouds that had spattered the city with raindrops only moments before.

The spring shower dipped out of a threatening sky and H. D. Short, 73, and his wife, Lillie, 72, left their gardening and rushed into their stucco home at 512 E. Stanford.

Across Fourth Street, perhaps a mile away, John Cox, 26, and his wife, Glenna, drove along Clovis Road toward Avenue Q. Cox was a Vietnam veteran working on a masters degree at Texas Tech. His wife was a school teacher. They had been in Shallowater visiting relatives and were returning to their home at 1615 16th St.

A moment later, Lillie Short was dead and Cox was seriously injured. They were victims of a twisting, thundering wind that sent a city buckling to its knees and claimed the lives of 24 others before it spent its fury. Mrs. Short's daughter, Mrs. H. H. Reagan of 4915 14th St., talked with her mother over the telephone a half hour before she died.

"They had worked in the yard, rose bushes and this sort of thing. There's just nothing left. The trees are even blown down.

"My father said the electricity had gone off. They were standing side by side in the living room when the storm hit."

"My mother got up to close the door the wind had blown open. I guess the last words she ever spoke was 'I cannot hold this door.'"

Short was helping his wife when he heard a terrible roar. The storm destroyed only the front part of their home.

"Debris flew through the front door and wall. My mother took the full impact from it," Mrs. Reagan recalled later. The 73-year-old man was thrown across the room onto a couch.

"When he realized what had happened he called Mother's name. A pet dachshund, Nicki, was beside my mother's body."

As young Cox and his wife continued their journey home, they neared Avenue Q on the Clovis road and plunged right into the killer storm. Apparently the young couple took refuge outside the car. He died soon after in Methodist Hospital. She was listed in serious condition.

During the following seconds, similar scenes of horror would occur in the path of the holocaust.

Four miles from the Cox couple, Dale McClintock, 39, of 2101 Mesa Rd., a former policeman and a salesman for Lubbock's W. D. Wilkins Co., struggled with a storm cellar door. His wife, Betty, and two daughters were at home with his mother, Mrs. L. L. McClintock at 2121 Cypress Rd. in the Country Club Addition.

McClintock was trying to open the door so his family could dash into the shelter. An instant later he was killed, probably by flying debris.

At Loop 289 and U.S. Hwy. 87, Thomas Andrew Cook, 29, a trucker, and a companion, Frank Moreno Canales Jr., 33, both of Uvalde, were driving their large van loaded with bird seed. It was destroyed and they were riddled with debris and flying wreckage. The spinning storm claimed two more lives.

In a small home at 108 N. Ave. L, Mrs. Aurora Salazar, 68, of 216 Ave. N, huddled with the Emilio Ortega family and five other persons, 11 in all. Everyone but Mrs. Salazar took shelter beneath a table and other furniture. She was struck by a piece of wall and a large chair when the frame dwelling collapsed around them. She died May 12 in West Texas Hospital.

Two blocks away, Mrs. Estefana Guajardo Paez, of 201 N. Ave. O, fled her home and was trying to go to a storm cellar when an old, blue pickup truck that was tossed by the storm crushed her. She was a native of Mexico and moved to Lubbock 54 years ago.

Jose Luz Leyva, 13, son of a migrant farm worker from Brownsville, was in a caravan of four cars traveling from Brownsville to Nebraska. The cars reached a traffic light at Plainview Highway and Erskine Road and the first three made it through. The Leyva car stopped.

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*"... victims of a twisting, thundering wind
that sent a city buckling to its knees..."*





The Fields and Company Living Center, 4th and Ave. Q, top view from a block away through overturned car, and bottom, up close. Opposite—aerial view of smashed homes in Mesa Road area.







...only a moment, and it all changed

The family covered itself with quilts and began to pray. Jose and his father were sucked out of the car and hit by flying fragments borne by deafening winds.

Jose died early May 16 in Methodist Hospital.

The same day, Joseph Glen Garrett, 29, of 1102 Marlboro St., died. He, his wife and three children were in their home when the deadly tornado destroyed it. Garrett's sister, Ruth Ford of 302 E. Purdue St., said all five members of the family were tossed into a field by the whirling winds.

Pedro Lopez, 56, of 208 Ave. N., was found dead at 1st St. and N. Ave. M. He was muddy and wet and bleeding from his head and neck.

Jose Aguilar, 75, of 221 N. Ave M, was found dead in his storm-ravaged home.

Shelby Curtis Glenn, 52, who lived northeast of Lubbock near Idalou, died a short time after he arrived at Methodist Hospital.

Mrs. Johnny Hobbs Butts, 56, was dead when she arrived at Methodist Hospital. She had been at home at 1902 10th St., when the twirling storm crashed across the structure and left only a few walls standing.

At 2105 Cypress Rd., Mrs. Frances Rogers, 88, and her daughter, Cassie, were alone. Mrs. Rogers was sitting in a chair when the wind took the house, stripping

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***"The family covered itself with quilts
and began to pray . . ."***

...destruction in the city

both mother and daughter as it went. Mrs. Rogers was wrapped in a piece of tin.

She was held prisoner all night. Mrs. Rogers and her daughter lay in the rain and hail, unprotected but conscious as the storm spent its fury. The elderly woman was black and blue from hail and tin marks when she died in the intensive care unit at Methodist Hospital May 20.



In a frame home at 2301 Mesa Rd., Kenneth R. Medlin, 23, had talked with his mother over the telephone.

"It looks like it might hail," he told her, "I'd better put the car in the garage."

Moments later his entire family became victims of the storm. The young bricklayer, his wife, Mary Jane, 22, and a son, Alan Raye, 3, apparently were killed instantly when the storm demolished their home.

An infant son, Dustin, only nine-months-old, was found wrapped in blankets. He died at 2:10 a.m. the following day, May 12, in Methodist Hospital.

A block from the Medlin home, Mrs. E. C. Knight was in her residence at 2201-A Mesa Rd. The 63-year-old home economist was at home while her husband was in Mexico fishing. She never saw him again.

In Acuff, Dora Bertie Graves, 49, and her husband, H. J., spent the afternoon working on a new home they were building. They were returning to Lubbock and were on Loop 289 and near the Amarillo Highway when the killing storm found them. Mrs. Graves was found dead on one side of the highway and her husband was seriously injured on the other.

Mrs. Pauline Zarazua, 39, of 2803 1st St., had just gotten off work at Litton Industries. She died in her car at Loop 289 and Hwy. 87.

Salvadore Jack Lopez, 57, of 208 N. Ave. L, died when the whirling winds destroyed his home.

Across the street and a few doors down, Otila Gonzales, 46, died in her home at 201 N. Ave. L, as the storm whipped it to the ground.

Mrs. Helen Alafa, 30, of 2908 2nd Place, had just been involved in a traffic mishap shortly before the storm crashed over the city. Her husband had met her at the scene of the collision and as they returned to their home, traveling on 4th St., it struck. They stopped the car and

*"She never saw
him again."*



Residents salvage what's left from demolished home in hard-hit Country Club area as new storm clouds gather.

...and doom in the suburbs

fled for shelter but Mrs. Alafa was fatally injured by storm-blown debris. She died May 21 in the intensive care unit of West Texas Hospital.

Two days before, the storm claimed the life of another young victim. She was Marie Angela Mora, 8, daughter of Mrs. Florencio Mora of 1311 Jarvis St.

The child died May 19 in Methodist Hospital. Marie, three sisters, and their mother were crouching under the

house when the tornado struck. The father, a welder, was at work.

Mrs. Ola Belle Hatch, 77, of 2101 Cypress Rd., died May 13 in Reese Air Force Base Hospital. Mrs. Hatch and her husband, William H., were injured when the storm struck their home near Lubbock Country Club.

It had been a night of terror.

"... a night of terror."



Telling It Like It Was

BY PHIL HAMILTON

There was only time for two words—"Get Down!"

The cry came from somewhere inside the second-floor newsroom of The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal as glass on the first floor shattered and swirled up the stairway and the few small panes on the second floor burst from their casings.

For a moment it seemed impossible that a metropolitan newspaper, hooked up by telegraph with the weather station only a few miles away, connected by radio to the local police broadcasts, and with a traditional eye for news related to South Plains weather could be caught in the swirling vortex without more advance notice.

But as copy paper, pictures and other items left on desks as they were abandoned for more solid shelter swirled through the beam of a flashlight, the realization came that the city—and The Avalanche-Journal building—had been hit by a tornado.

The flashlight that had been nearby when the storm hit became a beacon in a sea of darkness and the initiating force in publishing a newspaper that on any other night would have been wrapped up and ready for the presses three hours later.

But this wasn't an ordinary night.

The block-long building had taken the full fury of the twister, the roof was heavily damaged and the north wall of a new addition to the mail room scattered across the terrain beyond.

The newsroom had to be evacuated when the ceiling opened up and water from the drenching rains that accompanied the twister poured in. In moments the water was streaming into the composing room and down the stairs to the first floor.

Aided by the light from two flashlights that had been purchased only a short time earlier when staff members had needed—but had been without—lights as they gathered information following the storms that crippled Whiteface, Whitharral, Cotton Center and Plainview, reporters, proof readers, photographers, and printers filed into the press room in the building's basement that was unscathed by the twister.

Next came a head count. No injuries. But two members of the staff had been out when the storm hit. Both showed up a short time later—shaken, but unhurt.



Photographer Milton Adams, taking pictures of hailstones that had pounded the area an hour before the tornado struck, had been out of the storm area completely. The police reporter, Lane Arthur, en route to a reported storm near Idalou, had been caught in the twister, forced to abandon the staff car when it was blown into a ditch, and had hitched a ride in a battered police unit to get back.

A quick survey of the damage that could be seen from outside the building brought the realization that this might be the biggest news story of the century in Lubbock—but how do we get it to the public?

Loss of power had silenced composing room equipment and the press. Telephones were dead. Typewriters and note pads had been left behind in the flooded newsroom. But there were still reporters and editors—and that's a beginning.

A relatively dry corner of the circulation department on the first floor was quickly turned into a makeshift newsroom and all available hands were pressed into

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"The newsroom had to be evacuated when the ceiling opened up ..."

a miracle at 8th Street & Ave. J

service in an attempt to determine the magnitude of the storm. Several reporters who were not scheduled to work that night soon showed up. Included in those was the A-J regional editor, Tanner Laine, who a short time later fell victim to a misplaced step on a flooded curb and finished the night in a hospital bed with a severely damaged knee—the only staff casualty of the storm.

Still with no idea how their efforts would get into print, the staff was divided into teams of two and sent out, pioneer style, to survey the surrounding area.

Others were pressed into service talking with persons who had weathered the storm and just “dropped by” to see how the A-J had fared. Others watched the parade of injured through the city’s hospitals.

Transportation was at a premium. Many of the employees’ and staff cars had been battered by the storm. Those that were available were almost useless on the rubble-littered streets, but by midnight reports from various points across the city and from the Emergency Operating Center in City Hall had provided a rough idea of the magnitude of the storm.

The A-J radio station, KFYO, had a line open to Dallas station KRLD when the storm hit. Through some stroke of fate it remained open.

Newsmen and others, gathering in the flooded and darkened first floor area of The A-J after the initial shock and head count, and within 15 minutes started charting plans to get a paper out.

As soon as it was ascertained that it would be impossible to publish in The A-J building that night, alternatives were quickly hashed over, with The Amarillo Globe-News plant the logical choice—despite dwindling time and long distance.

The wheels were in motion.

Key personnel who needed to confer somehow found the time to do so at the right time. There was complete teamwork, quick decisions.

Within half an hour, staff and other members were fanning over the city to compile first accounts. Within an hour the picture was taking definite shape.

In addition to the KYFO line to Dallas, A-J newsmen waded water and encountered flat tires to reach South-

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...by a line and a prayer

western Bell offices where another line was made available to The A-J so that news of the disaster could be fed in detail to The Associated Press in Dallas for distribution around the world.

Notes, some of them soggy and stained, started pouring in from staff members. By midnight, both the line at KFYO and another at Southwestern were "tied-up" by A-J staffers pouring storm news into the offices of The Amarillo Globe-News which had set up a special staff detail to compile hundreds of words for use in The A-J edition at the same time the Amarillo paper was compiling its own late storm paper.

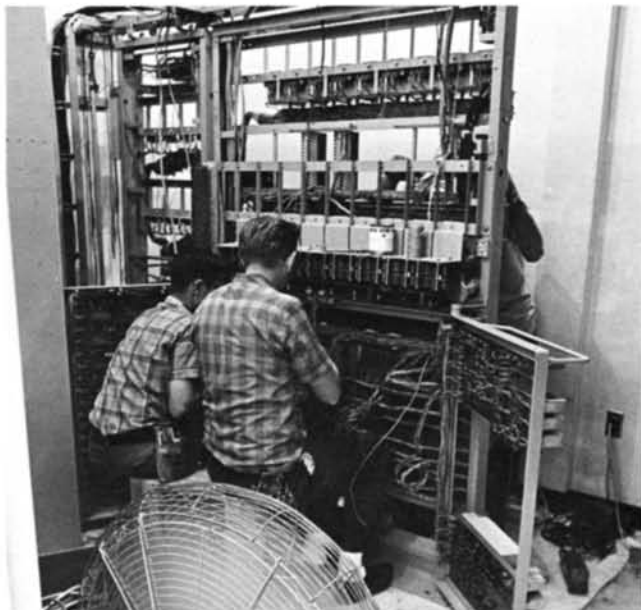
The last "top" on the main story—updating it to say 20 persons had been killed, an accurate report at that time—was dictated about 3 a.m.

The Globe-News even had engraved an Avalanche-Journal "sig" right down to the "red sunrise" and by 7 a.m. had printed and trucked to The A-J offices some 60,000 copies of the "miracle" storm edition!

A more direct telephone operation was set up for the following afternoon edition and it, with a list of known dead, also was printed in Amarillo and trucked in.

If the Tuesday papers seemed to amaze those who wondered how it was done, the Wednesday morning and afternoon "Tornado Editions" were even more impressive.

Working in makeshift quarters, with transportation still at a premium, flickering lights from a single line and at times using a portable generator, the 42-page Wednesday morning paper—carrying pages crammed with pictures and reams of the latest storm details—rolled on time!



Telephone technicians worked around the clock to restore The Avalanche-Journal's contact with the outside world.

The newspaper on the doorstep Tuesday morning seemed to those who had compiled it a symbol of triumph over impossible odds, but the elation was confined to a few.

One member of the staff, visiting his barber a few days later, expressed his pride in publishing that morning.

"Yeh, you got it out," was the reply. "But it was sure a little thing—only eight pages."

But to those who had a hand in its making, it was the biggest eight pages ever published anywhere.

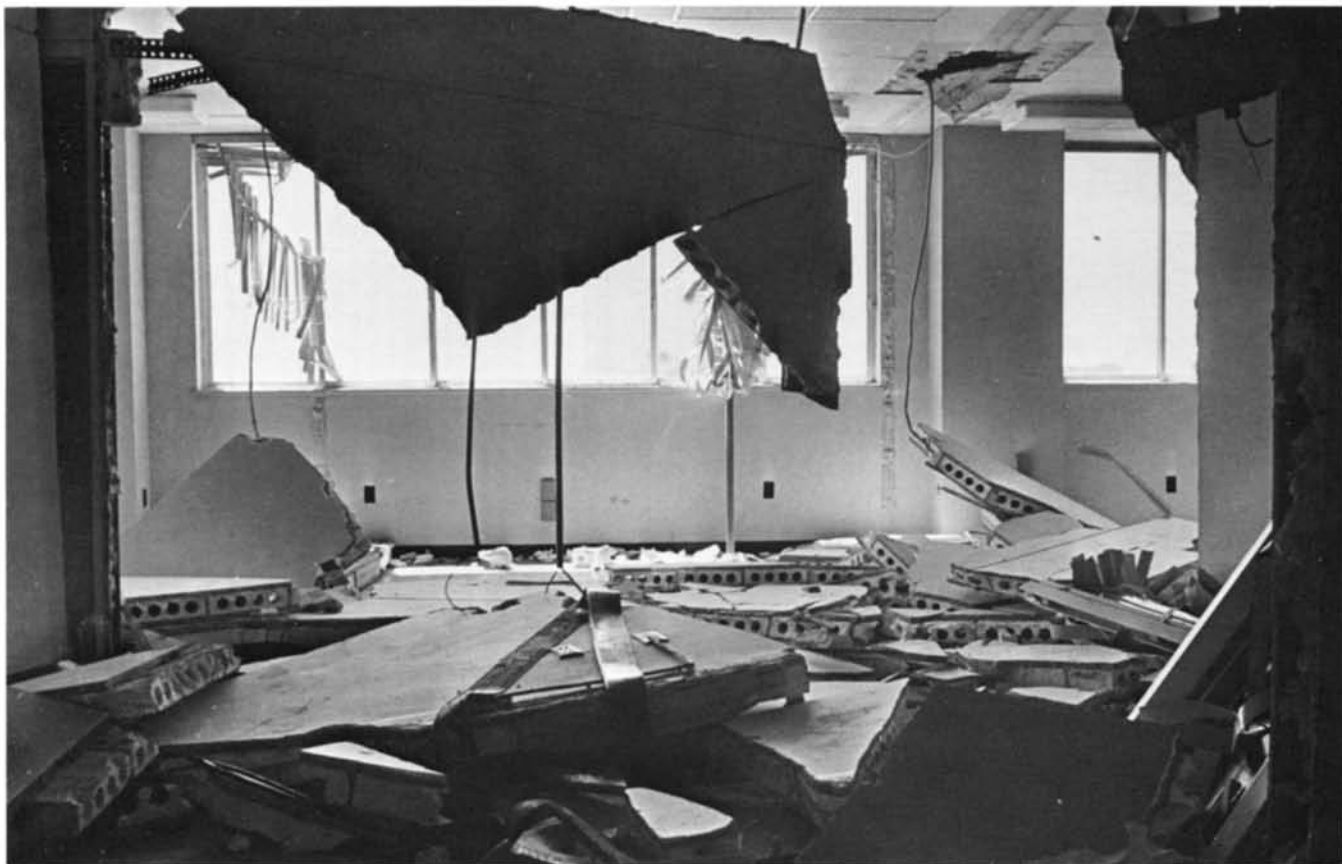


motels, businesses and littered streets

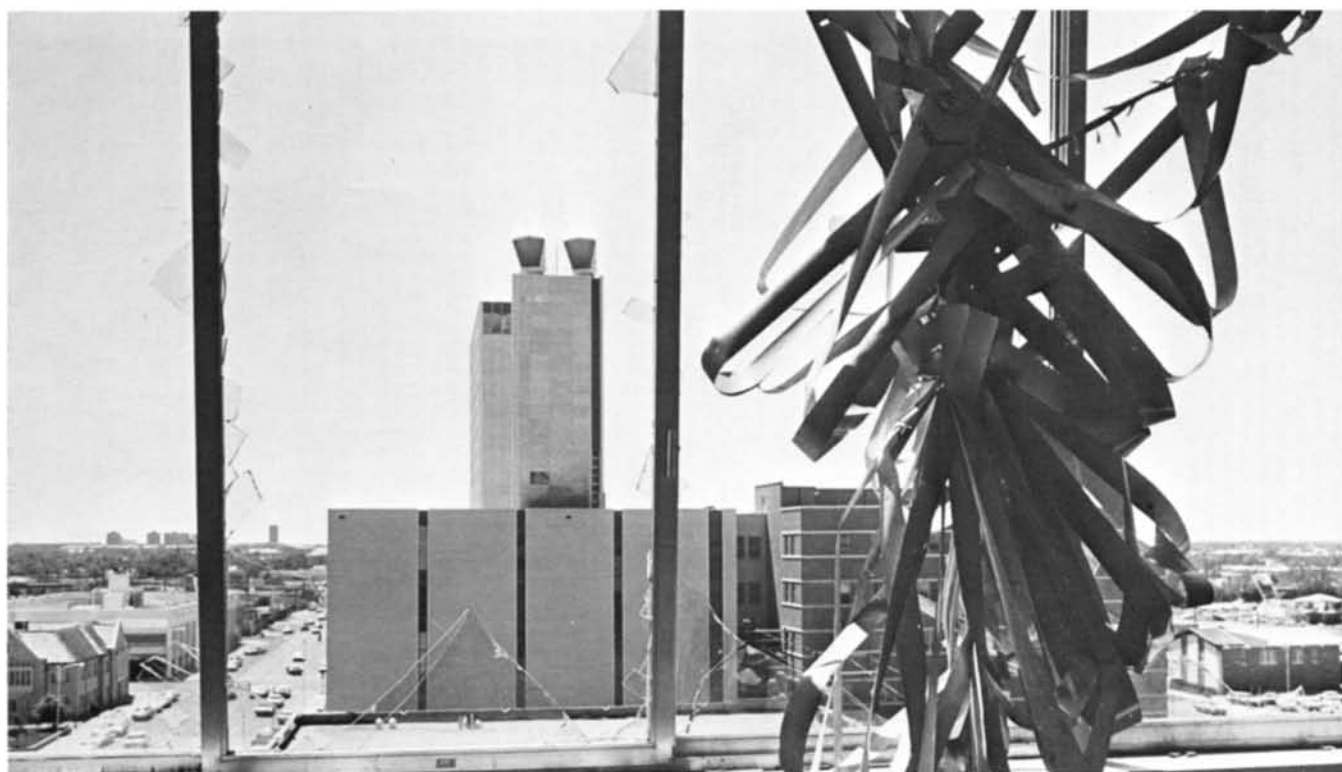


Eldorado Motel (above) took the full force of the storm but patrons escaped without serious injury. Below (left) an employee of Newsom's gathers a few supplies that were not ruined by the twister. And at right an employee of a downtown store sweeps debris off the sidewalk.





Looking into a fifth floor office of the Great Plains Life Building, photographer captures the results of the storm's force.



Looking out of the building shows the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Building scarred but still standing.

Tech student apartments were targets



Tech students pause for a snack in the area where their apartment stood before the storm (top), but at another apartment complex nearby, only a few of the apartments were unroofed.



two views of Astro Motel — 5th St. and Ave. Q



Aerial and ground-level views of the Astro Motel with twisted Newsom Co. complex in foreground above.





Jones Stadium lights, among the nation's best, dimmed by twister.

What To Do In Case of TORNADO

● When a black, deadly tornado approaches, a person's immediate reaction may mean the difference between life and death.

● In open country, move away from the killer's path at a right angle. If there is no time to escape, lie flat in the nearest depression, perhaps a ditch or ravine.

● If you're in a city or town, seek shelter inside, preferably in a tornado cellar, an underground shelter. Even in a steel-framed or reinforced concrete building of substantial construction. But stay away from windows!

● In an office building, stand in an interior hallway on a lower floor, preferably the basement.

● In homes, the corner of the basement toward the tornado usually offers the greatest safety.

● In a house with no basement, take shelter under heavy furniture or under a mattress in the center part of the house.

● Keep some windows open but stay away from them!

● In factories, post a lookout but be ready to move quickly to sections of the plant offering the greatest protection.

● In schools, go to a storm cellar or an underground excavation. If there is no storm cellar but the building is of reinforced construction, stay inside. Away from windows! If possible, go to an interior hallway on the lowest floor. Avoid large rooms with poorly supported roofs, such as auditoriums and gymnasiums.

● If the building is not of reinforced construction, go quickly to a nearby reinforced building or to a ravine or open ditch and lie flat.



Twisted sheet metal forms a shroud around the Great Plains Life Building a few blocks in the background.

blocked streets, flooded roads, crushed vehicles



Fallen power poles block downtown streets.



Flooded intersections stall traffic.



Falling wall crushes truck delivering comics.

May 11: a bad day for Texas

May 11 could easily be recorded as the deadliest day in modern Texas history.

It was May 11, 1953, when a black, swirling storm dropped out of the turbulent afternoon skies over Waco, killing 114 persons and injuring 597. The spinning whirlpool damaged 900 homes and destroyed 150. Before it swept out of the Central Texas city, it had left almost 700 other buildings either destroyed or damaged.

The same day, a tornado struck near San Angelo in the Concho River Valley, striking eleven dead and causing 159 injuries.

Exactly 17 years later, May 11, 1970, a spiraling monster moving in from the south, crippled Lubbock, a bustling city that was the hub of the South Plains. In its wake, it left 26 dead, and countless injuries.

Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes confers with U.S. Sen. John Tower on best methods to aid city with federal, state funds.



Storage elevators along 4th Street took a beating. One on the south side of street fell before the force of the winds.



Cleanup work begins with everyone pitching in to help. Abernathy school teacher dons overalls to help clean up brick in the downtown area (above). A Lubbock youth takes axe in hand to help remove tree limbs from residential property.



volunteer aid...

...and trained help

On May 11, Sharon McNeece, 13, was covered by the splintered remains of her storm-torn home.

Seven days later the small, blonde and slightly freckled youngster was still homeless herself, but she wanted to help others.

Sharon, at right, and a friend, Faye Jackson, 10, started a door-to-door fund-raising campaign for storm victims.

At the end of a tiring day, they turned their proceeds, \$16.08, over to the ever-increasing and much-needed disaster relief fund.

"We just heard all these things and wanted to help as much as we could," the sunburned girls explained.

The youngsters and hundreds of other citizens opened their hearts and their pockets to disaster relief agencies faced with a monumental task.



across the street...



...and around the corner



a view from the kitchen...



...and one from downtown





Scene of utter destruction among homes in hard-hit Guadalupe area.



... Lots of water ... but little to drink.



a message in the ruins

"So persecute them with Thy tempest, and make them afraid with Thy storm."

These words stood out on the open page and immediately caught the eyes of two Texas Highway Department workers as they cleared rubble from the Guadalupe area of Lubbock after the May 11 tornado.

They were printed in a battered, water-soaked pocket testament opened to the 83rd Psalm with the preceding page folded back.

David H. Patton and Charles Penick, both of Slaton, found the testament atop a pile of debris that had lodged beneath a small bridge in the vicinity of North Avenue K and Emory Street.

From that 13th verse, the passage read:

"Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O Lord.

"Let them be confounded and troubled forever; yet, let them be put to shame, and perish;

"That men may know that Thou whose name alone is Jehovah, are the most high over all the earth."

Empty hotel (above) and crowded street (below) were scenes prevalent in the aftermath of the twister.



They Came, They Saw and They Were Awed

For most of the first week after the devastating tornado struck, by necessity a major portion of the damaged area was blocked to the general public.

Only those persons with emergency passes and who lived, worked or otherwise had reason to be in the stricken section were permitted in by Lubbock Police, Department of Public Safety, Sheriff's units or National Guardsmen.

Gradually, the barriers were lifted, first in the main business section, and then gradually in other areas as cleanup operations progressed.

Then, on Sunday, May 17, the public was permitted to make a guided tour of all but two sections still crippled and off limits.

In long, seemingly unending lines, they came.

Not only from Lubbock, but numerous towns throughout the South Plains and Panhandle, New Mexico, and Oklahoma and dozens of other states. Miles of cars, trucks, motorcycles, dune buggies, bicycles and afoot . . .

They, individually and collectively, were stunned.

Many had never seen such devastation in their lifetimes. Few indeed were those who were prepared for the utter ruins which lay before them, mute evidence of the

power of Nature unleashed in all her fury.

And they were touched . . .

Many gave money to civic club groups stationed strategically along the route, the funds to be turned over to disaster relief.

Others took more direct action . . .

"We haven't given a thin dime or a single piece of clothing," one man related, "But we're on our way home right now to clean out our closets and stock of canned goods . . ."

A man stopped to fix a flat tire . . . Nearby an older man dug through the rubble of his home. The man with the flat, looking up, stopped, rolled up his sleeves and walked over . . . He too started helping the man clean brick and straighten the rubble . . .

A car, its windows shattered by the previous Monday's storm, approached a busy intersection where a tired and hot officer directed traffic. A hand came out of the car and the patrolman was given a cooling drink and a cup of ice cream . . .

Those who came will never forget, and although most of them didn't need to be reminded . . . "There but for the grace of God, go I . . ."





