

Clues 'painted' in sky of approaching twister

by DOUG REED

Curling wisps and fibres of cirrus clouds, forming like so many giant white fluffy feathers, 45,000 to 50,000 feet above the ground, Friday afternoon, were the only clues of approaching bad weather.

Similar cloud formation appeared just hours before two vicious twisters slammed into the Woodstock-Norwich-Branford area (Oxford, Brant, Haldimand-Norfolk) at supper hour on Aug. 7, 1979.

Another clue last Friday's foul weather was on its way was a dropping barometer which finally bottomed out at 29.3 inches after falling for most of the day.

By four in the af-

ternoon, after cool winds had picked up thanks to a cold front moving in from Lake Hurons, it started to grow darker. Then the rains came, followed by thunder and lightning and plenty of gale force winds.

Then without warning six twisters blew into Central Ontario slicing their way from Orangeville and Shelburne to Barrie and Tottenham.

As they ripped through the province they spread havoc over a wide area and in some cases virtually obliterated entire residential blocks.

Bricks fell like confetti as home after home exploded into a

darkening sky.

Friday's deadly twisters left at least 1,000 homeless, injured hundreds and killed 13.

In many cases the only link with the outside world was through the use of ham radio sets. Barrie radio and TV stations were knocked off the air for a time after power and telephone lines had been knocked out of commission.

Premier Frank Miller who visited many of the stricken areas on Saturday promised, Ontario would provide immediate disaster relief. A spokesman for the federal government gave the same assurance.



Twister's brute force flips building

This frame building was flipped over on its roof by the brute force of one of six twisters that raced through central Ontario last Friday afternoon. The above photo was taken in Barrie

where damage will run into the millions of dollars. Twelve people in the province died from injuries they received during the killer storms.

-Photo by Peter Spohn

Twister 'bombs' village

One of six twisters to slice their way through sections of central Ontario just before 4:30 p.m., Friday, all but blew the village of Grand Valley off the face of the earth.

Two people were killed, 69 others were injured as almost every home in the community suffered some destruction from the rampaging tornado.

The public library and two churches were flattened as were literally scores of residential dwellings.

It was as though a bomber had unleashed its payload, there was total destruction as far as the eye could see.

Photos tell the story

The day the earth stood still

May 31, 1985

P6,7



Bandage One on the job

Bandage One, Ministry of Health's helicopter ambulance was pressed into service shortly after six vicious tornadoes ripped a path of death and destruction through central Ontario late Friday afternoon. The 'copter

dropped off a supply of blood for Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital. Saturday it "tied down" at HDH to wait out the turbulence left in the wake of Friday's killer storm whipped up by 500 km/h (300 mph) winds.

Vehicles sucked up like toys

Not all the damage inflicted last Friday afternoon on Central Ontario by six twisters was heaped on buildings, power and telephone lines and poles.

Dozens of motor-vehicles were tossed like dinky toys and wrecked beyond repair. That was especially true along Highway 400 at Barrie.

There were reports of vehicles being sucked up by one twister and being lifted 100 feet in the air before the funnel released its grip. It was an afternoon of terror.

In rural areas livestock often were killed by flying debris or were dashed

to death after being caught out in open fields as the twister moved east.

Drive sheds, barns and the occasional silo met much the same fate. Farm implements were destroyed by the topsy-turvy weather while roads leading into the devastated areas looked like battle zones, as the tornadoes vented their fury on everything in their path.

In some cases, the vicious twisters skirted entire communities only to settle down on others with disastrous results.

May 31, 1985, a black Friday in Ontario's history.

The good in people

Within hours of last Friday's half a dozen killer tornadoes, outside aid and volunteer assistance started to stream into those areas most badly hit by the twisters.

Friends, neighbours and relatives rallied together.

An emergency services co-ordinator with the Red Cross is reported as saying the response "from volunteers and people offering their homes to the homeless has been overwhelming."

In the Barrie area

alone it was estimated that as many as 200 people had been billeted while others found their own accommodation just hours after twisters had ripped through a 100 km long corridor, 45 km wide from south of Owen Sound to Barrie.

Scores of claims adjustors from as many as 200 insurance firms zeroed in on the devastated communities.

One company authorized its personnel to make out cheques for up to \$15,000 immediately.

However, the final tab will run into the tens of millions of dollars given the hundreds of homes and factories that were literally flattened by the vicious tornadoes which ripped through the district with little warning.

It has been estimated it will cost as much as \$8 million to replace Barrie Raceway, for instance, which took much of the brunt of one of the twisters that touched down along a natural valley east and west of the raceway in the Highway 400 area of Barrie.



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