

Furious twister decimates subdivision

by DOUG REED

The devastation was awesome. Even from a height of 1,900 feet above Barrie we could easily detect entire neighbourhoods that lay in ruins.

As we circled in our Cessna high over Barrie, early Saturday morning, our four-seater plane rocked and swayed. The air was still turbulent.

Below we could see for ourselves Allandale Heights Subdivision. Street after street of homes had been reduced to rubble the previous afternoon after one of six screaming tornadoes that had sliced their way through Central Ontario smashed into the south section of Barrie with the force of an atomic bomb.

Buildings were battered. There was debris everywhere. Trees had been wrenched out by their roots by 500 km/h winds that some say had a real loud shrill whistle to it.

Just outside the city, entire once stately forests were crushed as if an angry child had been fed up with playing pick-up-sticks.

Power and telephone lines were strewn across streets. Factories destroyed. Barrie Raceway lay in ruins.

Cars, trucks and buses were flung about like so many dinky toys.

We made two separate passes in our Four Seasons Flight Academy four-seater over a shocked city; first at 1,900 feet then much lower.

It was numbing. It appeared as though 200 to 250 homes had been laid waste; many of them literally sucked off their moorings while others seemed to have exploded.

The twister's deadly swath could plainly be seen from the air. It followed the floor of a natural valley from west of the raceway near Highway 400 easterly touching down along a route that eventually took it out into Lake Simcoe.

It was obvious the funnel that touched down on Barrie packed super destructive power.

Chunks of wood and debris seemed to be scattered everywhere. Buildings were flattened, properties decimated, roofs blown off structures and sent asunder...the result of nature venting her fury on everything in her path.

It was a terrible sight.

Friday's series of tornadoes were born out of humid, moist air that had clashed with cold grey-black skies.

Despite the fact that there had been two days of severe weather warnings issued by Environment Canada, when the twisters struck they struck with the power of A-bombs.

Five hundred kilometre winds sent bricks flying like pieces of confetti reducing some homes and factories to rubble right before their owners' eyes.

Farm homes and livestock weren't spared either and in some cases farm buildings were virtually knocked off the face of the earth.

The twisters' ferocity easily tossed trees and hydro poles, flung cars in the air along Highway 400 near Barrie snarling traffic, peeled off roofs from homes and factories before petering out in Lake Simcoe.

Within hours outside help streamed into those areas most hardest hit. The homeless were taken care of. The injured treated. The dead, prayed over.

It was that kind of a day.

Sunday, emergency crews were still sifting through the ruins.

The toll? Twelve dead. Damage in the tens of millions of dollars.



Twister leaves destruction in its path

Allandale Heights Subdivision in the south end of Barrie was turned into a "war zone" Friday afternoon after one of six twisters to slice through central Ontario touched down, east and west of Highway 400 near the Barrie Raceway cutting a path of

destruction straight through to the subdivision before blowing itself out over Lake Simcoe. The Barrie twister left an estimated 1,000 homeless throughout the province, killed 12 and injured hundreds.

-Photo by Peter Spohn

250 homes damaged

As many as 250 homes in Barrie alone were damaged, Friday afternoon, after a raging tornado ripped through the area.

Hardest section to be hurt by the twister in the city was the Allandale Heights subdivision situated in the south part of the municipality.

As many as 250 dwellings were damaged; 200 will have to be replaced after being all but destroyed.

In southwest Woodstock, during an Aug. 7, 1979 tornado, more than 350 homes were damaged or destroyed while a church and a school were

severely battered.

A number of factories were also crushed in Woodstock as was the case in Barrie last week.

Both Premier Frank Miller and Ontario Liberal Party Leader David Peterson were in Barrie and area on Saturday assessing the situation.

And both the provincial and federal levels of government have already assured tornado victims that they will be helped to get back on their feet.

Plans already call for temporary housing to be made available.

Counting the cost

As of yesterday, the death toll from a series of hellish tornadoes which had flailed sections of central Ontario stood at 12; nine of the dead were from Barrie.

And it has been estimated that as many as 1,000 people were left homeless while another 20,000 were without power.

The cost of the killer twisters won't be known for some time but it is expected to run into the tens of millions of dollars.

For now it's a matter of picking up the pieces and starting all over again for those left homeless after twisters criss-crossed across Central Ontario

slicing through their homes and factories.

Hardest hit were the communities of Barrie and Grand Valley although Tottenham, Alliston, Arthur, Fergus, Orangeville and Shelburne weren't spared, not by a long shot.

Before the twisters had spent their force, scores lay dead and hundreds more had been injured by the brute force of the devastating tornadoes.

It was by far the worst natural disaster to strike the province since Oct. 15, 1954, the day Hurricane Hazel swept in off Lake Ontario killing 81 and leaving thousands more homeless.

Six deadly tornadoes slice swath Fri. through Ontario communities

by DOUG REED

It is expected to take months to clean up and start rebuilding from the devastation left by six deadly killer tornadoes that cut a 45 km wide swath 60 km to 100 km long from Shelburne and Orangeville to Tottenham and Barrie shortly before 4:30 p.m. last Friday.

Twisters, packing 500 km/h winds ravaged not only Barrie and Orangeville but Shelburne, Holland Landing, Grand Valley, Fergus, Arthur, Tottenham and Alliston as they sliced their way from south of Owen Sound on a path of destruction folks in these parts won't forget in a life time.

Not since two twisters struck the tri-county region of Oxford, Brant and Haldiman-Norfolk at the supper hour on Aug. 7, 1979 has nature

produced such disastrous results in Ontario.

The 1979 storms left several dead and \$100 million damage in their wake.

Only Hurricane Hazel which left 81 dead was more murderous than Friday's tornadoes.

Hazel has always been described as the worst storm ever to wallop Ontario.

It smashed into the province from Lake Ontario on Oct. 15, 1954.

Last week's twister culminated a solemn day of grey-black skies. The menacing weather itself was capped off by a series of violent thunder showers late in the afternoon.

The unstable weather turned out to be the raging tornadoes' calling card as they started to slam into the region shortly before 4:30 p.m.

In just a few minutes funnels flattened entire streets of houses, wiping out farms and factories and wrenching out trees by their roots.

Vehicles of all sizes and shapes were tossed about like so many dinky toys.

As the tornadoes hopped about the province it quickly became apparent that all hell had broken loose.

Traffic was stopped for a time on Highway 400 near Barrie while emergency crews began to search for victims everywhere.

By dawn Saturday tornado-devastated regions began picking up the pieces and counting their dead and injured.

At one point it had been estimated that as many as 21 people had died from injuries they received from what some call, a steam roller on a drunken rampage.

The death toll turned out to be 12 as of yesterday.

Twisters: despite battering cools heads prevailed

A shopping mall in Orangeville, a farm homes and restaurant in Dundalk, The Barrie Raceway, Friday afternoon after

six rampaging twisters left a trail of destruction unmatched in this area's history.

While victims were still counting up their losses this week, most agreed the loss of life might have been higher had not cool heads prevailed.

Rescue crews who took part in disaster plans to cope with the result of six deadly tornadoes last Friday have been praised for a job well done.

No sooner had all six twisters slammed into the district did police, ambulance, fire, Bell Canada, Ontario Hydro, St. John Ambulance and Base Borden personnel move into action.

They swarmed

through debris-littered communities searching for the dead and injured while comforting those who had escaped the vicious storms.

Red Cross teams also moved into the area setting up information centres. Personnel from Base Borden erected a combination first aid station and field hospital in Barrie after a number of emergency plan command posts were deployed by city officials.

Bandage One, Ministry of Health's helicopter ambulance flew in a load of blood while 300 cases of I.V.

solution was trucked to Barrie the same evening.

Both supplies were earmarked for Royal Victoria Hospital which acted as a trauma centre. Many of the more seriously injured were rushed by ambulance to Toronto hospitals during the night.

By 10 p.m., following a street by street, house by house search, rescue workers stopped to take a breather before starting to wind down for the night.

OPP from Barrie (District 7), Burlington (District 3), Downsview

District 5) and Mount Forest (District 6), aid local police offers in controlling traffic, sifting through ruins, etc. on the heels of Friday's six devastating tornadoes which in some cases virtually obliterated communities the likes of Grand Valley.

There were 101 homes were destroyed while another 200 were seriously damaged.

Shops and homes were reduced to a pile of bricks. In some cases cars disappeared from driveways while camping trailers in the Shelburne-Fergus-Orangeville-Arthur area were blown to bits.

This lottery winner got a second chance

Penetanguishene's Marie Johnson became a \$10,000 television celebrity, last week in Toronto.

On Thursday night, Johnson joined 61 other contestants, vying for cash prizes of between \$25,000 and \$1,000,000, on Global TV's Match Three Doubles Million Dollar Lottery Sweepstakes. Although the sweepstakes show runs at a regular 13 week intervals, Thursday's was a special extravaganza evening, in the CNE's

Queen Elizabeth Theatre, marking the tenth anniversary of the Ontario Lottery Corporation.

It was Johnson's luck in purchasing a lottery ticket with, bearing the word Sweepstakes under three "scratch and win" panels, that qualified her for the show. Her luck didn't hold long enough for any of the big prizes, but she was still ecstatic to bring home one of the \$10,000 consolation prizes.