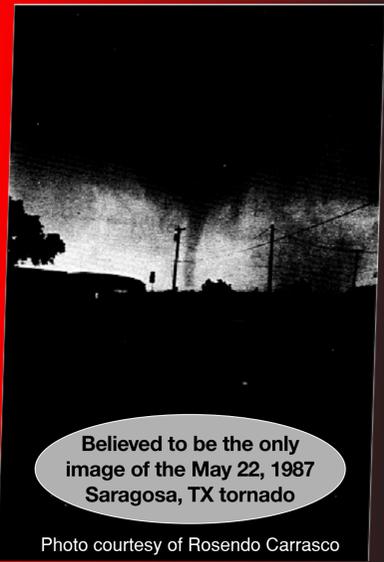


Saragosa, TX Tornado

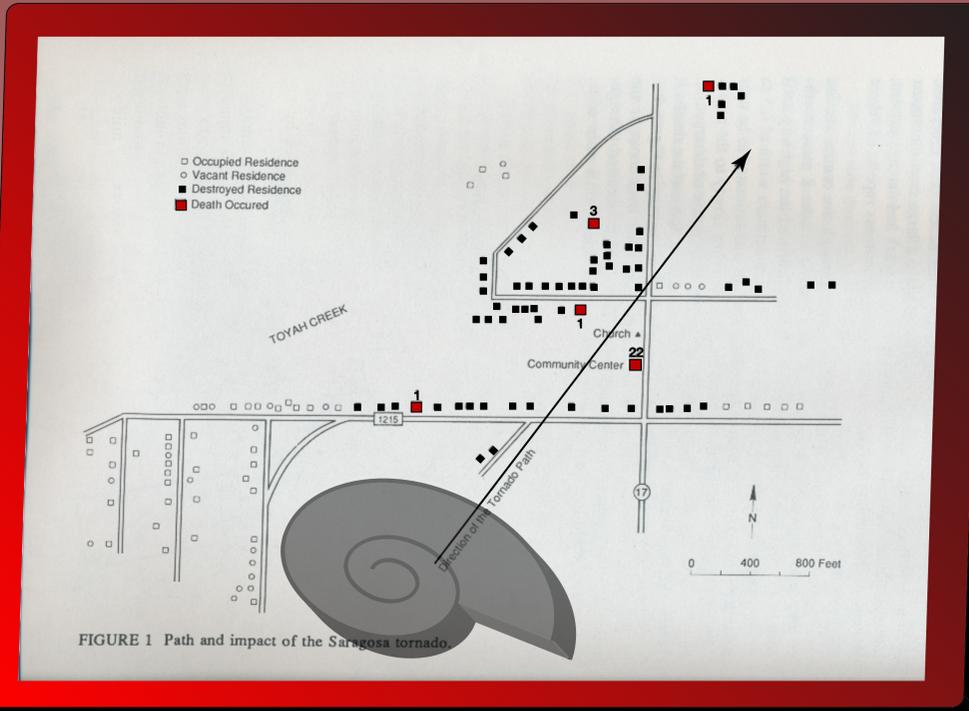
May 22, 1987

On the evening of Friday, May 22nd, 1987, as citizens were gathered at the town's community center for a Head Start graduation, a multi-vortex, 1/2-mile wide tornado struck Saragosa, Texas. In less than five minutes, the tornado destroyed nearly the entire community. 110 homes were damaged or destroyed, along with a church, the community center, and several businesses. Of the community's few hundred citizens, 31 were killed and 121 were injured. Because citizens were aware of tornado safety rules, there were numerous instances of proper protective action taken, which likely saved lives.

The Tornado



Damage Path



Location



Survivors' Accounts

"It was an ugly, terrible feeling... It was black dust and it was coming fast."

Linda Briceno
Midland Reporter Telegram
Thursday, May 22, 1997

"They say it sounds like a train, I guess it does. The only thing I heard was windows breaking."

Nancy Matta
Odessa American
Thursday, May 22, 1997

"When I saw our porch swing 8 feet up in the air, I knew we were in trouble."

Peggy Walker
Midland Reporter Telegram
Thursday, May 22, 1997

"Every time you would try to pick up a piece of the wall, somebody would scream..."

Herman Tarmin
Odessa American
Thursday, May 22, 1997

"Recollections of a Killer Tornado"

By Glenn Humphries

The following is Mr. Humphries' account of the events of that day, as he experienced and recalls them.

7:00pm: "The sky looks wicked and full of energy, but down here at ground level, it's deathly still."

8:00pm: "Reeves County Deputy Sheriff Floyd Estrada approaches, it's really raining hard now... Floyd thinks we're directly under a wall cloud, and I agree. Mr. Charles Towry is coming back to Balmorhea from Fort Stockton. As he passes Carrasco's Mercantile he tells us he is 'in pea-sized, no, marble-sized, no, golf ball-sized hail.' He tells us the hail has suddenly quit and that he sees rotation in the cloud above."

8:05pm: "We're on our way back towards town at a high rate of speed. A Department of Public Safety Trooper tells us he sees a funnel crossing the interstate (IH-10) near milepost 210. I radio the Midland Weather Service Office that a highway patrol trooper has visual contact with a tornado on the ground."

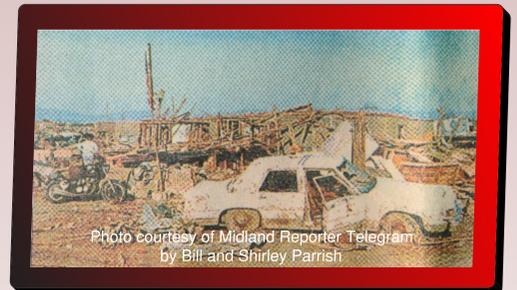
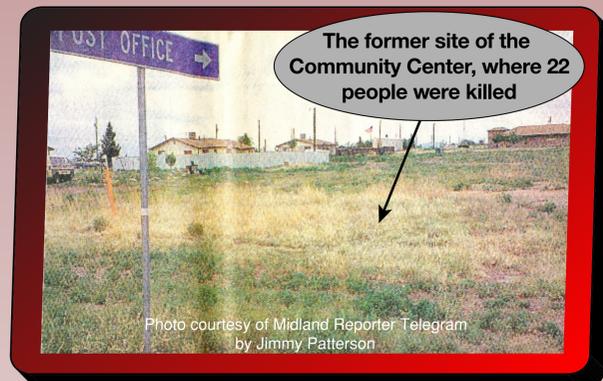
8:10pm: "With sirens on and lights flashing, we screamed through Balmorhea and toward Saragosa. I notice the milepost sign at milepost 210 is twisting around 360 degrees both ways as fast as it can. The car is hopping from side to side with the force of the wind."

8:15pm: "Power lines are down everywhere. We should be seeing buildings and houses by now..."

8:16pm: "Floyd is stopping now on the side of the road, now I see that we really are in Saragosa. Floyd's out of the car and I am too, he's pointing at the remains of the community center-- this really is Saragosa! I can't see any other buildings. In a few minutes it will dawn on me that they were having the Head Start graduation in this building..."

Time is impossible to track now- it has no meaning: "So much is happening so quickly, and yet other things seem to be happening in slow motion... It's clear that we'll need lots of ambulances and that there will be lots of fatalities. Since we first arrived, adults and children alike are running up and grabbing me; holding on for dear life. Most of them want and need to be reassured that the tornado is really gone and won't come back. This has to be worse than any war zone I've ever heard about."

Aftermath



Impacts

- 31 Fatalities
- 121 Injuries
- 110 Homes damaged or destroyed... ~85% of the town's property value
- 1.9 miles- Est. tornado path length
- 100 + Utility poles snapped
- 0.5 mile Est. tornado width
- \$8,700,000 Est. in damage

