

December 3, 1978 Bossier City Tornado

Track Overview

The Bossier City tornado was spawned from a supercell thunderstorm which developed in Deep East Texas ahead of a squall line. No tornadoes were reported with the supercell as it moved from Deadwood, Texas and across Southwood High School, Pierremont Mall, and the VA Hospital in Shreveport. However, wind equipment at the National Weather Service, located at the Greater Shreveport Municipal Airport (as it was known at the time), recorded a 52 mile per hour wind gust during the passage of the supercell.

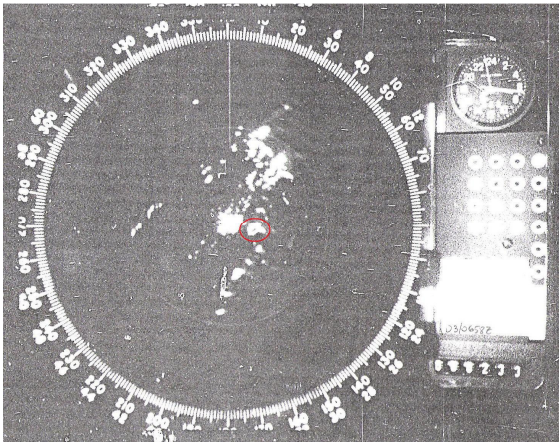


Figure 1. National Weather Service Longview, TX radar image at 12:58 am CST. The red circle highlights the supercell thunderstorm which would eventually produce the Bossier City tornado.

From there, the storm moved into the Meadowview region of Bossier City. Parts of Meadowview Elementary School were destroyed, as wind speeds around 260 mile per hour carried several 700 pound I-beam structures several hundred feet before being firmly planted into the ground. Two fatalities occurred in a home on La Don Drive, when the tornado thrust an automobile into a bedroom where two sisters were sleeping.

The tornado initially developed in the Central Park area of Bossier City, almost directly across the Red River from the VA Hospital around 1:50 AM. The tornado crossed Interstate 20, just west of the Barksdale Boulevard interchange. It continued moving northeastward, affecting businesses and residences along Benton Road and Airline Drive, before briefly moving into the more sparsely populated area east of Airline Drive and north of US-80

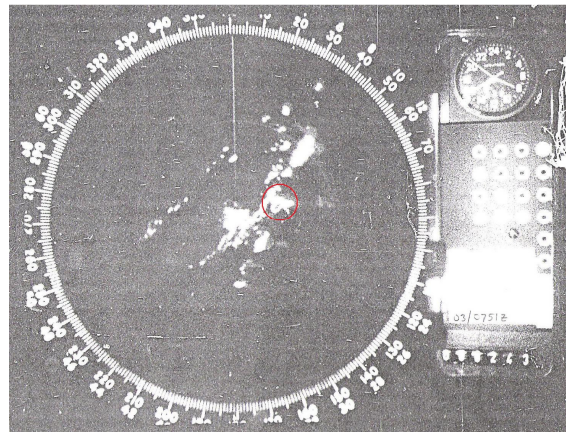


Figure 2. National Weather Service Longview, TX radar image at 1:51 am CST. The red circle highlights the supercell thunderstorm. A tornado is on the ground at this time in Bossier City.

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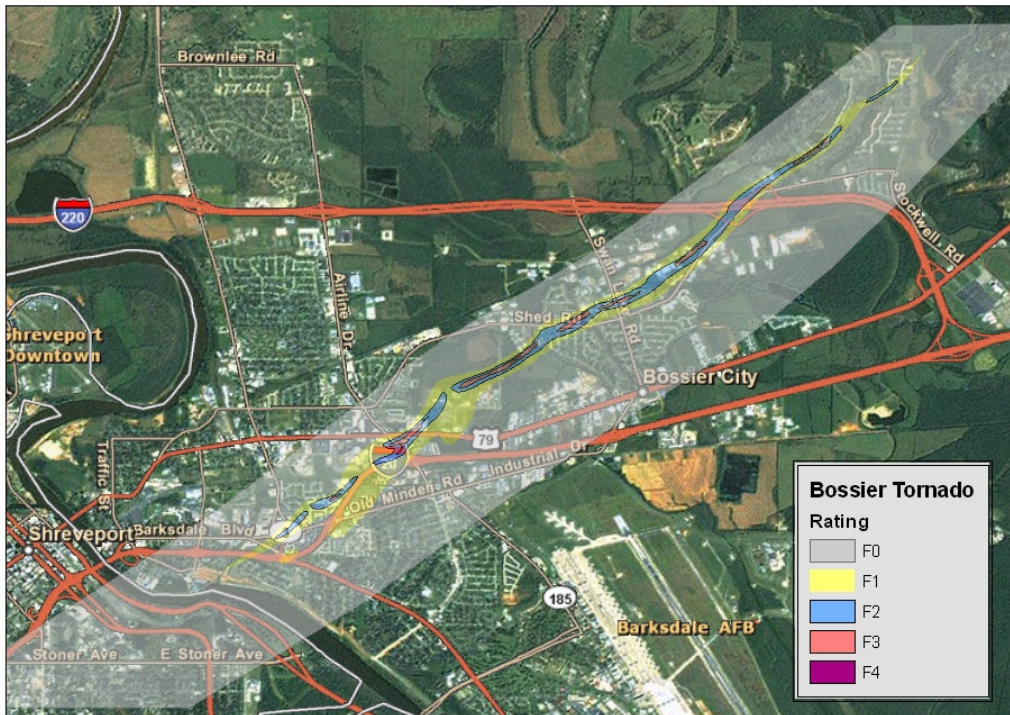


Figure 3. Overview of Bossier City tornado track. Colors indicate the tornado's intensity. (Modified from Fujita, 1979)

The National Guard Armory was then destroyed. Moving across Interstate 220 near the Shed Road Interchange, the tornado destroyed the Northwest Louisiana State School prior to affecting homes in the Stockwell Place and Carriage Oaks region of Bossier City. The tornado lifted just north of this region, near Red Chute Bayou.

In addition to the Bossier City tornado, other tornadoes were spawned by this long-track supercell thunderstorm. A sleeping woman, in a mobile home, was killed as an F2 tornado destroyed homes and outbuildings near El Dorado, Arkansas. The same supercell also produced a tornado that briefly touched down 3 miles southwest of Tunica, Mississippi, located near Memphis.

Following the event, renowned tornado scientist, Theodore Fujita, with colleagues Robert Abbey and James McDonald arrived in Shreveport to examine the damage. Working with Official-in-Charge Ernest Ethridge of the National Weather Service, an extensive areal and ground damage survey was completed. The resulting damage path was mapped with great precision, a rather cutting-edge idea at the time. Over \$100 million in damage resulted from the F4 tornado, but miraculously, only two lives were lost.