

Just after sunset on May 11, 1970, the worst tornado in the history of Texas swept out of the West Texas sky and plowed through the City of Lubbock like a lawnmower in an unmowed lawn.

The twister struck with little warning at 9:46 p. m., and six minutes later, much of the city of 150,000 was laid waste, 26 were dead, 6,000 were injured and thousands were homeless. With daylight the next morning came the realization that more than \$200 million in property had been destroyed.

For the city government of Lubbock, a seemingly insurmountable task lay ahead.

Within minutes after the tornado struck, the city staff, which had been through many dry-run tornado drills, was already in action. Procedures that had been practiced time and again under Lubbock's Civil Defense Plan were put into action....this time for real.

Under the plan, each of the 52 directors and department heads has a specific area of responsibility. All divisions, Public Works, Traffic Engineering, Police, Fire, Planning, Finance, General Services, Personnel, Legal, Utilities, Tax and Civil Defense, were represented as the tornado struck, and went to work.

Rescue crews began to inch their way through the rubble in pitch darkness, trying to find those who had been killed and injured and get them to the city's crowded hospitals. Repair crews had to get telephone and radio communications restored. Volunteer help had to be coordinated to channel help in the right direction. Water and electricity had to be restored to the damaged areas, which included the heart of the emergency operation, City Hall.

On and on, the problems multiplied logarithmically with every minute.

City Manager Bill Blackwell, a veteran of Hurricane Carla in Freeport, Texas in 1961, and his staff directors, were in the Emergency Operation Center in City Hall as the tornado passed overhead, shaking the two-story building on its trip through the downtown area.

Within minutes, Blackwell relayed a message to the Governor's office in Austin, through a direct telephone line at the Department of Public Safety Regional Headquarters in Lubbock, to mobilize the National Guard. Following

the Lubbock Emergency Operations Plan, pre-designated rescue teams, made up of firemen and other city employees, were ordered to take every available vehicle and immediately begin sifting through the rubble to look for survivors...and bodies.

Within an hour of the disaster, newly elected Mayor Jim Granberry and the four other members of the City Council were at the E. O. C. The Council authorized the Mayor to declare a state of emergency, and within minutes, Granberry was on the air over the local Emergency Broadcast Station, with orders for the police to "shoot to kill" all looters in the badly damaged downtown area.

From this point on, the effective team, the City Manager and his staff, the Mayor and City Council, worked with almost handbook efficiency...directing the efforts of the City, County, State and Federal personnel already pouring into the city in the recovery task ahead.

Under the city charter, the Mayor has the power to run the city in time of emergency, but as Granberry said, "When you're in a desperate situation, you don't change leadership for the sake of changing. Blackwell runs the city operation on a day-to-day basis, and he was the most qualified to act in an emergency to lead the recovery. The City Council continued to set needed policy in the recovery; the city manager continued to carry out that policy."

And so the "system" functioned, and functioned well.

Within 15 hours all of the dead and injured had been found and treated. All of the homeless, which numbered above 4,000, were provided emergency shelter immediately, and within a week, were living in permanent housing provided by the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration.

Debris removal on public property, streets, alleys and the airport was substantially completed within 36 hours using city crews, the Texas Highway Department, Lubbock County road crews and the National Guard. Helicopters were brought in by the D.P.S. and the 4th Army to allow city officials to survey the damage from above and direct cleanup and rehabilitation efforts from the sky.

Debris removal by the Corps of Engineers was begun within five days on private property, and when completed 75 days later, the Corps had removed 360,000 cubic yards of storm refuse.

Meanwhile, Blackwell, Granberry, the City Council and City Staff toured the damaged areas with Governor Preston Smith, Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes, Congressman George Mahon, Senators John Tower and Ralph Yarborough, General George Lincoln, Director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness, Small Business Administrator Hillary Sandoval, and Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Larry Cox.

The close teamwork between the City Manager and his staff, the Mayor and Council in working with these State and Federal officials was impressive.

Through this teamwork, Lubbock received approval within 45 days for a \$4.7 million Neighborhood Development Program in the Mexican-American section of Lubbock. A \$930,000 TOPICS traffic signalization program, which before the tornado was six months away from approval, was approved for the downtown area. Federal officials made more than 700 homes available from F. H. A. and V. A. for displaced families. The Department of Labor provided \$313,000 for providing jobs for workers whose jobs were blown away with the storm. Planning grants totaling more than \$200,000 were provided by HUD for re-planning the city. HUD reserved \$8.6 million for an Urban Renewal project, which the voters in Lubbock matched with a \$13.6 million bond issue 89 days after the tornado.

With the passage of the bond issue, which included \$7.8 million for a Memorial Civic Center in the Urban Renewal area, a \$1.2 million Library also in the Urban Renewal area, \$1.8 million for city parks, and \$2.8 million for a series of six lakes in a canyon running through the damaged areas, the citizens responded to the work of numerous citizen groups and the City Council in saying they wanted to help themselves after their disaster.

It was the effective teamwork of a West Texas city within city government, its citizen participation, and the willingness of its people to make their city a better place to live, that made all the difference.

President Richard Nixon commended the citizens of Lubbock on August 4, 1970, with a letter that read:

Dear Mayor Granberry:

The outstanding leadership you and City Manager Bill Blackwell have provided to the people of Lubbock in the aftermath of the May 11 tornado, together with the splendid response of the

citizens of your city, should give encouragement to every city and town in America. I understand that the dedication and fellowship which have characterized the recovery efforts of the men and women of your community have not only brought the promise of full restoration of your city in a remarkably short time, but have engendered a new spirit of cooperation and innovation which will guarantee great progress in every area.

It is a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to congratulate you and all citizens of Lubbock for your exemplary work. You have my best wishes for continued success in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

General George Lincoln, Director of the O. E. P., said the day after the tornado while on the ground inspecting the damage, "I have never seen rescue and relief operations brought into being more quickly or effectively."

George Hastings, Regional Director of O. E. P. who has seen several disasters in the South Central United States said, "Disaster operations are always difficult, but this has been the smoothest recovery I have known. I attribute it to an excellent city government, and to full understanding and cooperation by the city, county, state and federal governments."

Today Lubbock still bears scars of May 11. But much has been accomplished through effective teamwork in the Council-Manager form of city government. Lubbock will always remember May 11, 1970, but she will never forget the story of how city government responded and how, through effective teamwork, she recovered and went on as President Nixon said, "to give encouragement to every city and town in America"....and to become an even greater city in the face of tragedy.