

LUBBOCK EMERGENCY

Tornado Added Twist to New Mayor's Life

LUBBOCK, Tex. (UPI)—James H. Granberry had been mayor of Texas' eighth largest city only three weeks when on May 11, a tornado ripped out the heart of Lubbock.

In a terrifying five minutes one of the worst tornadoes in Texas history claimed the lives of 26 persons, injured an estimated 1,500 and caused damage placed at \$200 million.

For the 37-year-old dentist-turned-mayor, life changed instantly.

Suddenly, 2,600 Lubbock families were plunged into various degrees of distress. Ninety of the injured were hospitalized. With 949 homes destroyed or heavily damaged, 1,800 persons required emergency shelter and 11,664 were provided by the American Red Cross with 34,994 hot meals in a week.

What can a mayor of three weeks, accustomed to the quiet decorum of a dental office, do when confronted with so frightening an emergency?

General's Praise

"I have never seen rescue and relief operations brought into being more quickly or effectively," said Gen. George A. Lincoln, the President's personal representative to the disaster area who flew in from Washington the next morning.

"Disaster operations are always difficult, but this has been the smoothest I have known," said George Hastings, who also arrived the following day to coordinate the entire federal relief and recovery effort. "I attribute it to an excellent city government, and to full understanding and cooperation by the city, county and state governments."

Hastings, of Denton, Tex., is regional director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness. Lincoln is director of the OEP, working directly under the President. Both arrived in Lubbock after the city's emergency operating center had swung into action.

"You handled everything perfectly," said U.S. Rep. George H. Mahon (D-Tex.) who comes from Lubbock.

Granberry, who defeated the incumbent mayor in an April 21 election, was at home with his family when the tornado dipped down from a crashing, lightning-filled thunderstorm.

Granberry said that at the approach of the storm, he and his family had gathered in the center of the house and he had helped his wife, Edwina, get the five children tucked away in the safest place.

"Then I went outside to

look at the sky. When I returned the radio was off and I figured my weak batteries had finally played out. It was several minutes later before I knew what had happened, and several hours before I began to realize the full extent of it."

The usual five-minute drive to city hall took almost an hour.

"We even got lost a couple times," Cranberry said. "The usual landmarks that we automatically used to guide us had been blown away."

At city hall Granberry was soon joined by the other four councilmen and city officials. Everything was turmoil. The police station had been hit and was without electricity and communications.

But it took only minutes to convene an emergency council meeting. The mayor asked for and received permission to allow the city manager, Bill Blackwell, to take charge and run things, although the city charter said the mayor had power under such emergencies to "act as he sees fit and order any agency or citizens to do what he requests."

Fast Action

"When you are riding horseback in a swollen stream and things get rough you don't try to change horses," Granberry said. "Our city manager operates the city on a daily basis and knows the people who head up each phase of our operation. I saw no reason to step in and take over when he already knew who was in charge of what and just how much he could expect of each person."

Action came fast that tragic tornado night.

"Immediately we proclaimed a state of emergency," the mayor said. "We put a curfew on the hit area as best we knew it, and ordered all looters to be shot on sight. Then, the city council went into emergency session to pass needed resolutions to begin immediate search and rescue, and make plans on how to operate our city."

"The council immediately contacted the state capital and asked the National Guard be activated. We learned the governor was out of state, but the lieutenant governor promised every help possible and flew out to aid us himself the next morning."

Granberry went 44 hours without sleep while directing the emergency operation. All of the dead were found before daybreak, and only a few injured were found after the sun came up.

"I see no major goof-ups in the entire operation looking back over it," Granberry said. "Sure, no one is ever prepared for this type of thing. But with a capable, efficient and dedicated city staff, concerned and cooperative citizens and tremendous response from the county, state and federal government, everything seemed to go as smoothly as possible."

By daylight rehousing of persons had begun. The Red Cross and the Salvation Army headed the feeding and reclothing of stricken people, operating with the United Fund and many church organizations.