

'Tornado' tests Guard

By H. DAVID WHITE
A tornado swept through Yegua State Park, on the southwest inlet of Lake Somerville, at 11:45 Saturday killing ten people and injuring six others.

Not really. But for about 50 Texas A&M students in the Texas State Guard it did happen. And they found that because of a lack of equipment they were somewhat unprepared for the emergency.

The Texas State Guard, which in the event of mobilization of the National Guard would assume that organization's responsibility, held its annual spring exercise for the 203rd Military Police Battalion. This battalion is made up of three companies: A Company from Huntsville, B Company from Brenham, and my unit, C Company commanded by Lt. Joel White, of Bryan. These three companies, with a total strength of 59 enlisted personnel and 18 officers, assembled Saturday, at the Brenham National Guard Armory. All three companies spent their last two meetings preparing for this search and rescue simulation.

We sat in the armory hearing the news at 11:45 a.m., a tornado and heavy rains swept through the Yegua State Park area. The briefing officer explained that the tornado touched down in an area of the park where three trailers, with 15 to 20 occupants were located. In addition, a light plane with six occupants was believed to have crashed at the same place. The last message heard was a distress call to Easterwood tower.

The whole exercise was coordinated with the Brenham police, Department of Public Safety, Washington County Sheriff's Department, a local hospital, the department and two local ambulance companies.

We drove out to the park and began setting up a command post. This was a small camping tent, which had been rented for the occasion because the unit does not get enough funds from the state to buy equipment.

"I spotted red in the grass ahead — we had found the victims"

Two, the other search team, had found more victims east of us. They called in a long list of injuries: "Two victims with internal injuries, three fractures and one person in shock."

A request for first aid supplies would have been useless since the unit does not have funds for equipment, despite the fact that administration of first aid in a disaster situation is one of the primary functions of the State Guard.

We asked that stretchers be brought forward immediately so that we could carry the victims back to the CP. But there were six injured victims, four requiring immediate attention, and only two stretchers. The equipment shortage was becoming more evident by the moment. But the decision was made to carry out the victims.

We started to carry the victims along a small, dusty road, resting

every 100 yards to catch our breath. After 500 yards, we came within sight of the CP. There we loaded the victims on a bus for the trip to the hospital.

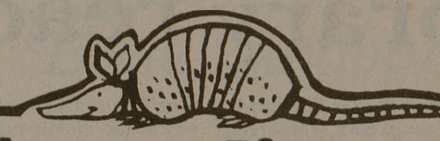
After the trip to the hospital we headed back to the armory where the critique of the exercise by a group of officers from headquarters in Austin was made. They were unaware of the acute equipment shortage and their major criticism was the log of events was not kept by each company.

They complimented the unit on its efficiency in accomplishing the mission. But they made no mention that the victims would have died because we didn't have the equipment to give them first aid, and from the time we lost wandering through the woods in the wrong direction because of no maps or compasses.

Most of the officers were impressed with our actions and agreed with Lt. Col. Frederick West, one of the inspectors from Austin, that it was "one of the most realistic exercises I've ever seen. It is something you might actually face and you've done a great job."

One of the enlisted persons on the exercise, a student from Texas A&M said, "It was one of the worst exercises ever. Sure we might have to face a situation like this but we'll be just as unprepared then as we were today, until Austin either supplies us with the necessary equipment or gives us the money to buy it ourselves."


Another student added, "It's a shame that something as potentially useful as the guard is unable to do anything because of a lack of equipment."



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