

04-27-1985 Rockwell TX – Benny Gracy – FF Flood Rescue Attempt

Benny Gracy, 32, of McKinney, Texas, who died while trying to save the same man and his son from drowning in their car caught in rising floodwaters in Rockwell, Texas, on April 27, 1985.



9 die in Texas floods, Tornado

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/223119424>

April 29, 1 985 Daily Times

DALLAS (AP) Tornadoes skipped mm, Flash flood warnings posted today across north Texas and flood watches were posted early today after a 24-hour killer storm that spewed 18 twisters and torrential rains left nine people dead, seven of them by drowning.

In Rockwell, about 15 miles northeast of Dallas, authorities said the town Fire Chief Benny Gracy, 32, drowned trying to rescue four people swept away in a car during a flash flood Saturday night on Interstate 30. Two of the passengers, Charles miles south of Fort Worth. His body was found about 400 yards from his nearly submerged automobile. Irving police also blamed the weather for the death of Jeri Thomas, a 15-year-old girl killed early Sunday after the car she was driving skidded on wet Christmas, 94, and Johnny Eugene pavement and struck an oak tree.

A sheriff's dispatcher said Gracy's body was found Sunday around noon more than two miles from the scene of the incident.

Killer storm rocks Texas

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/106733346/>

April 29, 1985 By JAY JORDEN Associated Press Writer The Anniston Star

DALLAS Tornadoes skipped across north Texas and flood watches were posted early today after a 24-hour killer storm that spewed 18 twisters' and torrential rains left nine people dead, seven of them by drowning. A tornado killed an 81-year-old Sunday night about 20 miles southwest of Abilene.

The body of Emma Talley, 81, of Shep was found in the wreckage of her house after a twister tossed the wood frame building more than 100 yards, Taylor County sheriff's officers said. Her husband, Alva Talley, 83, was admitted to Bellinger Memorial Hospital with cuts and scrapes, deputies said.

A Dallas man, and his two children drowned Sunday and his wife was missing Sunday after their car was swept away by a flood-swollen creek in the suburb of Duncanville. William Blair, 41, his children Ebony, 14, and William, 7, all of Dallas, drowned Sunday morning when their car washed off a road near a creek in the suburb of Duncanville. Their bodies and the car were found near the banks of the creek, but authorities found no trace of Blair's 42-year-old wife, Barbara, and said the search for her would resume at daylight today.

In Rockwell, about 15 miles northeast of Dallas, authorities said the town Fire Chief Benny Gracy, 32, drowned trying to rescue four people swept away in a car during a flash flood Saturday night on Interstate 30. Two of the passengers, Charles Christmas, 94, and Johnny Eugene Parker, 27, Rockwall County, also drowned, but Christmas's son and daughter-in-law were rescued.

From Staff, Wire Reports AROUND THE NATION Leave the windows open tonight

Two airplanes lie tangled at the Addison, Texas airport - high winds, rain caused power outages, flooding skidded on wet pavement and struck an oak tree. In Howard County alone, authorities sighted nine funnel clouds in a three-hour period Sunday night. No injuries were reported, but by 8 p.m., four inches of rain had fallen. Up to 6 inches of rain fell in some areas. A severe weather spotter reported a tornado on the ground 5 miles south of Valera at 1:35 a.m. today, moving east at 15 to 20 mph. About an hour later, National Weather Service radar tracked a tornado at the Brown-Coleman county line near Trickham. No damage or injuries were reported from either funnel, sheriff's officers said. The National Severe Storms Forecast Center issued a tornado watch for a large part of Central and Northern Texas until 10 a.m. CDT today.

Forecasters said twisters, large hail, dangerous lightning and damaging winds were possible in these areas. Flash flood warnings will remain in effect throughout the area until tonight, meteorologist Buddy McIntyre said. A sheriff's dispatcher said Gracy's body was found Sunday around noon more than two miles from the scene of the incident. Authorities found the body of a seventh drowning victim, identified as Ramon H. Martinez, on Sunday in the Nolon River near Cleburne, about 20 miles south of Fort Worth. His body was found about 400 yards from his partially submerged automobile.

At least nine people were dead today because of...

<http://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/04/29/At-least-nine-people-were-dead-today-because-of/4315590882074/>
April 29, 1985 By GARY SILVERMAN, United Press International

At least nine people were dead today because of severe Texas storms that lifted homes off foundations with tornadoes and swept cars off roads with swift-moving floods spawned by up to a half foot of rain.

Thunderstorms today extended from Colorado and Kansas to New Mexico and Texas. A flash flood watch was issued for all of northern Texas and tornado watches were in effect across portions of central Texas.

The National Weather Service said 19 tornadoes rumbled across Texas today and Sunday, including one that threw a Taylor County home 100 feet across a field, killing an 81-year-old woman and injuring her 83-year-old husband.

The death toll climbed to nine with the report that Jeri Thomas, 15, of Irving died early Sunday after her car skidded on wet pavement and crashed into a tree.

Police today planned to resume the search for a 42-year-old woman missing in floods near Duncanville, Texas. The bodies of the woman's 41-year-old husband, 14-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son were found Sunday.

At least four other people have been killed in floods caused by a deluge that began Saturday night in northern Texas. Six inches of rain soaked Rockwall and nearly 2 inches in one hour flooded streets Sunday night near Wichita Falls.

Hail as large as baseballs battered Texas near Mount Enterprise Sunday, while hail 1 inches in diameter was reported near Newellton, La., the NWS said. Gulf Coast storms Sunday hurled winds of up to 59 mph, downing power lines and damaging buildings in Mississippi and Alabama. Winds ripped the roof off a girls dormitory at Jones County Junior College in Ellisville, Miss.

'It came up all of a sudden,' said Ellisville police officer Greg Roberts. 'I heard on the television, 'severe thunderstorm warning,' and I looked out the window and things were already flying by. It took some tin off my garage.'

Among the dead in the Texas flooding was Rockwall Fire Chief Ben Gracey, who drowned while trying to rescue a car trapped in floods Saturday night. Two of the four people in the car, including a 94-year-old man, died with Gracey.

Blaine Smith, a sheriff's deputy, survived after being carried a mile downstream by floodwaters he estimated were traveling at 40 to 45 mph. Smith, an experienced scuba diver, credited his training with helping him survive. 'That, and the Lord helped me,' he said.

The other Texas flooding death occurred in Johnson County, authorities said.

Violent Texas Weather Claims 10 Lives

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/216504742/>

April 30, 1985

An outburst of violent weather that claimed 10 lives battered parts of Texas again Monday as rescuers pressed their search for a woman swept away in a flooded creek. Eight of the weekend storm victims drowned, and rising water continued to threaten much of North Texas Monday.

"It's not getting any better," said Dave Martin, a forecaster in the National Weather Service Fort Worth office. A flash flood warning was posted Monday morning for Hunt County, northeast of Dallas, and flood watches were in effect for much of North Texas. A severe weather spotter reported a tornado on the ground 5 miles south of Valera at 1:35 a.m., moving east at 15 to 20 mph. About an hour later, National Weather Service radar tracked a tornado at the Brown-Coleman county line near Trickham. No injuries or damage were reported.

In Rockwall, Fire Chief Benny Gracy, 32, drowned Saturday night while trying to rescue four people trapped in a car swept away by floodwaters.

"If you could have given him a chance to pick how he'd die, he'd do it like that helping people," said former Rockwall Deputy Sheriff Jerry Archer. Two of the people Gracy was trying to save also drowned. A sheriff's dispatcher said Gracy's body was found more than two miles away, and a deputy participating in the rescue was slightly injured when he was swept about a mile downstream.

During the weekend at least 18 tornadoes were reported over Texas.

Meanwhile, the search for Barbara Blair continued Monday with "all available police and fire personnel," said Duncanville police spokeswoman Sue Thompson. "We're hoping that now that the creek is down, we'll be able to find her," Ms. Thompson said. Mrs. Blair was swept away in a flash flood Sunday morning when the family car was washed off a road. Police found the bodies of her husband and their two children near the creek banks Sunday. The weather also claimed the lives of an 81-year-old Shep woman whose house was destroyed by a tornado, three people in Rockwall, including the fire chief; a deputy sheriff in Ozona; a man in Johnson County and an Irving teen-ager killed in a traffic accident.



<http://www.rockwall.com/Firedepartment/station1.asp>



Benny Gracy Memorial Fire Station #1
305 E. Boydston Ave.
Rockwall, Texas 75087
Phone: (972) 771-7770

General Information

This station was built in 1984 and later named for Chief Benny Gracy who died April 28, 1985 in the line of duty, while attempting to rescue four citizens from floodwater. Administrative offices are located at this station.



Chief Benny Gracy Fallen Hero

In the history of the fire department, we have lost one HERO in the line of duty. It was April 28, 1985 when Chief Benny Gracy lost his life while attempting to rescue four citizens from floodwater. Chief Gracy, Mark Poindexter, and Deputy Blain Smith responded to a call on Interstate 30 north service road of four citizens trapped in rising floodwater on Buffalo Creek. Deputy Smith had rescued one of the citizens by the time Chief Gracy and Mark Poindexter arrived. During the attempt to rescue the other three, Chief Gracy, Deputy Smith, and two of the citizens were swept downstream. One of the citizens was trapped in a car at that location. Deputy Smith, Mark Poindexter and two citizens survived. Two citizens and Chief Benny Gracy perished. He gave the ultimate sacrifice to rescue lives.

In 1985 the 1985 pumper truck was dedicated in memory of our fallen hero. The Central Fire Station name was changed to Benny Gracy Memorial Fire Station. His picture hangs in the bay area overlooking us on a daily basis reminding all the firemen of who he was, what volunteering stood for, his dedication to the job, and that any of us could ultimately lose our life when the alarm sounds.