

## **Interview conducted by Shane Pendleton (National Weather Service Volunteer)**

Responses below are to the following questions:

\*Tell me a little about that day and the events leading up to the tornado. What were you busy with that day? Do you remember what the weather was like in the morning and early afternoon?

\*Where were you when you received the news about the tornado? What did everyone do? What did you do?

\*Where were you during the passage of the tornado? Did you ever see or hear it?

\*What did you do immediately after the storm cleared?

\*Briefly describe the days that followed. What was the weather like? What did that region of Huntsville look like? How long did recovery efforts take?

Interviewee: Geoffrey Pendleton:

I was at work that day at the Space Science Lab Bldg. 4481 on Redstone Arsenal. The afternoon weather was blustery and relatively warm. We were aware that there was some chance for storms, but there was no real focus on tornadoes at that time. We did not hear about the tornado until after 4 in the afternoon. It was dark out when we heard about it.

I was in the main lab area in the Space Science Lab. Communication was by land line and radio. There was no Doppler radar, it was dark, and the visibility was very low. We heard there was a tornado somewhere possibly on the Arsenal. There were some strange effects like rain being blown in along the ceiling in corridors near the outside of the building. We saw some turbulent clouds in the lightning flashes but there was no way to know if it was part of the tornado. It was likely that the tornado had already struck airport road when we found out.

Where were you during the passage of the tornado? Did you ever see or hear it?

We didn't know it at the time, but the tornado had likely already passed us. We went to safe areas in the building but there was not a lot of clear information about events. About half an hour after we had our first warnings about the tornado and we started hearing about some damage around airport road. Communications were still spotty and so many people were worried about those who might have been in the path of the tornado.

About 90 minutes after our initial warnings many of us went home. I went back to my apartment about a quarter mile south of airport road. At that point traffic on that part of the parkway was light since the damage was farther up the south parkway. It felt like the temperature had dropped by more than 20 degrees compared to the time right before the storm hit.

The next day was cooler and very sunny. We learned the next morning that many people in cars on the south parkway were killed or maimed since there was a lot of traffic and the cars were picked up and thrown around by the tornado. Several of us went to help coworkers move out of the devastated airport road area with the ok of officials guarding the area. I remember seeing a car engine sitting by itself in a parking lot. Trees more than 2 feet in diameter were sheared off at the base presumably by the high-mass high-velocity debris. The apartment building we were moving people out of looked as if a giant chain saw had been used to cut off part of the second floor at a 45 degree angle. It was eerie walking into a room that had walls against the corridor but was open to the sky and had walls sloping down to the outside of the building where the wall was gone. The damage was greatest on the side of the building farther from the center of the tornado path. Other apartment buildings had been stripped down to the cement slab foundations. The aluminum street light polls seemed to fair the best compared to other structures. Some of them still had lamp poles sticking out of them, even in regions surrounded by nothing but low lying rubble.

It took quite a few weeks for the region to start looking normal again. It took a number of months for one of the apartment slabs that had been stripped bare and was visible from the parkway to be repaired.