

Death Comes In Box Cloud

By John Shurr

Associated Press Writer

"There's people lying everywhere, some of them dead and some of them injured."

Sportshop owner Farrell Coppin had just returned from what had been the downtown area of Keefeton and couldn't believe what a tornado had done to the small community.

"I've seen seven or eight dead," Coppin said. "They're just gathering them up everywhere. There are supposed to be some more in the houses." The Oklahoma Highway Patrol, however, had reported only four deaths and a hospital in nearby Muskogee said three victims had been brought there.

Coppin and his wife, Lois, run a small sportshop and beauty salon about a mile from the downtown area of Keefeton. Both were at the business when the twister tore through about 5 p.m.

"It come in from the west and it was a brownish gray color," Mrs. Coppin said. "It was just whirling. I could see it on the mountain where it was blowing the trees real bad."

"It was something you'd never believe. It didn't have a funnel shape to it, it was just a square type box," she added.

"It just jumped up on everybody," Mr. Coppin said. "It was all over before anybody knewed it. I thought it was just another storm."

The center of the town — composed of six or eight stores — was destroyed. A

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4

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Section A

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Continued From Page One

grocery store owned by Otis Evans was demolished and officials were digging through the rubble because they feared several people might be buried there.

Paul Pierce's service station was flattened and Civil Defense officials were concerned that fires might be ignited from the ruptured gas lines.

After the storm had passed, all that was left of Leo Grebb's Dairy Delight drive-in was the neon sign. It still glowed. High voltage lines east of the city were also downed.

A used car lot and junk yard owned by Keith Purdom was wiped out and the trailer where Purdom lived was missing. Debris from the businesses were scattered into an open field about a mile to the east of the main part of town.

Many trees were uprooted and nearly every piece of foliage in the area had been picked clean of its leaves. Horses and cattle were left dead and crippled in the fields.

The Coppins considered themselves lucky. "The tornado didn't do any damage down here. It just hailed," Mrs. Coppin said.

"It's just about destroyed Keefeton, though," Mr. Coppin added.

(Sent from Fort Sill, by Andy Earman)

Continued on Page 1, Col. 1