

Flight through tornado

During the June 24, 2003 severe weather episode commonly known in the region as the "Tornado Tuesday" outbreak, 67 tornadoes occurred in eastern South Dakota. One of them took a path through the north side of Sioux Falls airport at the same time as a passenger plane carrying one hundred people from Minneapolis was attempting to land.

Veteran storm chaser Jeff Piotrowski had driven to South Dakota from his home in Oklahoma to document the outbreak. He videotaped more than twenty tornadoes in southeastern South Dakota, and afterward stopped at the KELO-TV studios to share his pictures on the air. But Doppler radar indicated another circulation west of Sioux Falls. It was the signature of a developing tornado, so Piotrowski quickly left to give chase.

He called 911 to describe what he saw: "911. What's your emergency?" "Yes, this is Jeff. I'm a chaser. I'm here in Sioux Falls and I'm seeing transformers exploding on the west side of town." Radar showed a pair of developing tornadoes, one on each side of Interstate 90. Piotrowski watched one as it touched down northwest of the airport. He told 911: "It's on the ground! It's on the ground! It's on the ground north side of 90. Tornado is on the ground north side of I-90."



Doppler radar showed wind shear from the tornadic thunderstorm right in line with the approach to the airport's northwest-southeast runway, the one at which the jetliner was on final approach. Piotrowski described the tornado to dispatchers: "East of I-29, north of I-90, moving NE... Oh my God. Oh, my God. There's a plane right above the tornado! There's a plane! Oh, my God. There's plane almost got hit by the tornado. It's a jetliner. It's a jetliner. There's a jet going right by the tornado. It's a jumbo jet going right by the tornado. Oh, my God. The jetliner just flew over me. 911: "OK. Is it out of its path?" Piotrowski: "The jetliner just missed the tornado."

Barb Carman was one of the terrified passengers. She described the scene as the nose of the plane pointed down. "You know, you're just praying to yourself, 'get us out of here,' and just as quick as it came, the nose went up, and we were out of there." Later, the control tower radioed the aircraft with news of the tornado touchdown. Tower said: "Just to let you know there was a tornado reported four miles northwest of the airport." Pilot responded, "Copy, I think we got a nice glance at it." Tower said, "I bet you did."

Sioux Falls metro communications uses Piotrowski's eight minute phone call as a training exercise. You can listen to the call by clicking on the button:

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{rokbox title=|Jeff Piotrowski 911 call| thumb=|images/playbutton.PNG| size=|450 50| album=|demo|}./cases/Appendix B/Eyewitness.mp3{/rokbox}
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Download area: These are extremely large audio and data files.

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[Eyewitness.wav](#) - 22 MB, runs 8:14. Recording of the 911 call placed at 03:28:22 UTC 25 June 2003 by storm chaser Jeff Piotrowski to Minnehaha County Metro Communications, in which he described the tornadoes he saw and the jetliner that flew through them.

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[Radar.zip](#) - 23 MB. Compressed Archive2 radar data from KFSD between 0313-0338 UTC 25 June 2003. Contains significant dealiasing failure.

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[Tower.wav](#) - 78 MB, runs 29:53. Audio of radio conversations between Sioux Falls airport tower and the cockpit of a passenger jet as it approached the runway and aborted a landing at 0333 UTC 25 June 2003. Obtained by FOIA request 2004-00629GL from the Federal Aviation Administration, Great Lakes Region, Des Plaines, IL.

