

= Tropical Storm Alma ( 1974 ) =

Tropical Storm Alma , the first named storm to develop in the 1974 Atlantic hurricane season , was a short lived tropical cyclone that made a rare Venezuelan landfall . The storm formed from the Intertropical Convergence Zone ( ITCZ ) on August 12 well to the east of the Windward Islands , but advisories were not issued until the next day when Alma was at peak intensity . Subsequently , Alma moved at an unusually brisk pace of between 20 mph ( 32 km / h ) to 25 mph ( 40 km / h ) through the southeastern Caribbean Sea , causing numerous watches and gale warnings to be issued throughout the Caribbean . Alma moved quickly over Trinidad and continued westward , becoming one of only four storms to cross the Paria Peninsula of northeastern Venezuela . The storm dissipated on August 15 over the high terrain of Venezuela .

The storm left heavy damage on Trinidad , amounting to about \$ 5 million ( 1974 USD ) , making it the most destructive cyclone of the 20th century on the island at the time . Alma damaged about 5 @, @ 000 buildings , leaving 500 people homeless . The storm also wrecked about 17 @, @ 750 acres ( 7 @, @ 180 ha ) of crop fields . There were two deaths on Trinidad , including one who was struck by flying debris . Alma was also responsible a plane crash on Isla Margarita offshore Venezuela , killing 49 people on board due to heavy rainfall .

= = Meteorological history = =

A disturbance associated with the Intertropical Convergence Zone ( ITCZ ) left the coast of Africa on August 9 , with Dakar , Senegal reporting mid @-@ level winds of 75 mph ( 120 km / h ) . A weak circulation formed on August 10 within an area of thunderstorms . The disturbance moved slowly westward over the Atlantic Ocean , developing into a tropical depression at 18 : 00 UTC on August 12 around 10 ° north latitude , a latitude it would remain around throughout its lifetime . On August 13 , the depression intensified into Tropical Storm Alma about 375 mi ( 605 km ) east of Trinidad and Tobago , as indicated by a Hurricane Hunters flight reporting winds of 65 mph ( 105 km / h ) . This same flight also reported a circular eye with a diameter of 36 mi ( 58 km ) , the only report of an eye from this storm .

The center of Alma was elongated , causing gale @-@ force winds to extend 75 mi ( 120 km ) to the north while extending only 25 miles ( 40 km ) to the south . On August 14 the Hurricane Hunters reported gusts of 80 mph ( 130 km / h ) ; however , the storm weakened after its initial peak . Alma continued westward at 23 mph ( 37 km / h ) , which National Hurricane Center ( NHC ) Director Neil Frank noted was unusually rapid for a tropical cyclone at this time and location . Alma was able to maintain its low latitude movement to the west due to a strong subtropical ridge , which was at an unusually lower latitude than expected in August .

On August 14 , the storm made landfall on Trinidad with winds of 55 mph ( 90 km / h ) , becoming the southernmost landfall on that island since a storm in 1933 . The storm moved across Trinidad in only three hours , although the circulation was disrupted . The storm crossed the Gulf of Paria and made its second and final landfall on the Paria Peninsula of Venezuela , one of only four storms on record to do so ; the others were in 1605 , 1725 , and 1933 . The high mountains in Venezuela took a toll on the storm , ripping the circulation and causing Alma to be downgraded to a tropical depression on August 15 . At around 02 : 00 UTC that day , the circulation passed near Caracas . The convection rapidly diminished , and the presence on satellite imagery faded , although the NHC noted the potential for redevelopment once it reached open waters . Late on August 15 , the NHC issued the final advisory after the circulation dissipated near the border of Venezuela and Colombia . The remnants of Alma continued westward , reaching the Pacific Ocean where they would re @-@ intensify , becoming Hurricane Joyce .

= = Preparations , impact , and aftermath = =

Before Alma made landfall , gale warnings and a hurricane watch was issued for Trinidad , Tobago , Grenada , Saint Vincent and the Grenadines , and Barbados . As Alma progressed westward , gale

warnings were also issued for the Paria and Paraguaná peninsulas of Venezuela , the Guajira Peninsula , and the ABC islands . Initially , the Trinidad and Tobago weather service anticipated Alma would strike Tobago , but as the storm approached , the trajectory over Trinidad became apparent .

While moving across Trinidad , Alma produced sustained winds of only 35 mph ( 56 km / h ) at Piarco . However , gusts reached 91 mph ( 147 km / h ) at Savonetta . Rainfall at Piarco reached about 1 inch ( 25 mm ) during the storm 's passage . Strong winds downed trees and power lines , and damaged about 5 @, @ 000 buildings , including hundreds of households , wrecking everything inside ; this left about 500 people homeless . There was also widespread damage to agriculture , mostly to sugar , amounting to 17 @, @ 750 acres ( 7 @, @ 180 ha ) of damaged fields . The storm damaged several highways in the country , along with damaged schools and hospitals . The winds flung debris from a roof of a house and struck a woman , killing her . There was also an indirect death on the island , along with several injuries . Damage on the island was estimated at \$ 5 million ( 1974 USD ) , and Alma was considered the most destructive storm in Trinidad during the 20th century , according to the American embassy in the country . After the storm , the local Red Cross chapter provided meals and clothing to thousands of storm victims . The government allocated \$ 5 @. @ 1 million ( Trinidad and Tobago dollars ) for relief work , to be coordinated by the National Emergency Relief Organization of Trinidad and Tobago , which was established following the damaging Hurricane Flora in 1963 . This helped rebuild damaged houses , clear roads , and assist affected farmers . The United States Agency for International Development sent about \$ 5 @, @ 000 ( USD ) in assistance , after the country 's ambassador sent a formal request to Washington , D.C. The Amoco oil company also sent a \$ 500 ( USD ) donation to the country 's Red Cross .

While moving through the Windward Islands , Alma also produced strong wind gusts on Grenada . The outer rainbands of Alma spread over Venezuela while the center was still over Trinidad . At about 13 : 00 UTC on August 14 , the rains caused a Linea Aeropostal Venezolana Vickers Viscount 749 turboprop airliner to crash while circling the airport on Isla Margarita . The aircraft struck the side of La Gloria , 26 ft ( 8 m ) below the summit . All but one of the 49 people aboard died on impact ; the co @- @ pilot survived for 17 more days before dying from severe and irreversible brain damage . Also in Venezuela , Alma produced landslides due to heavy rainfall .