Storm Torn Bayou Benoit To Fight

BAYOU BENOIT — First, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ordered residents here to abandon homes or face legal eviction by July 15. Wednesday, a tornado, one of a series of the devastating twisters which struck throughout Acadiana, demolished homes, trailers and pushed a church off its foundations here. Now, the people who have lost their homes in the storm vow to rebuild and continue their fight to the last day against the Corps.

Two Mile Stretch
A two-mile central stretch of Bayou Benoit community, slated for a July 15 evacuation, was heavily damaged when a tornado struck, wiping out eight houses, four trailers and pushing the town church off its foundations.

St. Martin Parish Police Jury Secretary Carroll Fuselier said houses and trailers were demolished when the twister struck.

Police jury personnel rendered assistance Thursday by providing generator power for home freezers until electrical service was restored about 8 o'clock that night.

Assistance
Fuselier said that a Lafayette Red Cross representative and state Civil Defense personnel were on hand to look into the destruction and determine what assistance could be available to Bayou Benoit.

The area devastated by the twister is approximately the same affected by a Corps of Engineers order forcing abandonment or removal of structures along the levee. The Corps plans to raise the levee in that area as part of its flood control plans. Legal rights of way are held by appropriate state agencies who agree with the Corps' order.

Bayou Benoit residents reportedly vowed to rebuild their homes in the area despite the deadline and they say they will continue their fight with the Corps.

Tornadoes
A large portion of Acadiana was ravaged by a series of tornadoes and gusts of wind reaching 60 mph and higher Wednesday.

Fuselier said the church, which is at the center of the affected levee area, was pushed off its foundations by a twister and now rests about 6 feet from its original position. The structure also suffered roof and some structural damage but remains intact.