

Chapter 1 - The Set Up

In the days leading up to Hurricane Irma a series of composed and sobering text messages from the Government's Department of Disaster Management warned us of the pending threat. These are presented in truncated form below chronicling the dates and times issued, with the message headings in italics.

WEDNESDAY 30TH AUGUST, 2017

12:57 p.m. - Tropical Storm Irma forms in the Atlantic. Don't let your guard down, always #BeReady.

THURSDAY 31ST AUGUST, 2017

5:28 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Now a Category 3"*

...Forecasters believe Irma will pass very close to the islands of the northeast Caribbean Wednesday through Thursday morning.

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) is located in the northeast Caribbean and as such the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) is encouraging all persons to use the time now to start making preparations for any potential impact...

FRIDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER, 2017

3:10 p.m. - *"Irma Possible Northeast Caribbean Threat"*

6:29 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Regains Strength, Still a Cat Three Hurricane"*

SATURDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER, 2017

7:44 a.m. - *"Hurricane Irma remains a very strong hurricane...preparedness actions should continue"*

5:14 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Moving West South West at Cat 3 Strength"*

...The latest model guidance indicates that Irma may pass closer to the Leeward and Virgin Islands. Forecasters have shifted their track a little south of the previous, closer to the Leeward Islands.

11:24 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Summary"*

...Key Points

Irma remains a Category 2 hurricane.

Irma is expected to pass very close to the Leeward and Virgin Islands.

Irma is expected to remain a strong hurricane over the next week.

SUNDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2017

12:59 p.m. - *"Category 3 Hurricane Irma...Watches likely later today or tonight"*

8:45 p.m. - *"8pm Update: Hurricane Irma Moves Further West"*

...Based on the current forecast track, the eye of Hurricane Irma is expected to pass

approximately 70 miles north east of the British Virgin Islands.

11:16 p.m. - *"11pm Update: Irma Moving West South West"*

...Based on the current forecast track, the eye of Hurricane Irma is expected to pass approximately 54 miles north east of the British Virgin Islands.

MONDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2017

5:23 a.m. - *"5am Update: Irma Moving Closer to the Northern Leeward Islands"*

... Based on the current forecast track, the eye of Hurricane Irma is expected to pass approximately 37 miles north east of the British Virgin Islands...

5:49 p.m. - *"5pm Update: Hurricane Irma Now Category 4 Hurricane"*

A Hurricane Watch remains in effect for the British Virgin Islands. A hurricane watch means hurricane conditions are possible within 48 hours...On the forecast track, the center of Irma will move approximately 35 miles north east of the British Virgin Islands on Wednesday.

8:43 p.m. - *"Irma Continues to Strengthen: Winds Now 140 mph"*

11:17 p.m. - *"Hurricane Warning Issued for The British Virgin Islands"*

The Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Service has issued a Hurricane Warning for the British Virgin Islands. Hurricane warning means that hurricane conditions are possible within the specified area within 24-36 hours...On the forecast track, the center of Irma will move approximately 42 miles north east of the British Virgin Islands on Wednesday. Probable Impacts for Road Town:

Wind: 80 mph to 110 mph...

Rainfall: amounts of 8 to 14 inches...

Storm Surge: A storm surge of up to 6-8 feet will be possible on Tortola and increased up to 10-14 feet for the northern islands, including Anegada...

TUESDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2017

6:06 a.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Increases in Strength with 150 mph Winds"*

...On the forecast track, the core of Irma will move near or over portions of the northern Leeward Islands tonight and early Wednesday...

12:04 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Increases in Strength With 180 mph Winds"*

...Irma is an extremely dangerous Category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale...Hurricane Irma will move into the area today causing weather conditions to significantly deteriorate later this evening into tonight and tomorrow. Hurricane warning remains in effect for the BVI...Preparations to protect life and property should either be completed or rushed to completion.

5:57 p.m. - *"Hurricane Irma Winds Remain Near 185 mph"*

...The distinct eye of Hurricane Irma was located near latitude 17.1 degrees North, longitude 59.8 degrees West. Irma is moving toward the west near 15 mph...The BVI is located along latitude 18.25 degrees North, longitude 64.37 degrees West. Based on the latest forecasts, the approximate closest point of approach to Road Town from Hurricane Irma is 20.9 miles.

7:09 p.m. - *"Corrected: Hurricane Irma Winds Remain Near 185 mph"*

***Based on the latest forecasts, the approximate closest point of approach to Road

Town from Hurricane Irma is 1.8 miles.***(not 20.9 miles as previously posted)...

WEDNESDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

12:35 a.m. - *“Irma Approaches the BVI”*

...On the forecast track, the extremely dangerous core of Irma will move [sic] the northern Virgin Islands throughout the day on Wednesday...The approximate Closest Point of Approach (CPA) to Road Town, Tortola is located 10.4 miles away.

2:02 a.m. - *“Irma Headed for The BVI”*

...On the forecast track, the extremely dangerous core of Irma will move [sic] the northern Virgin Islands throughout the day on Wednesday...The approximate Closest Point of Approach (CPA) to Road Town, Tortola is located 19.6 miles away...Maximum sustained winds remain near 185 mph gusting to 205 mph...Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 50 miles from the center and tropical storm-force winds extend outward up to 175 miles. The minimum central pressure estimated from Air Force and NOAA Hurricane Hunter aircraft observations is 916mb...Sea conditions will be dangerously rough with heights of 20 feet. The combination of a life-threatening storm surge and tide will cause normally dry areas near the coast to be flooded by rising waters moving inland from the shoreline...Irma is expected to produce rainfall amounts of 8 to 14 inches, isolated 20 inches in some areas. These rains could cause life-threatening flash floods and mudslides. The BVI remains under a FLASH FLOOD WATCH.

5:49 a.m. - *“Irma Winds Beginning to Affect the BVI”*

At 5:00 AM, the National Hurricane Centre has indicated that Hurricane Irma's maximum sustained winds remain near 185 miles per hour (mph) with higher gusts. Irma is the most powerful Atlantic hurricane in recorded history and will be the strongest system to ever make landfall in the Caribbean.

...Based on the latest forecasts, the approximate closest point of approach to Road Town from Hurricane Irma is 17 miles northeast. With the shift to the WNW, the centre of the hurricane is now expected to pass near or over the North Sound area of Virgin Gorda with winds extending throughout the entire Territory.

But no one predicted a direct hit on the capital, Road Town, on the main island of Tortola, and nothing could prepare us for Irma. The last frantic message came in on Wednesday, 6th September, 2017 at 11:34 a.m.:

“We are in for a direct hit, a direct hit on Road Town! Move, move to safe room immediately! Move please to safe room immediately! Immediately! Move please.”

These are the Irma survivors and their stories...