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Las Vegas SUN

November 03, 2003

Fire captain critical after truck overturns

LAS VEGAS SUN

A firefighter remained in critical condition at University Medical Center this morning from an accident late Friday in which a fire truck carrying him and three other firefighters flipped over on U.S. 95 at Rainbow Boulevard.

Capt. Thelonious Adams, who reportedly was riding in the right front seat, was listed as critical today at UMC, the hospital said.

The Nevada Highway Patrol, which is investigating the 11:30 p.m. accident, said the other three firefighters in the unit were treated and released from UMC. What caused the accident has not yet been determined.

No other vehicles were involved in the accident, Las Vegas Fire Dept. spokesman Tim Szymanski said.

The fire engine, valued at \$325,000, was in the lead, followed by a ladder truck when it entered a curve, rolled onto its side and skidded into a guard rail, Szymanski said. It is not yet known whether the vehicle, which suffered extensive damage, can be repaired.

No fire was found in any of the buildings in the vicinity of the accident.

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Las Vegas SUN

November 03, 2003

Fire captain critical after truck overturns

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LAS VEGAS SUN

A Las Vegas firefighter remained in critical condition at University Medical Center this morning after an accident late Friday in which a fire truck flipped over on U.S. 95 at the Rainbow Boulevard off-ramp.

Capt. Thelonious Adams, who purportedly was riding in the right front seat of the fire truck, was listed as critical today at UMC, the hospital said. One of his fellow firefighters said Adams suffered a broken neck and possibly a severed spinal cord in the accident, but hospital and fire department officials refused to confirm the extent of Adams' injuries.

The three other firefighters who were on the truck with Adams were treated at UMC and released, authorities said.

About 11:30 p.m. Friday, Adams and his crew were in Las Vegas Fire Engine 6 rushing to a call about smoke in an apartment complex off Rainbow Boulevard. As it took the off-ramp for Rainbow, Fire Engine 6 entered a curve, rolled onto its side and slid into a guard rail, Las Vegas Fire and Rescue spokesman Tim Szymanski said.

No other vehicles were involved, Szymanski said.

A firefighters in a ladder truck going to the same call came upon the accident and called for help.

The Nevada Highway Patrol is investigating the accident but has not yet settled on a probable cause.

Fire Engine 6 is a \$325,000 vehicle, and it is not yet known whether the vehicle, which suffered extensive damage, can be repaired, Szymanski said.

Nevada Department of Transportation officials today said there have been no incidents resulting from design issues regarding that off-ramp. However, to improve traffic flow, a \$42 million road-and ramp-widening project is to begin this month at that location, NDOT officials said.

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Las Vegas SUN

November 05, 2003

Firefighters pull for injured captain

Vigil scheduled tonight at UMC for victim of rollover of fire engine

By Christina Littlefield

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LAS VEGAS SUN

Las Vegas firefighters have organized a candlelight vigil tonight in support of Capt. Thelonious Adams, 39, who remains in critical condition at University Medical Center's Trauma Center.

Adams suffered serious injuries late Friday night when the Las Vegas Fire and Rescue engine he was riding in rolled over on U.S. 95 at the Rainbow Boulevard exit.

"I can tell you he is in good spirits, but not much has changed," said Fire Capt. Bertral Washington, who was acting as a spokesman for Adams' family.

One of Adams' fellow firefighters said Adams suffered a broken neck and possibly a severed spinal cord, but hospital and fire officials will not confirm the extent of his injuries.

Preliminary reports from the Nevada Highway Patrol say firefighter John Delucchi was driving too fast for the curve's conditions, Trooper Angie Wolff said Tuesday. She added that it will be awhile before the Highway Patrol can finish its reports because of a lack of data on fire engines.

Delucchi and fellow passengers Thomas Cox and Brett Strong were treated for minor injuries and released from UMC, Highway Patrol officials said.

Adams and his crew were responding Fire Engine 6 to a call about smoke at an apartment complex off Rainbow Boulevard about 11:30 p.m. Friday. As Delucchi took the curved off-ramp for Rainbow, the engine rolled on its side and slid into a guard rail, Las Vegas Fire and Rescue spokesman Tim Szymanski said.

The off-ramp posts an exit speed of 25 mph.

No other cars were involved in the accident, Szymanski said.

Deputy Fire Chief Rick Gracia said firefighter engineers go through intensive driver safety training and are taught that the right of way given to fire engines through the lights and sirens is a privilege.

"They don't have to speed to go to an emergency," Gracia said. "I know there is a misperception that they put on the lights and floor it, but that is not the case."

As with all drivers, no extent of driver training can prevent some accidents, Gracia said.

"The engineers know the dangers of speed, but that still doesn't always prevent accidents from happening," Gracia said.

Adams, a 13-year-veteran firefighter, came to Las Vegas from New Orleans, Washington said. Washington also added that Adams is currently working on his bachelor's degree in English literature from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and is a volunteer with the Boy Scouts.

The vigil for Adams will take place at 5:30 p.m. in the parking lot across the street from and to the east of the UMC Trauma Center.

Washington said many firefighters and Highway Patrol officers had expressed interest in attending the vigil to support Adams.

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Las Vegas SUN

December 16, 2004

Firefighter is convicted in crash that paralyzed captain

Fire captain was paralyzed when truck flipped

By Molly Ball

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LAS VEGAS SUN

A Las Vegas firefighter was driving too fast when his fire truck rolled over on the Rainbow Boulevard off-ramp of U.S. 95 last year, paralyzing a fire captain, a judge ruled on Wednesday.

John DeLucchi was convicted of driving too fast for conditions, a misdemeanor, and fined \$250 by Justice of the Peace Deborah Lippis.

In a September trial, DeLucchi had maintained his innocence, saying the truck's speedometer was broken and his driving was in accord with fire department guidelines.

As far as he knew, the fire truck was going 30 mph on the ramp, which had a speed limit of 25 mph, he said. But in fact, the truck's speed was 20 mph over the limit, according to police.

Lippis wrote in her ruling that given the fire truck's immense weight, it should have been traveling at less than the speed limit to ensure safety.

On Oct. 31, 2003, firefighters were heading to a reported apartment fire that turned out to be a false alarm. Exiting U.S. 95 at Rainbow Boulevard, the truck rolled. Capt. Theo Adams was paralyzed from the neck down as a result.

The charge DeLucchi faced was punishable by as much as six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine. In requesting a lesser punishment, prosecutor Bruce Nelson said the crash was a tragic accident.

"This is a case where there was no intentional action here," Nelson told the judge. "There is no question that the defendant did not intend for the fire truck to overturn."

DeLucchi's city-retained lawyer, Frank Cremen, said the firefighter would accept the punishment. DeLucchi was barred by the department from speaking to the press.

Nelson said prosecutors treat public servants no differently than civilians when it comes to traffic crimes. Drivers of emergency vehicles are not above the law, but nor are they held to a higher standard, he said.

"This case makes the point that even if you're a fireman, you have to drive carefully," Nelson said. "You

can put the lights and sirens on, but you still have to watch out."

Drivers of fire trucks, who have the authority to violate some traffic rules in the line of duty, must always exercise caution, said Las Vegas Fire Department spokesman Tim Szymanski.

"You're given the privilege of breaking the law, but you're not allowed to injure anyone in the process," he said. "You can only break the law with due regard for safety. Our job is to protect people and property, not to destroy it."

But accidents happen. "When you're out there driving a 35,000-pound vehicle, it can be unpredictable," said Szymanski, himself a former driver.

After a departmental investigation and some retraining, DeLucchi, who is well regarded on the force, is back on the road, Szymanski said.

Driving a fire truck is "probably the best job on the fire department," Szymanski said. It involves specialized training, an exam, and a higher pay grade.

As for Adams, he declined to be interviewed, but the firefighters' association has held several fundraisers to help him. He is retired on permanent disability.

The off-ramp that was the site of last year's crash is gone, part of the widening of U.S. 95 that had been planned for years. No design flaws in the ramp are thought to have contributed to the crash, officials said.

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Photos: [Instructor Mike Johnson](#) | [A monitor at a control station](#)

Las Vegas SUN

January 12, 2005

Firefighters' simulator first of its kind in U.S.

By Jen Lawson

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LAS VEGAS SUN

Responding to a house fire with his lights and sirens blazing, Clark County fire training instructor Mike Johnson looks to his left and pulls out onto a road, when suddenly he is caught in a heavy, foggy downpour.

As he struggles to see, the rain gives way to snow.

Then, without warning, the sky turns dark, the bright orange glow of the fire dramatically lighting up the night in the distance.

Johnson had almost reached his destination when a tire on his truck blew out. He wrestled control of the 76,000-pound vehicle, then soldiered on.

He perilously crossed a rickety-looking one-lane bridge -- a car coming in the opposite direction did not yield -- before finally arriving at the burning house.

Johnson was glad this wasn't a real emergency. It was a virtual one on the L-3 Driving Simulator, a sophisticated system that uses detailed computer animation to mimic 35 different obstacles that fire department engineers could encounter: inclement weather, motorists who ignore lights and sirens, drunk drivers, heavy traffic, equipment malfunctions, hazmat scenarios.

"By creating safer drivers, it reduces costs and saves lives," Johnson said.

The simulator is the first of its kind in the nation, Fire Engineer Troy Jepson said. The \$100,300 cost of the unit was covered by a Fire Act grant from the federal government.

Although the department obtained the system with no particular collision in mind, the hopes is to avoid anything like the rollover that paralyzed Las Vegas Fire & Rescue Capt. Theo Adams in 2003.

Adams was riding in a fire engine when the vehicle rolled while exiting U.S. 95 at Rainbow Boulevard.

An investigation showed that the driver, firefighter John DeLucchi, was going about 20 mph above the speed limit. DeLucchi was convicted in December of driving too fast for conditions, a misdemeanor, and fined \$250.

All of Clark County Fire Department's 290 personnel who drive fire engines, ladder trucks and rescue vehicles have used the simulator since the department received it last month, and any new personnel

who are learning to drive the vehicles will be trained using the system.

Fire department officials began looking for a fire-focused driving simulator about a year ago, wanting to upgrade how they do training for emergency driving.

They had been showing videos and overhead transparencies, then saying "good luck" and having the new drivers hone their skills while on the job.

"We thought 'there's got to be something out there that's more hands-on,' " Jepson said.

They found police driving simulators, but none for fire departments.

The department contacted L-3 Communications, which develops systems for intelligence collection, imagery processing and satellite communications for clients such as the the Department of Defense and the aerospace industry.

The system, which took L-3 nearly a year to develop, resembles a race car driving game found in a video arcade.

The company built the system to the fire department's specifications, re-creating the humming vibration of the fire engine, dashboard and controls, gauges, steering wheel and foot pedals.

Flat LCD screens give the driver a view through the windshield and both side mirrors and windows.

After turning the key, putting the system in drive, releasing the emergency brake, the driver begins racing through the streets of Salt Lake City to a number of possible emergencies -- a fire or plane crash, for example.

One of L-3's western branches is located in Salt Lake City, so it was easier for the company to use that city instead of Clark County, plus it would have cost an extra \$100,000 to customize the simulation.

The training instructor sits at a computer next to the simulator that shows an overhead view of the vehicle as it moves through the city.

Every move the driver makes is recorded and can be replayed from several different angles.

If the driver loses control or hits something, a cracked windshield and the word "COLLISION" fills the screen.

A small steering wheel is attached to the instructor's system, and the instructor can make a distracting rogue driver appear on the simulator.

"For our purposes, we just use it to harass people," Jepson said as he deftly crossed the civilian SUV in front of the fire engine and whipped past it on the shoulder.

"One thing it doesn't have are drivers who can flip us off," he said, laughing.

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