

Author: "Tutterow Robert" <rtutterow@ci.charlotte.nc.us> at INTERNET-MAIL
Date: 04/30/2000 8:03 PM
Priority: Normal
TO: Kevin M. Roche at -PFDOPS_PO2
Subject: FW: Chicago Lieutenant Is Latest LODD

----- Message Contents -----

Here's one you may not have yet received. I doubt this incident involved seat belt failure!

-----Original Message-----

From: FIRETV@aol.com [mailto:FIRETV@aol.com]
Sent: Sunday, April 30, 2000 12:26 PM
To: dddmanf@3dmanufacturing.com; johnwitt@netcom.ca;
jo-da-mn@worldnet.att.net; gweidner@city.virginia-beach.va.us;
cfsi@erols.com; ChiefvonZehle@wiltonfire.org;
Rtutterow@ci.charlotte.nc.us; ElkoEMPhil@aol.com; jtodorai@home.com;
gtepper@co.la.ca.us; burtay@prodigy.net; SutTowers@aol.com;
rsuche@fgiltd.ca; jtsfire@gte.net; bspangler@fedsig.com
Subject: Chicago Lieutenant Is Latest LODD

"18 Year Career Veteran Dies Responding To False Alarm"

by: Amy Steelman

Flirting With Disaster

(Chicago) - This morning, Chicago Fire Department's flags are at half mast, and black and purple bunting drape the bay doors at a southside Fire Station.

A veteran Chicago Fire Department is dead and 13 people are injured, some seriously, when a responding CFD aerial apparatus was struck by another truck on the city's Southwest Side. The fatal accident occurred at around noon on Saturday.

Ladder Company 24 was responding with lights and siren on a suspected fire, when the firetruck was struck broadside by a landscaping truck at a busy intersection.

Commander of Ladder 24, Lieutenant L.C. Merrell, 43, was apparently thrown from the cab of the apparatus upon impact. Department paramedics pronounced Merrell dead at the scene. Ladder 24 had just completed operations at a minor house fire, when they were dispatched by fire alarm to a second call. That call turned out to be unfounded.

Firefighters and paramedics were able to respond quickly because another hook-and-ladder truck was en route to the same call, according to Commissioner Joyce. A battalion chief, who was following Ladder 24 at the time was eyewitness to the accident.

Lt. Merrell was riding in the officer's position on the apparatus, and it has

not yet been determined whether he was wearing his seatbelt, according to CFD

Commissioner James Joyce. Joyce added that four other firefighters, whose identities were not released, and nine civilians riding in two other vehicles

were taken to Chicagoland hospitals. Three remained hospitalized on Saturday

night.

A 27-year-old firefighter remains in serious condition and another was listed in fair condition on Saturday night at Christ Hospital and Medical Center in Oak Lawn. Two other firefighters were treated and released.

The fatal accident occurred at a 4-way stop at 107th and Throop Street, and police have not yet released information as to whether the fire apparatus stopped or slowed down at the intersection. Police did indicate that the driver of the commercial truck would not be charged with any felonies.

The Trib reported: Accidents involving emergency vehicles account for about 27,000 crashes annually in the United States. From 1992 to 1997, highway crashes were to blame for 20 percent of the 259 firefighter fatalities nationwide, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In a report in the Sunday edition of the Chicago Tribune, fellow officer Capt. William Vogt notes, "We lost one of our best guys today. I've served with him for a long time, and he was...very aggressive and ran a good ship."

Lt. Merrell is survived by his wife and four children.

An additional report will be issued following statements from the CFD as well as Local 2 IAFF.

condolences can be posted to:
Webmaster@IAFF-Local2.org

Author: <FIRETV@aol.com> at INTERNET-MAIL

Date: 04/30/2000 12:26 PM

Priority: Normal

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ls@bmfefire.com at INTERNET-MAIL, sbarraclough@paccar.com at INTERNET-MAIL,
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Subject: Chicago Lieutenant Is Latest LODD

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Lt. Merrell was riding in the officer's position on the apparatus, and it has not yet been determined whether he was wearing his seatbelt, according to CFD Commissioner James Joyce. Joyce added that four other firefighters, whose identities were not released, and nine civilians riding in two other vehicles were taken to Chicagoland hospitals. Three remained hospitalized on Saturday night.

A 37-year-old firefighter remains in serious condition and another was listed in fair condition on Saturday night at Christ Hospital and Medical Center in Oak Lawn. Two other firefighters were treated and released.

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Subj: **Fwd: Chicago - FIREFIGHTER KILLED, 13 HURT IN CRASH**
Date: 4/30/00 12:53:38 PM US Mountain Standard Time
From: SachsGM
To: LHSachs, Kroche1234

Forwarded Message:

Subj: **Chicago - FIREFIGHTER KILLED, 13 HURT IN CRASH**
Date: 4/30/00 7:55:18 AM US Mountain Standard Time
From: p.maniscalco.1@ALUMNI.NYU.EDU (Paul M. Maniscalco)
Sender: EMSNEWS@HERMES.CIRC.GWU.EDU (EMS News)
Reply-to: p.maniscalco.1@alumni.nyu.edu (Paul M. Maniscalco)
To: EMSNEWS@HERMES.CIRC.GWU.EDU

<http://www.chicago.tribune.com/version1/article/0,1575,SAV-0004300215,00.htm>

**FIREFIGHTER KILLED, 13 HURT IN CRASH
TRUCK, PICKUP COLLIDE DURING EMERGENCY RUN**

By Karen Mellen and Virginia Groark
Tribune Staff Writers
April 30, 2000

An 18-year veteran of the Chicago Fire Department was killed and 13 people were injured Saturday when a firetruck and another vehicle collided on the Southwest Side.

Lt. L.C. Merrell, 43, assigned to Hook and Ladder Co. 24, was thrown from the cab of the truck after the collision with a landscaper's pickup, said Fire Commissioner James Joyce. Merrell, who was married and had four children, died at the scene.

The fire company was responding to a call and its lights and sirens were activated, Joyce said. It was unclear whether Merrell, a passenger in the truck's right-front seat, was wearing a seat belt as required by department regulations, Joyce said.

"We lost one of our best guys today," said Fire Capt. William Vogt. "I served with him for a long time, and he was really good. He was very aggressive and ran a good ship."

Four firefighters, whose identities were not released, and nine people riding in two other vehicles were taken to hospitals. Three remained hospitalized Saturday night.

The accident happened shortly before noon. Firefighters in Company 24's hook-and-ladder truck had just extinguished a minor fire on the Southwest Side when they received orders to respond to a call that turned out to be false.

While northbound on Throop Street at 107th Street, a four-way stop, the firetruck was struck on the passenger side by a westbound Zepeda Construction pickup, said Fire Department spokesman Patrick Howe.

Six people were in the pickup, a Zepeda official said. A midsize sedan near the intersection, with three people inside, was struck by the two trucks.

Joyce said it is standard procedure for drivers of emergency vehicles to stop at intersections to make sure they are clear before continuing. Fire officials are investigating if that procedure was followed.

Chicago police are investigating. No charges had been filed as of Saturday evening.

Joyce did not blame Zepeda's driver for the accident, but he questioned "how a big truck with lights and sirens can be ignored by motorists."

The accident, he said, points to the danger that firefighters and other emergency personnel face en route to calls.

"It's another dangerous part of a very dangerous job," Joyce said.

Sam Zepeda Jr., manager of the South Side family-owned landscaping and construction business, said the pickup's passengers were traveling to a job site to plant trees.

"It's a shock for all of us," said Zepeda, whose uncle was injured in the crash. "We are very sorry as to what happened. We are sorry about the death.

"We have a family business," he added. "It's a small business, and we are all close, very close, with everybody. For us right now, it's a very sad tragedy for everything that has happened."

Accidents involving emergency vehicles account for about 27,000 crashes annually in the U.S. From 1992 to 1997, highway crashes were to blame for 20 percent of the 259 firefighter fatalities nationwide, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In Chicago, police and fire officials have reported seeing a marked increase in drivers leisurely veering to the side of the road as an emergency vehicle approaches or ignoring the vehicle altogether.

Their concern prompted the city last year to more than quadruple the fine for failing to yield to emergency vehicles, to as much as \$500.

Edward Davidson, who lives near the accident scene, heard the crash as he was getting out of his car.

"It was just a loud boom," Davidson said. The firefighter "had a siren on."

Davidson said that almost immediately, other firefighters and paramedics were on the scene, working to revive the lieutenant, who was lying in the street.

Firefighters and paramedics were able to respond quickly because another hook-and-ladder truck was en route to the same call, Joyce said. A battalion chief, who was driving behind the truck, witnessed the accident.

A 37-year-old firefighter was listed in serious condition and another whose age was not available was listed in fair condition, Saturday night at Christ Hospital and Medical Center in Oak Lawn. Two others were treated and released.

A 45-year-old man, a Zepeda employee, was listed in fair condition Saturday

night at Cook County Hospital with a broken arm and other injuries. A 36-year-old man was treated at Little Company of Mary Hospital and Health Care Center in Evergreen Park and released.

Four men were treated at St. Francis Hospital and Health Center in Blue Island and released. A 38-year-old woman and two girls, ages 4 and 11, were treated at Roseland Community Hospital in Chicago and released.

Flags were lowered Saturday at firehouses throughout Chicago, and black-and-purple bunting will be hung in Merrell's honor at the Company 24 firehouse at 104th Street and Vincennes Avenue, Howe said.

This listserve is intended for the open and free exchange of emerging news / trends within Emergency Medical Services.

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Received: from LIME.EASE.LSOFT.COM (lime.ease.lsoft.com [209.119.1.41]) by rly-zc02.mx.aol.com (v71.10) with ESMTP; Sun, 30 Apr 2000 10:55:00 -0400
Received: from PEAR.EASE.LSOFT.COM (209.119.0.19) by LIME.EASE.LSOFT.COM (LSMTP for Digital Unix v1.1b) with SMTP id <11.005ADFE7@LIME.EASE.LSOFT.COM>; 30 Apr 2000 10:55:00 -0400
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Received: from compaq ([12.79.46.112]) by mtiwmhc26.worldnet.att.net (InterMail VM.4.01.02.39 201-229-119-122) with SMTP id <20000430145424.YQJX12683.mtiwmhc26.worldnet.att.net@compaq> for <EMSNEWS@hermes.circ.gwu.edu>; Sun, 30 Apr 2000 14:54:24 +0000
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Updated: Monday, May 30, 2000 - 5 PM

Chicago Fire Lieutenant Killed; Firefighter Critical and 12 Others Injured in Collision

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[Funeral, Visitation Information Now Added Below](#)

DAVE J. IANNONE

Firehouse.Com Senior Editor

A veteran Chicago Fire Lieutenant was killed and a second firefighter listed in critical condition when a ladder truck responding to a false alarm on Saturday, Apr. 29 was broadsided by a truck that failed to yield the right-of-way at a four-way stop intersection, officials said. Twelve other people were injured, including three firefighters.

Fire Lieutenant L. C. Merrell and Firefighter Rodney Sevier was ejected from their unit when it was broadsided by a landscape truck in an intersection, officials said.

Merrell, the unit's officer, was pronounced dead a short time after being transported to Christ Hospital. Sevier was listed in fair condition Monday at the same hospital with multiple injuries, police said.

A third firefighter was released from an area hospital Sunday and the two others were treated and released with minor injuries on Saturday, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

At least nine civilians were injured, none seriously.

Merrell, 43, was an 18-year veteran who is survived by his wife and four children. Their ages were not immediately available early Sunday. He



Chicago Fire Department Photo
 Fire Lieutenant L. C. Merrell

According to officials, Truck Company 24 was returning from a response when it

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was dispatched on an automatic alarm call shortly before Noon on the city's South Side.

The unit had slowed down as it approached a four-way stop at the intersection of 107th and Throop Streets. The landscape truck went through a stop sign, and broadsided the responding unit on the front passenger side.

"There's no criminal negligence, it's just a terrible accident," Sgt. Matthew Brown of the Chicago Police Department's Major Accident Investigation Unit told Firehouse.Com News early Sunday.

The driver of the landscape truck, 56-year-old Isac Zepeda, was issued three traffic citations, including disobeying a stop sign, failure to yield to an emergency vehicle and failure to properly wear a seat belt. More serious charges would not be filed in connection with Merrell's death, Brown said. Six people were travelling in the pickup truck, reports said.

A third vehicle was also involved in the crash. Witnesses in that vehicle told the Chicago Sun-Times that the pickup truck ignored the stop sign.

Officials said they did not know if the firefighters had been wearing the seat belts, the Chicago Sun-Times reported. City regulations require that emergency units have control of an intersection before going through.

"The fire truck slowed down, but it was a four way stop and they had their emergency lights on," Brown said. "[The lights] are a request for a right-of-way to go through, not automatic, but in this case [the fire truck] was already in the middle of the intersection when [it] was [struck]."

Grief counselors were called in to assist those who worked with Merrell and his crew deal with the tragedy. Firefighters were keeping vigil at Christ Hospital for those still hospitalized.

Funeral and Related Information

- **Visitation**
Friday, May 5
Noon - 8 PM
Leak & Sons Funeral Home
7838 South Cottage Grove
Chicago
- **Funeral Service**
Saturday, May 6
Visitation - 10 AM
Funeral Service - 11 AM
Metropolitan Community Church
4100 S. King Drive
Chicago
- **Internment**
Lincoln Cemetery
12300 South Kedzie Avenue

Related Links

- Sun-Times (Wed): [Failure to use seat belt cited in crash death of firefighter](#)
- Sun-Times (Mon): [City firefighters honor colleague killed in crash](#)
- Sun-Times (Sun): [Firefighter killed in crash](#)



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▲ News

Firefighter killed in crash remembered

Monday, May 1, 2000

By Steve Metsch
Staff Writer

A loving husband and father. A friendly, helpful neighbor. A man with a perpetual smile.

That's how neighbors of Chicago Fire Department Lt. L.C. Merrell recalled him Sunday.

Merrell, 43, died Saturday when he was thrown from a fire truck after a truck ran a stop sign and collided with it at 107th and South Throop streets. The medical examiner's office said Merrell died from blunt head trauma.

Louise Abernathy, who lives next door, called Merrell "a very, very, very nice person." Brenda Johnson, who lives on the other side of the Merrell house, called him "a nice, ordinary guy."

"You couldn't ask for a better neighbor," said Abernathy.

"Last week I had three trees out back that needed to be cut down and he did that for me. He just got his saw and cut them down. He was extremely nice and always had a smile," Abernathy said.

The Merrell family, L.C., wife Marilyn, one daughter and three sons, resided in the 3000 block of West 85th Street in the Ashburn neighborhood for about two years, Abernathy said.

A woman who answered the door of the Merrell home Sunday morning said "Mrs. Merrell is not ready to talk about her loss."

The home, with two small American flags hanging near the front door and a pool in the backyard, sits on a quiet residential street across from Hayes Park.

That's the park that Merrell could often be seen walking the family dog or playing catch with his sons, neighbors said.

Streets around the park were clogged with park cars Saturday evening as dozens of mourners paid their respects, Abernathy said.

"Given his job," Abernathy said, "I'd have imagined that if he had died at work, he would have died in a fire."

The firehouse at 104th and Vincennes, where Merrell was stationed, was draped in purple bunting Sunday.

One firefighter shook his head and said "a terrible way to go," when asked about Merrell's death, which happened en route to what turned out to be a false alarm.

The fire truck was heading back from another call when a new call crackled over the radio. The fire truck was hit by a pickup truck owned by Zapeda Construction Co. at the intersection of Throop and 107th Streets.

Isaac Zapeda of Chicago has been ticketed for failure to obey a stop sign, failure to yield to an emergency vehicle and failure to wear a seat belt.

Another firefighter injured in the crash was in fair condition Sunday at Christ Hospital in Oak Lawn with abdominal and neck injuries, fire department spokesman Patrick Howe said. A civilian was in serious condition at Cook County Hospital, he said.

Johnson, who owns a motorcycle, fondly recalled how Merrell always warned her to be careful when riding.

"I was cleaning the motorcycle Friday and he came out. He shook his head, smiled and told me again to be careful. That's the kind of neighbor he was. He was genuinely concerned," Johnson said.

"I'm devastated," said Johnson, who lit a candle in church Sunday morning as she prayed for Merrell.

Johnson said she planned to prepare a meal for the Merrell family, but wasn't sure how to approach Marilyn.

"What can I say to her that would help make up for her loss? I know she's suffering," Johnson said. "There was a lot of love there. They were tight. I could tell by the way he'd clean her car for her, or warm it up in the winter."

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City firefighters honor colleague killed in crash

May 1, 2000

BY STEVE WARMBIR STAFF REPORTER

Chicago firefighters bowed their heads in a moment of silence Sunday afternoon over a makeshift flower memorial they had made for their fallen colleague.

The planted marigolds formed "24," the number of Lt. L.C. Merrell's truck company.

Friends and fellow firefighters recalled Merrell as a top firefighter who commanded respect and trust at fire scenes, whose boss valued him so much he recently had asked him not to transfer.

"This guy was an incredibly good fireman," said the Rev. Thomas A. Mulcrone, a Fire Department chaplain. Merrell, the father of five, "was on busy companies all his life."

Merrell was killed Saturday when a pickup truck blew through a stop sign at Throop and 107th Street and collided with the fire truck he was riding in, police said. Another firefighter was seriously injured, but his condition was upgraded from serious to fair Sunday, a Fire Department spokesman said.

One of the men in the pickup truck also was hospitalized in fair condition with a broken arm, the spokesman said.

Chicago police ticketed the pickup truck driver, Isac Zepeda, 55, of Chicago, for failing to stop at a stop sign and other charges, and their investigation continues.

One witness said the landscaping truck was speeding and did not stop. There was no sign of skid marks at the intersection Sunday afternoon.

www.suntimes.com

Just a few yards from the corner, five firefighters cleared weeds and planted marigolds, tulips and petunias around a wooden cross and the printed text of "A Fireman's Prayer."

"His joy was doing right," said firefighter Lloyd Leftridge, who had worked with Merrell. "Everybody had confidence in him."

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Failure to use seat belt cited in crash death of firefighter

May 3, 2000

BY FRAN SPIELMAN CITY HALL REPORTER

Chicago Fire Lt. L.C. Merrell would be alive today if he had been wearing his seat belt, Fire Commissioner James Joyce said Tuesday as he vowed to crack down on firefighters who don't buckle up.

"There are things I can't control--building collapses, holes in the floor, things like that. This is something I think I can control," Joyce said.

If Merrell had been wearing his seat belt, Joyce said, "I believe that L.C. would be alive today. I don't want to use this tragic death, but we have to learn something from this ..."

Many firefighters ignore an internal order to wear seat belts because they're too cumbersome to get around heavy equipment, said Bill Kugelman, president of the Chicago Firefighters Union Local 2.

Since April 1992, firefighters have been required to buckle up on their way to fires--emergency gear and all--to prevent precisely the kind of tragedy that occurred Saturday.

Merrell, an 18-year veteran assigned to Hook and Ladder Co. 24, was thrown from the cab of the truck at 107th and Throop after the truck collided with a landscaping truck. Merrell had been on the way to an emergency that turned out to be a false alarm.

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Fallen firefighter honored

May 7, 2000

Hundreds of firefighters put on their white gloves, caps and overcoats, no matter the warm day, to pay respects to Chicago fire Lt. L.C. Merrell, who was buried Saturday.

The leader of Engine Company No. 24 was killed April 29 when his fire truck was hit by a landscaping truck at 107th and Throop.

His casket arrived Saturday morning at Metropolitan Community Church aboard a pumper truck, as bagpipes played and firefighters from as far away as Cincinnati stood in silence.

"Taps" was played on a trumpet, and a bell sounded three times, then five, then three more, signaling a final return to quarters.

Leaving the church, 41st and King, firefighters embraced, consoling each other.

The procession stretched for three miles, shutting down the Dan Ryan Expy., as the cars crawled toward Lincoln Cemetery, 123rd and Kedzie in Blue Island.

Merrell is survived by his wife, Marilyn; three sons, Dan Williams, Lavar Merrell and Rasheed Merrell, and two daughters, Rossalyn and Tiffany Merrell.

"Every place he went became a better place," said the fire commissioner, James Joyce.

Chicago Sun-Times staff

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Saturday, June
24, 2000

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FIREFIGHTER'S WIDOW SUES IN FATAL CRASH

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June 24, 2000

CHICAGO The widow of the Chicago firefighter killed when he was thrown from the cab of a firetruck that collided with a landscaper's pickup filed suit Friday in Cook County Circuit Court against the landscaping company and the truck driver.

The suit filed by Marilyn Merrell alleges that defendant Isac Zepeda of Zepeda Construction Inc. failed to yield to the firetruck in which her husband, Lt. L.C. Merrell Jr., 43, was riding and failed to reduce speed to avoid an accident.

The collision occurred April 29 when the vehicle driven by Zepeda allegedly ran a stop sign at 107th and Throop Streets, striking the firetruck.

Neither officials with the firm nor attorneys for Merrell could be reached for comment.

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