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Firetruck crash kills 1, injures 5 in Melrose Park

2 departments were headed to blaze

By Brett McNeil and Angela Rozas, Tribune staff reporters. The Associated Press contributed to this report

April 28, 2004

One firefighter was killed and five others injured, one critically, when two firetrucks collided violently late Tuesday in Melrose Park as they were responding to a garage fire in unincorporated Leyden Township.

A Northlake Fire Department truck struck a Stone Park truck at Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue about 5:50 p.m., said Dean Krone, village attorney for Stone Park. The impact hurtled the Stone Park truck, smashing its front and sides before it landed on its side facing south across Armitage.

Two firefighters from Stone Park were taken to Loyola University Medical Center, where one died and the other was in critical condition late Tuesday, said a hospital spokeswoman. Hospital officials declined to release the firefighters' names or any additional information.

A third Stone Park firefighter was taken to Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Three firefighters from Northlake were taken to Westlake Hospital in Melrose Park, where they were treated and released, a hospital spokeswoman said.

It's not clear how the Stone Park truck, northbound on Mannheim, collided with the Northlake truck, heading east on Armitage, but both appeared to arrive in the intersection at the same time, Krone said.

"My understanding is they were both in motion when the collision occurred," he said. "This is a tragic event for both communities, and I'm sure the workers at both departments feel very deeply [about it.]"

The intersection's traffic lights are equipped with a system that allows emergency vehicles to override the signal. Officials could not say if either truck had activated the system.

Melrose Park police and Illinois State Police are investigating the collision, authorities said.

Blocks from the scene, traffic on both roads came to a stop for several hours. Dozens of people gathered at the usually busy commercial intersection to view the wreckage.

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Cecil Graham, 39, a mechanic with Pollard Motor Co. in Melrose Park, was walking outside when the crash occurred, he said.

"As soon as [the truck] crossed the first lane of traffic, that's when I heard the bomb, the big explosion," he said.

More than half a dozen emergency agencies responded to the scene. One firefighter had to be extricated from a truck as others fought shooting flames.

An American flag was lowered to half-staff at the Stone Park Fire Station Tuesday evening, where firefighters declined to talk.

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NBC5.com

Firefighter Dies In Collision Of Fire Trucks

Trucks From Stone Park, Northlake Collide

POSTED: 6:14 PM CDT April 27, 2004

UPDATED: 9:03 PM CDT April 27, 2004

NORTHLAKE, Ill. -- One firefighter was killed and two others were injured Tuesday when two fire trucks collided in a crash that a witness said sounded like a bomb went off.



The firefighter died at Loyola University Medical Center in the Chicago suburb of Maywood, said hospital spokeswoman Sandra Martinez. She had no information on the condition of another firefighter brought to Loyola. A third firefighter was in serious condition Tuesday night at Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, spokeswoman Sheri Scott said.

The collision happened about 6 p.m. at an intersection on the border of the suburbs of Northlake and Melrose Park. A witness said fire trucks from Northlake and the suburb of Stone Park were involved.

Cecil Graham, 39, a mechanic with Pollard Motor Co. in Melrose Park, said he was walking outside when he saw one fire truck heading through the intersection of Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue. The other fire truck was traveling along Mannheim.



"As soon as (the truck) crossed the first lane of traffic, that's when I heard the bomb -- the big explosion," he said.

Graham said one fire truck landed on its side after the collision.

"I could see underneath the truck, the whole thing," he said.

Firefighters involved in the accident had to extricate at least one firefighter from the truck and had to extinguish flames coming from it, he said.

Ellen Maslo, a receptionist at Pollard, said the trucks were "pretty mangled" when she stepped outside.

"I thought if anybody came out of there, it would be a miracle," she said.

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Firefighter killed in fire truck collision

*April 27, 2004***BY ASSOCIATED PRESS**

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Illinois Firefighter Killed In Accident 'Loved His Job' Another Victim Reportedly Remains In Critical Condition

Courtesy of NBC5.com

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Purple bunting draped the Stone Park Fire Department building Wednesday, in honor of a firefighter killed in a crash between two fire trucks Tuesday. The collision happened at the intersection of Mannheim Road and Armitage, on the border of North Lake and Melrose Park, around 6 p.m., as both trucks headed for a garage fire.

Firefighter Jeffrey Bergstrom, 34, was killed in the crash. Another firefighter remained hospitalized in critical condition Wednesday.

Stone Park Police Officer Andrew Morales was the second officer to arrive at the scene of the crash. He told NBC5's Anita Padilla that he stood by Bergstrom in his final moments.

"He was breathing," Morales tearfully recalled. "But then there was nothing else I could do, and nothing else anybody else could do."

Morales told Padilla that firefighters were trapped inside the wreckage.

"Another one we tried to get out -- we bent the roof back as far as we could," Morales said. "We tried to bend the door back, but his leg was pinned."

Morales recalled pulling the driver of one of the trucks out of the wreckage, then going to Bergstrom's side.

"Very outgoing guy, very happy," Morales said about Bergstrom, whom he knew before the accident. "He loved his job. Pretty much like everybody else, he loved doing what he did, serving and protecting."

Padilla said Bergstrom worked full time for the Chicago Fire Department, where he was a paramedic, and worked part time as a firefighter in Stone Park.

The firefighter who was in critical condition was at Loyola Medical Center, Padilla said, but she was unable to get updated information about his condition.

A third firefighter who was injured in the accident was treated and released from Elmhurst Memorial Hospital.

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Firefighter dies after trucks collide during call

*April 28, 2004***BY ANA MENDIETA AND CHERYL V. JACKSON Staff Reporters**

On Tuesday night, a woman laid red roses and lit a candle outside the firehouse in Stone Park, only a couple of miles from the crash of two fire engines from different suburban departments that killed her friend.

The 34-year-old firefighter, a Chicago resident, died and five others were injured Tuesday evening after the engines collided in Melrose Park while on their way to the same residential garage fire.

"We lost one of our very good firefighters tonight," said Stone Park Mayor Ben Mazzulla of the firefighter, whose name authorities would not release late Tuesday.

Each of the engines, from the Stone Park and Northlake fire departments, carried three firefighters. The Stone Park truck was traveling northbound on Mannheim Road about 6 p.m. when it broadsided the Northlake truck at Armitage Avenue, officials said.

Two Stone Park firefighters were transported to Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, where the Chicago man died and another was in critical condition. A third Stone Park firefighter, 27, was treated and released Tuesday at Elmhurst Memorial Hospital.

The three Northlake firefighters were transported to Westlake Hospital in Melrose Park, where they were in stable condition.

Northlake firefighters did not appear to suffer serious injuries, said Northlake Mayor Jeffrey Sherwin, who visited the scene shortly after the accident.

One Stone Park firefighter, who asked that his name not be used, said his fallen comrade "was a great guy, very outgoing."

"He loved doing what he did," the firefighter said solemnly of his colleague. "I know he's happy. If he was going to pass away, this is the way he wanted to do it -- in the line of duty."

WMAQ-Channel 5 reported the man who died also was a Chicago firefighter, but the Chicago Fire Department was unable to confirm that report.

The two fire engines were responding to a 5:50 p.m. call of a fire in unincorporated Leyden Township, Sherwin said. Leyden, the City of Northlake and the Village of Stone Park have an automated response agreement, which has departments from all three municipalities responding to reports of structure fires in each municipality, Sherwin said.

Authorities from nearby communities and the Cook County sheriff's office were on the scene, he said. According to Mazzulla, Illinois State Police and the Melrose Park Police Department will investigate the incident.

The garage fire to which the engines were responding was contained with no injuries, said Dean Krone, a Stone Park village attorney.

He said he did not know why the trucks collided, or whether there was a communication failure between the two engines, one engine and the base, or both.

"I don't know whether there are any specific failures that we can point to," Krone told reporters.

Stone Park had purchased the \$250,000 truck involved in the crash in 2002, Mazzulla said.

The part of Mannheim Road south of Armitage falls in Melrose Park, while the northwest corner is in Northlake and the northeast corner is in Leyden Township in unincorporated Cook County.

Benjamin Gaitan, 25, a Northlake mechanic, said he was headed for a nearby grocery store when he saw flames coming from the Stone Park fire engine and firefighters trying to extinguish the blaze and pull victims from the truck.

"The three men were on the ground. They covered one of them completely and they were trying to resuscitate the other two," Gaitan said. "There were fire trucks everywhere and the flames were coming from the cabin. They were covering the cabin completely."

Contributing: *Art Golab*

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Kevin Roche

From: Nagle, Eric [Eric.Nagle@associates.dhs.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2004 10:28 AM
To: 'jmoreland@erols.com'; 'kevin.roche@earthlink.net'; 'enagle@netrax.net'; 'l.hurley@erols.com'
Subject: FF Fatality - Bergstrom, Jeffery - Stone Park FD -IL

Courtesy of: WBBM Newsradio 780

<http://www.wbbm780.com/asp/ViewMoreDetails.asp?ID=38229>

Suburban Fire Trucks Collide, 1 Firefighter Dead

The crash scene (photo credit: CBS 2 News) [NL] [NL] Wednesday, April 28, 2004, 8:33 a.m. [NL] [NL] (Northlake, IL) -- State and local officials early Wednesday were investigating the crash of two suburban fire trucks the night before, which killed a 34-year-old Stone Park firefighter and injured two others. [NL] [NL] Police and emergency vehicles responded to the crash involving a Stone Park fire engine and a Northlake fire engine at Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue in Northlake, according to information from representatives of the Stone Park and Melrose Park police departments. [NL] [NL] The call of the accident came in at 5:42 p.m. Tuesday, the Stone Park police representative said. [NL] [NL] Killed in the accident was Jeffrey Bergstrom, of 1503 W. Wellington Av. Chicago, another office spokesman said. Bergstrom was a Stone Park firefighter, a Stone Park police representative said. [NL] [NL] Broadcast reports said the fire trucks were both headed to a garage fire. [NL] [NL] Cecil Graham, 39, a mechanic with Pollard Motor Co. in Melrose Park, said he was walking outside when he saw one fire truck heading through the intersection of Mannheim Road and Armitage Avenue. The other fire truck was traveling along Mannheim. [NL] [NL] ``As soon as (the truck) crossed the first lane of traffic, that's when I heard the bomb -- the big explosion,' he said. [NL] [NL] Graham said one fire truck landed on its side after the collision. [NL] [NL] ``I could see underneath the truck, the whole

thing," he said. [NL] [NL] Firefighters involved in the accident had to extricate at least one firefighter from the truck and had to extinguish flames coming from it, he said. Ellen Maslo, a receptionist at Pollard, said the trucks were "pretty mangled" when she stepped outside. [NL] [NL] "I thought if anybody came out of there, it would be a miracle," she said [NL] [NL] Police told the medical examiner's office that the two critically injured firefighters were taken to Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, according to another spokesman for the office. [NL] [NL] A voice message supplied by a Loyola University Medical Center spokesman confirmed that two firefighters from the accident were being treated at the hospital, but the message did not give information on their injuries or conditions. [NL] [NL] According to an initial accident report supplied to the medical examiner's office, the fire trucks "T-boned" in the intersection, causing one of the trucks to roll over. The trucks were responding to the same call of a fire, the report said, but it did not indicate which lane each truck was in at the time of the crash. [NL] [NL] Illinois State Police District Chicago sent two traffic crash reconstruction officers to the scene to investigate the cause of the crash, a state police representative said. "The officers are specially trained in determining momentum, speed, vectors, and other causes of the accident," he added. [NL] [NL] A short memorial service was held for Bergstrom when his body was delivered to the Stein Institute by Stone Park firefighters around 3:30 a.m., a medical examiner's office spokesman said. [NL] [NL] About 10 firefighters and one police officer attended the five-minute ceremony, which included a prayer and a moment of silence, he said. [NL] [NL] Bergstrom's body was covered with a United States flag and a Stone Park village flag, the spokesman said. [NL] [NL] Following the ceremony, the flags were removed and folded, he said. [NL] (The Associated Press contributed to this report.) [NL] [NL] Stay tuned to WBBM Newsradio 780 for the latest developments on this and other stories. [NL] [NL] HKM

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CBS 2

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Lost Firefighter Remembered

- VIDEO:  [CBS 2 News reports.](#)

Apr 28, 2004 5:43 pm US/Central

Investigators are trying to figure out what went wrong when two fire trucks collided on the way to the same call. Surviving firefighters remember a friend and colleague, who was lost in the deadly crash.

City and suburban firefighters remember a colleague who loved the job -- a firefighter who now leaves behind a young son following a fatal collision between two fire trucks.

Investigators are trying to determine how trucks from Northlake and Stone Park crashed into each other during a call last night. Firefighter Jeffrey Bergstrom, 34, was killed in that collision. He was a Chicago paramedic working with the Stone Park Fire Department on his day off.

"Suburban communities obviously don't have the residency restraints, so they go out there and do secondary employment. It's very unfortunate for the firefighter's family. I'm very sorry to hear that," said Ald. Issac Carothers, Chairman of Police and Fire.

The village of Stone Park is planning to set up a memorial fund for Bergstrom at a local bank.

On Wednesday, Chicago Fire Commissioner James Joyce issued a statement on behalf of his department offering deepest condolences to the Bergstrom family.

Bergstrom had worked for a year as a paramedic for the Chicago Fire Department. He also worked as firefighter and paramedic for Stone Park.

Investigators said all of the firefighters in the Stone Park fire truck were wearing their seatbelts, but the impact was so great, Bergstrom's seatbelt could have come undone. The truck overturned and Bergstrom was thrown from the cab and killed. Five other firefighters were injured. One remains hospitalized in critical condition.

It is unknown whether the traffic signals played a roll.

"The individual truck that we had out there yesterday on the call did have an optical box to activate the signal," said Stone Park Mayor Beniamino Mezzulla. The Northlake truck also had that same equipment.

Investigators expect to know within a couple of days whether both trucks tried to activate a green light at the same time.

"Everyone is looking for an answer," Mezzulla said. "But right now we need to think about what's at hand. That we lost a firefighter and that should be the first thing on everybody's minds, making sure we give them the support they need."

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