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One firefighter dies, three others injured

## Crash kills acting fire captain

Pumper truck was responding to a call

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JOE LEDFORD/The Kansas City Star

An accident involving a fire truck Sunday in the 8100 block of Blue Ridge Boulevard killed one firefighter and critically injured another firefighter and the driver of one of the cars.

A Kansas City firefighter died on the way to a call Sunday night after his pumper truck collided with two cars and wrapped itself around a large tree.

Authorities did not release the dead firefighter's name Sunday night, but he was 57 years old and a 32-year department veteran. Chief Smokey Dyer said he had an "impeccable record and reputation." He said the man's wife told him he had planned to retire before the end of the year.

Three other firefighters were injured in the wreck, including one who was in critical but stable condition at a hospital. He was expected to live, Dyer said. The driver of one of the cars also was in critical condition Sunday night. No further information was available about him.

The two other firefighters were taken to a hospital with injuries that were described as non-life-threatening.

The collisions occurred about 5:15 p.m. in the 8100 block of Blue Ridge Boulevard, Police Sgt. Randy Sims said. He gave the following account of the wreck:

The firefighters were on their way to a call at the Deerhorn Village Apartments, 9828 Willow Ave. It turned out to be a minor fire, Dyer said.

Sirens blaring and emergency lights flashing, Pumper 33, which was southbound on Blue Ridge, came up on a southbound car that was slowing to make a left-hand turn into a driveway.

The two vehicles collided as the fire truck tried to swerve around the car, which continued making the turn. The car's driver was shaken up but otherwise uninjured, Sims said.

The fire truck then hit a northbound car that had stopped on the far right side of the street. It was a head-on impact, and that car's driver suffered critical injuries. His car was knocked into a yard.

Meanwhile, the pumper kept moving forward, unable to stop. It sheared a utility pole in half and finally crashed into a tree yards from the front door of a house.

Sims said the driver of the pumper was not at fault, and he expressed condolences to the dead firefighter's family.

Sims called it a "tragic, unfortunate incident."

The firefighter who died was an acting captain on Sunday, but his regular rank was fire apparatus operator, Dyer said.

For years, the man had been stationed at Station 24, 2039 Hardesty Ave., one of the department's busiest, Dyer said. He had recently transferred to Station 33 at 7504 E. 67th St. Of the four men riding in the pumper Sunday, he was the most experienced.

He was a relatively new grandfather, and one of his two sons is a Kansas City firefighter, Dyer said.

Other firefighters have been injured or killed while responding to calls for help. Last November, a Kansas City, Kan., Fire Department captain, Gary Boyert, died in a one-car wreck on the way to a call. He was alone in a Fire Department car.

In 1999, John Tvedten, a Kansas City Fire Department battalion chief, died while fighting a blaze inside a West Bottoms building. He became disoriented in the smoke, got lost and ran out of air.

Dyer called Sunday's accident very unusual because it happened on a straightaway road with four lanes and clear visibility. Whenever wrecks have happened in the past, they've usually been at intersections, he said.

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