LINE OF DUTY DEATH REPORT

REPORT SLIDES

F2021-14

Captain Falls into the Basement and Dies While Fighting a Fire in a Large Residential Structure - Maryland

Summary

- On August 11, 2021, a 46-year-old career captain died after falling into a basement while fighting a large area residential structure fire.
- Engine 251 had just cleared from an incident and responded as the first due company.
- After locating the driveway, Engine 251 dropped 500 feet of 4-inch supply line where the driveway split.

The working fire at Box 23-11 in the large area residential structure looking at Side Alpha of the structure.
(*Courtesy of the Division of Fire and Rescue Services*)

Summary

- Engine 251 drove up the driveway to the house arriving on-scene at 16:51 hours.
- Engine 251A (E251A) provided the scene size-up.
- E251A stated, “Engine 251 is on-scene, large 3½, 2 ½-story single family. We do have a working fire. Go ahead and start rapid intervention team (RIT) and tanker task force.”
- Engine 251 parked on the Side Alpha/Side Bravo corner of the house in the driveway.

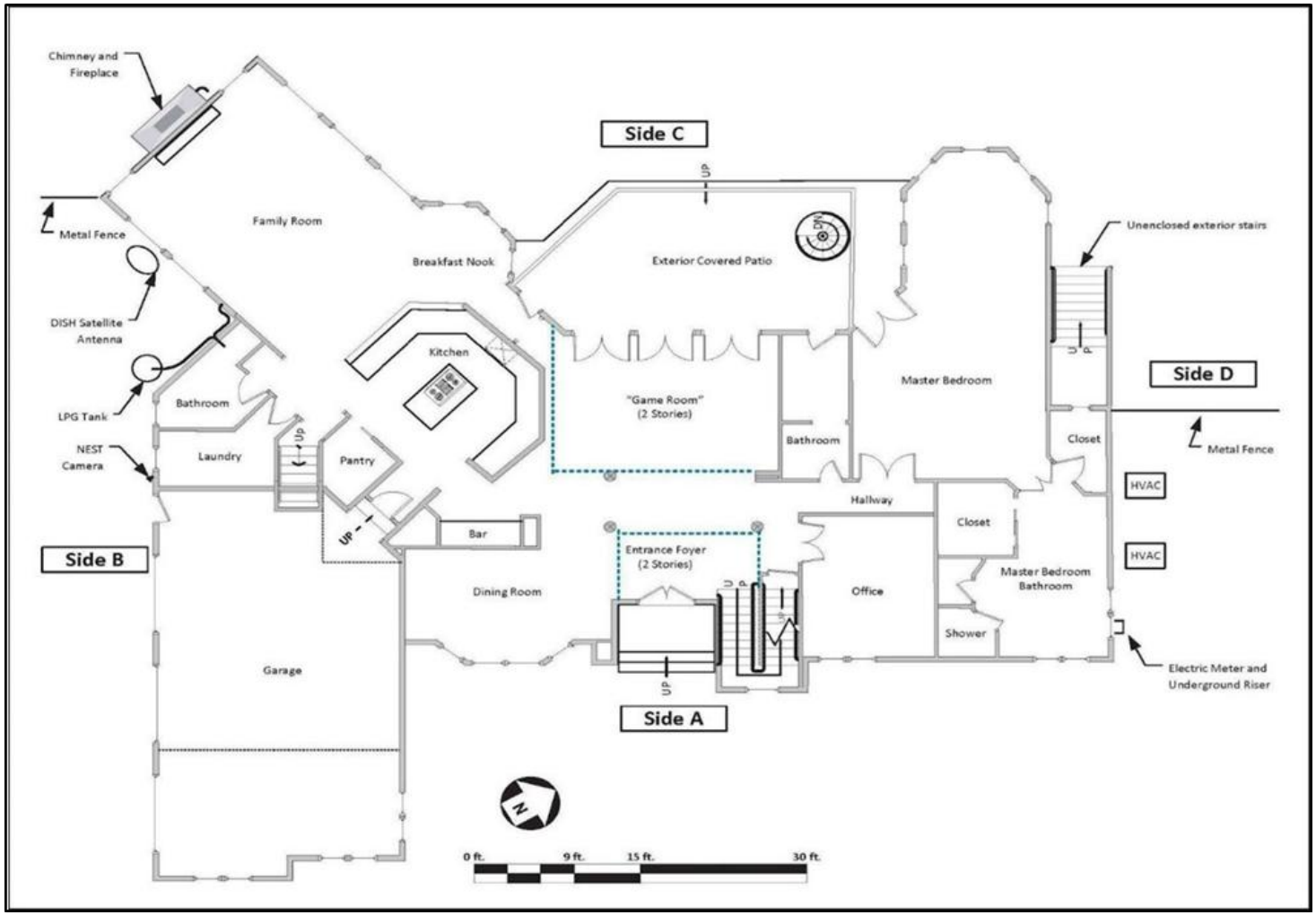
Side Alpha of the fire structure. (Courtesy of the Division of Fire and Rescue Services)

Summary

- At 16:52 hours, the Emergency Communication Center (ECC) transmitted the RIT dispatch.
- Truck 23 arrived on-scene at 16:52 hours.
- At 16:53 hours, a tanker task force was dispatched for Box 23-11.
- At 16:55 hours, Chief 23 responded to Box 23-11, arrived on scene, and assumed command.
- At the same time, OPSAC900 (division's Operations Division Assistant Chief) arrived on-scene and went to Side Charlie.

Summary

- A minute later, Truck 23A told Command, “360 of the residence showing single floor in the back, heavy fire on Side Charlie.”
- Immediately after, E251A told Command, that he was unable to complete the 360.
- From 16:56 hours to 16:59 hours, Command dealt with arrival assignments and water supply.
- At 17:00 hours, OPSAC900 and Engine 251B (driver/operator) had two lines in service.
- Engine 251B told Command that Engine 251 was almost out of water.



First floor house plan.
(Courtesy of the ATF)

Summary

- At 17:00 hours, E251A (deceased firefighter) transmitted a Mayday stating “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, Engine 251A has fallen through the floor in the fire room.”
- E231, E152, and TR23 were immediately deployed to find the downed captain.
- At 17:08 hours, E251A transmitted, I think I'm in the Side Charlie corner. I had to retreat form the fire, now I'm stuck and I'm burning up.”
- At 17:08 hours, a rapid intervention group entered the basement by the basement steps on the Side Charlie/Side Delta corner.

Side Charlie and Side Delta of the fire structure. The exterior steps to the basement were located on Side Charlie/Side Delta corner, as indicated by the red arrow. (*Courtesy of the Division of Fire and Rescue Services)*

Summary

- At 17:09 hours, E251A transmitted, “Tell my family I love them.”
- At 17:12 hours, Engine 231A, with the RIT, told Command they found E251A unconscious and were removing him from the basement.
- At 17:14 hours, E251A was out of the basement and in the backyard.
- Basic and advanced life support treatment was initiated.
- E251A was taken to a trauma hospital in Washington, D.C. via air ambulance where he was pronounced deceased.
- The fire at Box 23-11 was marked under control around 22:00 hours.
- The fire was declared out at 07:00 hours the next day.

Contributing Factors

- Low frequency/high risk incident
- Incident management system
- Crew integrity
- Initial rapid intervention crew (IRIC)
- Professional development
- Corrugated stainless-steel tubing (CSST) system

Recommendations

- For low-frequency, high-risk incidents, fire departments should ensure incident commanders (ICs) implement an incident management system that prioritizes personnel accountability and maintains effective incident communications. As a part of incident management system (IMS) oversight, the IC can:
  - Conduct a thorough scene size-up and risk assessment
  - Develop a strategy and incident action plan specific to large-area residential structures that includes the eight functions of command
  - Anticipate and forecast incident progression
  - Implement a functional personnel accountability system
  - Establish and maintain effective incident communications
  - Assign a staff aide or incident command technician (ICT) to support the IC

Recommendations

- For low-frequency, high-risk incidents, fire departments should ensure all companies operating on the fireground maintain crew integrity throughout the incident. Companies can:
  - Operate based on the assignment given by the IC
  - Communicate critical incident benchmarks to the IC
  - Deploy to rescue members during the initial stages of an incident
  - Use a thermal imager during the scene size-up and while operating in the hazard zone

Recommendations

- Fire department standard operating procedures (SOPs)/standard operating guidelines (SOGs) are consistently updated to ensure adequate staffing and professional development opportunities to support skills and competencies to manage Type V and Type IV incidents. Possible opportunities and activities:
  - Train all firefighters and fire officers in fireground survival procedures
  - Conduct training on rural water supply operations
  - Provide annual proficiency training and evaluation on fireground operations, including live fire training, to all members involved in emergency operations
  - Train all members and dispatchers on the safety features of portable radios including the emergency alert button (EAB)
  - Train on awareness of Corrugated Stainless Steel Tubing (CSST) and the hazards associated with it

- Governing municipalities (federal, state, regional, and local) should develop and implement legislation which prohibits the use of corrugated stainless-steel tubing in residential, commercial, and industrial structures.

Contact Us

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program
Surveillance and Field Investigations Branch
Division of Safety Research
NIOSH 1000 Frederick Lane, MS 1808
Morgantown, West Virginia 26505-2888

FFFIPP Webpage

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