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Report of the Week

"The IC has my back, right?"

06/23/2011

Report Number: 10-0000059

Report Date: 01/11/2010 12:50

Synopsis

Floor collapses during aggressive attack.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Battalion Chief / District Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 17 - 20

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.

Event date and time: 02/13/2000 10:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Command
- Situational Awareness
- Communication
- Individual Action

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Units were dispatched to an apartment fire reported "in the area of" with no address. The Battalion Chief arrived on scene and communicated a working fire. I was the officer on the first arriving engine. We found 4 apartments with heavy fire involvement and command advised us to hit it from the other side. Not knowing where the other side was, we changed from pulling a 3" attack line to establishing a hose lay attacking the fire with a 1 3/4" line. Command advised we had a second crew coming in behind us. We attacked fire on the 1st floor, knocking major portions of fire in the first two units. My crew advanced the line to the second floor for fire attack. During this time the fire began to intensify. The second crew was delayed in advancing the second line to the first floor units.

While completing attack on the second floor, the floor collapsed causing me to fall into the first floor. My two firefighters, who were exiting the building, advised command of the incident. Command continued communicating over the radio. I was unable to call a MAYDAY because of the radio traffic. I rescued myself out of the first floor and attempted to locate my crew. Command had advised them to go get me. One went inside and one went around the back. After not finding my crew, I found command and advised him I was out and trying to locate my crew. We exchanged words and I called a mayday declaring a lost crew. There were no RIT or back-up crews. I also advised command to go "defensive mode" and call for a PAR report.

After several tense moments, my crew was located. There was a failure of an on-scene report advising crews of location and conditions. Failure to identify, properly state task assignments, and a failure on my part to question command on my assignment to "attack from the other side."

The first crew was aggressive making it to the second floor; I did not check to insure fire was in control prior to advancing above.

Lessons Learned

There was a failure to have a RIT or backup units in place to assist. A good command system should have been established from the beginning. Staging should have been established with the amount of fire we had and the building construction. There was no department review or critique of the incident. Command believed it was a lack of proper actions by the first officer. I accept my mistake and have taken action to improve my abilities. The department should have conducted an investigation and a post incident analysis so everyone could learn from the incident.

Report of the Week

Firefighters have high expectations of their commanders. Firefighters expect their commander will provide oversight, direction, watch out for their general safety; and have the proper resources in place in case of a mayday. The call of "mayday" over the radio is that heart stopping moment where all of the expectations have to be addressed simultaneously with diligence, preparation, a focused mind and steady hand; if the call is heard. In this week's ROTW, [10-059](#), a rapidly advancing fire sets the stage for a near miss that result from a clash of expectations.

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Command, control, organization, and discipline, both operationally and on the radio, are requisite elements for every member of a response assignment to a structure fire. SOPs, risk assessments, crew integrity and a well-established safety plan lay the foundation for reaction to the mayday potential. Commanders need to ensure they are well prepared for all of the demands of performing as an incident commander. Once you have read the entire account of [10-059](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. If your department responded to the incident described in [10-059](#), how quickly would it be able to address the essential fireground responsibilities of rescue, fire attack, back-up, extension protection, ventilation, command and safety?
2. Does your department have a protocol, practice or SOP in place to promote radio discipline so essential messages can be transmitted?
3. What command post practices does your department have in place to ensure an organized approach so the fireground is maintained?
4. How many times each year do you participate in firefighter safety and survival training?
5. How frequently do your department's command level officers train on handling mayday incidents?

The commander is often perceived as the lifeline to a firefighter caught in a Mayday situation. The command post can easily be buried in an avalanche of radio traffic in the early stages of a firefight if the commander fails to quickly organize the fireground with groups and divisions. This organization of the incident into functional elements reduces radio traffic, ultimately leaving more air time for essential and emergency messages.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Firefighter Expectations of Command

[05-396](#)

[06-164](#)

[07-990](#)

[08-577](#)

[09-990](#)

[11-015](#)

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Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.