Editor's note: The Oklahoma City Fire Department, along with numerous city, county, state and federal agencies, operated for 17 days at the site of a terrorist bombing. The death toll stands at 168. To date, 640 injuries have been recorded, including 39 injuries to rescue workers. More than 60 cars were damaged or destroyed. At least 460 buildings sustained damage and over 60 buildings received heavy damage. Estimates of property loss are at least $280 million. Thousands of rescue workers and civilian volunteers operated during the incident. With all that activity, Firehouse® can only begin to scratch the surface of what occurred during that period. There is no intent to exclude any part of the operation or any rescuers who worked during the operation, but space limitations preclude us from telling every aspect of the story. Final documentation of the incident by the Oklahoma City Fire Department is scheduled for completion in early 1996.

The Oklahoma City Fire Department has just under 1,000 firefighters who operate 33 engines, 13 ladders and six squads from 33 stations with six district chiefs. The department protects 500,000 people in a 621-square-mile area and is the first-responding agency for medical emergencies.

In 1989, following the death of three firefighters in a flashover, residents approved a plan to increase the city's sales tax by three-quarters of one cent, with the extra revenue to be split between the fire and police departments. This let the fire department hire 200 firefighters, build five new stations, buy equipment and apparatus and provide money for skill pay, tuition reimbursement, educational incentives and benefits. For 1995 this will generate an extra $23 million for the fire department, above and beyond the current general budget, which is being cut this year. Plans to consolidate six rescue squads into three that had been proposed before the explosion are facing opposition — money from the sales tax cannot be used to replace those funds.

In July 1994 some 60 people from every department and agency in city government, including the assistant city manager, attended a disaster management course at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, MD.

Department staffing is as follows:
- Engine — Minimum three, maximum four.
- Truck — Minimum three, maximum four.
- Rescue squad — Minimum three, maximum four.
- One to three portable radios per rig.
- Shift — 24 hours on, 24 hours off, 24 hours on, 24 hours off, 48 hours off.
- Dispatch — Minimum four, maximum five.
- First-alarm response for a
April 19, 1995
At 9:02 A.M. a tremendous explosion rocked downtown Oklahoma City and surrounding areas up to 50 miles away. Fire Chief Gary Marrs was on his way to City Hall a few blocks from Fire Headquarters when he felt the blast. Driving past a few tall buildings he noticed a dust cloud in the sky a few blocks away. Engine 5 was away from its station and available on the radio. The crew called dispatch and reported, “We seem to have had an explosion downtown.”

Marrs arrived at the scene of the explosion and monitored a transmission over the radio from dispatch, reporting that the explosion involved the Water Resources Board. From his vantage point he could see the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, located at 200 Northwest Fifth — he radioed dispatch that it was not the Water Resources Building, but that the north side of the nine-story Federal Building had collapsed.

Dispatchers inside the fire alarm office at 820 Northwest Fifth, above Station 1 and Fire Headquarters five blocks from the blast site, thought their building’s air conditioning had blown up or that something had hit the roof. Two off-shift dispatchers ran outside and saw the dust and smoke to the east.

When the dispatchers returned to their office all the phones were ringing — they didn’t stop ringing for five days. People were calling from all over the city. As soon as the dispatchers hung up the phone on one caller another would ring immediately.

This was the first day back to duty for the red shift after being off four days. A meeting with all six district chiefs was scheduled with the acting shift commander in his office on the first floor of Station 1 at 9 A.M. The meeting was just about to begin when the blast occurred. The building shook and ceiling tiles came down, dislodging dust. All the chiefs walked out to the rear of the station and could see dust in the sky toward downtown, several blocks away. They prepared to respond to the scene. On the third floor of Station 1 firefighters had just discussed the morning lineup when the blast rattled the building. Firefighters hit the poles to get out of the station, thinking something had blown up in the fire administration building. Firefighters saw the cloud of dust straight up Fifth Street and prepared to respond as first-in companies. Engine 1 and 51, Truck 1 and Squad 1 responded from Station 1.

Lieutenant Dennis Griffin, District 3 Chief Jim Conner’s driver on car 603, was on the phone at Station 1 with another firefighter four miles away. He told the firefighter it sounded like lightning had just hit Station 1. Griffin hung up and the person on the other end of the phone hung up, walked two steps and felt the blast.

Engine 8 and Truck 8 were on the way to the department drill field in the western part of the city for hose testing when the crews heard and felt the blast. Their response area is close to downtown. Figuring they were going to be dispatched to the incident soon, they headed toward the scene.

Firefighters in Station 7, about 30 blocks south of the blast site, heard the blast and could see the dust cloud from their quarters. Captain Chris Jackson of Truck 7 had been inside
and thought the noise sounded like the 85-foot elevated platform apparatus had backed into a wall inside the station. Firefighters quickly put on the television and within minutes live shots from the scene were being broadcast. Seconds later they were dispatched to the scene as the second and third alarms were transmitted.

Truck 5, the second- or third-closest truck to the site, was in quarters about 17 blocks north of downtown, heard the blast, and dispatched itself. Most of the remaining companies that are assigned to respond on the first three alarms also responded on their own.

Many of the executive staff at Fire Headquarters responded to the blast. Assistant Chief of Operations Ken Bunch saw the mayhem while responding and circled the area to see how widespread the damage was. Three blocks from the site he could see heavy damage in the area. Within one to two blocks, he said, it looked like a war zone. Bunch said when he saw the Federal Building it took his breath away.

Chief of Special Operations Mike Shannon figured that whatever it was, it was going to impact Special Operations and EMS. Gary Davis, the EMS chief, stopped in front of the Regency Towers, a 22-story high-rise building at Fifth and Hudson. All of the windows in the building had been blown out as a result of the blast. About 25 people were exiting the building, suffering minor injuries from flying glass. The walking wounded were helping with other injured parties. Davis couldn't see the Federal Building a block away because of the thick black smoke. He knew he had a long-term rescue and recovery. Get a number of alarms headed this way. Start breaking the exposures into divisions.

Marrs could see that all the exposures were damaged, but he was not clear as to the specific damage inside. The front of the Federal Building was now ripped open from the ground floor to the roof. About 80 percent of the front wall and facade was gone. There was a pile of debris that was three stories high from a pancake collapse involving the front portion of all nine floors. The neoprene-membrane roof was hanging over the top floor and shielding some of the hanging debris. Firefighters would later find that a piece of the roof weighing in excess of 35,000 pounds (and later nicknamed the “mother slab”) was hanging by only several reinforcing rods and slanted onto remaining portions of the eighth and ninth floors. Debris littered the entire neighborhood. Apparently a wheel from one of the vehicles near the blast was blown up on top of the 22-story Regency Towers on the next block. In another car close to the blast a piece of carpet was found in the trunk, stuck between a tire and its rim.

The Murrah Building was named after late federal Judge Alfred P. Murrah, who served on the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. It was completed in 1977. The replacement value in today's dollars is $35 million. The building had 315,000 square feet of interior space, of which 107,000 square feet was for offices, 196,000 for storage and 11,750 that included restrooms and a cafeteria. About 650 employees worked in the building, but occupancy could be expected to be as high as 900. A child day-care center was located on the second floor. The building was cast concrete, nine stories high, with a glass facade measured approximately 300 feet long and 50 feet wide and it had several levels of below-grade parking. The building was protected by automatic alarms, a wet-sprinkler system and standpipes on each floor. It also had a

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Three truck companies position aerials and platform to remove trapped people. Note the roof collapse on the Athena building. The Regency Towers high-rise in the background had every window blown out. Parking meters were sheared off at ground level.

Firehouse/September 1995
dry sprinkler system for the below-grade areas. The southeast and southwest stairwells were pressurized for evacuation. A fire pump was located on the second floor. Windows were made of non-movable plate glass.

Exposures (see photo on pages 90 and 91)

The Water Resources Board building was three stories high, brick construction, approximately 80 feet long and 100 feet wide. There was a partial collapse in the front of the building.

The Athenia building (named for a Greek restaurant inside), next to Water Resources, was under renovation. There was a partial collapse of all floors in the front third of the building. Half of the roof had collapsed. This building faced Fifth Street and bordered a parking lot, where numerous cars were burning.

At the other end of the parking lot the Journal Record building (built in 1922) is six stories high, of brick construction and measures 200 feet deep by 50 feet wide; half of its peak roof was blown off. The multi-story YMCA on the corner of Fifth and Robinson sustained many broken windows. The First Methodist Church (built in 1904) at the corner of Fourth and Robinson and St. Joseph's Old Cathedral (built in 1903) at Fourth and Harvey sustained structural damage. The roof of St. Joseph's was blown off.

McMahon listed his five priorities: a fire problem, a huge EMS problem, a rescue problem, a possible hazardous materials incident and a safety issue. The safety issue was not only for the firefighters and rescue workers, but for the people trapped in the building. Hundreds of people started coming up to the command post to offer their services or donate equipment, and it didn't stop for six hours.

McMahon tried to place the people who had special training in specific functions in the management system. All six district chiefs and the shift commanders' vehicles are equipped with cellular phones. Because of the number of people in the area using the system it became overloaded and it was impossible to get through.

Davis set up medical triage at Northwest Sixth and Robinson and a smaller site at Northwest Fourth and Harvey. St. Anthony's Hospital is six or seven blocks away, but close enough that it also received some damage. Three other hospitals — University, Presbyterian and Children's — are in a complex 1½ miles east of the scene. During an average day 20 ambulances would be on duty citywide. At the time of the blast seven ambulances were dispatched.

Additional private ambulances that had been dropping off patients at nearby hospitals also responded.

Shannon responded to the scene and was being inundated, just like all the other chief officers as they arrived on the scene. When Shannon first saw the building he thought to himself that it looked like it had been an air strike. He also noted the parking meters in front of the building were sheared off two inches above the concrete. Shannon entered the Federal Building and made his way upstairs.

He could see civilians throwing desks, furniture and debris, wildly looking for children and other victims.

Truck 1 Captain Nathan Shipman responded straight up Fifth Street. As the apparatus approached the scene, the crew saw people lining the street, looking in the direction of the blast. As they drew closer they noticed people bleeding, crying and screaming. They stopped the rig in front of the Regency Towers and directed the injured people to one corner. Adjacent to the apparatus was a car, occupied by a child, that had its roof crushed by an axle. The axle had been blown from a vehicle close to the explosion. Witnesses said the axle flew through the air like a boomerang before landing on the car. The Truck 5 crew started seeing broken glass and people covered...
A Stokes basket is carried up an aerial as a bleeding injured party awaits attention in the area that was once the front of the Federal Building.

Conner, the District 3 chief, arrived and was assigned to division 1, the front of the Federal Building. It took a few minutes to see that all the smoke was coming from the car fires and blowing into the Federal Building across the street. Visible were people covered in white dust and who looked like mannequins on the third floor of the Water Resources Building. Conner asked Truck 1 to remove those people.

Engines 1 and 6 laid lines to extinguish the numerous car fires in the parking lot opposite the Federal Building. Two cars were burning very close to the exposures. Inside the Federal Building Conner could see one man on the third floor and several people on other floors. He then received a report of four critically injured people inside. Conner requested several more truck companies to report to the front of the building.

A serious problem for fireground commanders was that hundreds of civilians, medical personnel and law enforcement officers were running through the building, looking for victims. They were throwing chairs, tables and furniture wildly. This added to the stress of the half-demolished building by shifting loads. Apparently at one point the second floor was so overloaded that it dropped several inches. Firefighters attempted to control the situation, but many of the civilians and other personnel wouldn’t listen. People throwing and overturning debris were asked to leave; they were causing small debris to fall on people working below them. Despite the good that the people thought they were doing, they were bringing a serious risk to themselves.

Fireground commanders now were faced with additional people who were placing themselves at risk. Many felt it was fortunate that there wasn’t a secondary collapse. Conner requested three additional district chiefs and the police to the rear of the Federal Building for crowd control.

Griffin noticed a woman, covered with blood, screaming in the Athenia building. As Griffin went to the rear of the building to attempt entry he noticed a large natural gas meter had been blown over. The huge meter was spewing gas under pressure. Cars in the nearby parking lot were burning. He and Conner were worried that the fire could ignite the gas and extend into the two or three nearby exposures that were badly damaged. If the fire communicated to these buildings, it would add many problems to the already complicated incident. Griffin radioed for the gas company to respond. Entering the rear of the building, Griffin met the woman at the top of the stairs and directed her to the triage area.

Returning to the parking lot near the Journal Record building to do a

**OCFD Time Line: The First 36 Hours**

4-19-95

09:02 a.m. OCFD notified dispatch of an explosion. Primary backup phones down at Emergency Medical Service Agency.

09:05 Engine 51, Truck 1, E 6, T 6, E 4, E 1, Squad 1, Chief 1

Third alarm: Chief 3, Haz Mat 5, Deputy Chief, E 5, T 5, CS established, Sixth & Harvey.

09:10 601A designated IC.

09:11 Fourth & fifth alarms: E 4 on scene, all patients to Sixth & Robinson.

09:12 E 1 began fighting car fires.

09:14 T 7, E 10, E 7, T 8, E 8, Squad 17, T 24, Squad 18, Squad 21, Squad 34.

09:20 E 1, T 1, Squad 17 searched Water Resources, 1 patient.

09:27 First patients transported.

10:00 Electric, gas, water off, 601A ordered evacuation because of possible second device. Command post at Eighth & Harvey. Morgue on the south side of Federal Building.

10:15 Water Resources evacuated.

10:22 Building evacuated second time, Triage at Fifth & Robinson, staging at Seventh & Robinson.


10:30 General alarm, T 10.

10:32 Six bodies recovered.

10:45 E 1, T 1 sent to Eighth & Harvey staging. Fire under control. Building evacuated, possible third device.

11:00 Staging moved to 10th & Harvey.

11:20 Outside perimeter controlled.

11:35 Rehab established at Eighth & Harvey.


12:12 E 9, T 9, E 26, E 24, E 17, 12 transports from the building.

12:30 Shawnee FD loans OCFD ropes, generators, lights.


17:00 227 injured.

18:22 Severe thunderstorm watch issued.

19:10 Sacrament & Phoenix FEMA teams dispatched.

United States Fire Administration (USFA) investigators dispatched. Virginia Beach on standby.

19:18 28 doa’s.

20:34 ID badges ordered.

22:30 5-year-old female found alive.

4-20-95

01:00 Primary search above third floor complete.

08:45 Fences erected.

08:59 Southwestern Bell installed cell sites and provided 150 phones.

07:30 Large contingent from FBI, ATF, U.S. Marshals, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, Military Police at scene.

13:32 Airspace restricted for five miles. Count stands at 38 doa, 200 missing, 423 injured.

17:44 Suspect composites released.

22:25 Doa #41 removed.

4-21-95

02:10 Respirators needed for rescue workers.
size-up, Griffin intended to report back to his chief. He was unable to get through on the radio, so he contin-
ued on and checked the parking lot for victims. He noticed a small fire on the first floor of the Journal Record building. His main concern was res-
cue and extraction. Hollering in each window for any injured or trapped people, Griffin continued his way down the alley. The roof of the Jour-
nal Record building was made of steel wire mesh and two-inch-thick concre-
ete. After the blast one entire side of the roof (see pages 90 and 91) came down like a blanket in the alley.

Griffin then heard a voice; he said it was like looking for a needle in a hay stack. Apparently a man who lived in the area had been walking down the alley on his way to the post office when the blast threw him against the wall of the Journal Record building. If that wasn't enough, then the roof fell on top of him. After several minutes Griffin found the man, who remained calm. He asked the injured man whether anyone else had been with him or whether he had seen anyone else in the area. Griffin was concerned

because there was another lump under the roof — it turned out to be a telephone pole. The man said he was alone and hadn't seen anyone else. Griffin and firefighters from a squad with a variety of tools freed the man from under the roof. Griffin related that the sounds during the first few minutes on the scene were incredible: water-flow alarms, car alarms, screams, sirens, natural gas hissing, debris falling, people talking, burglar alarms sounding. "You tried to block out the noise and stick to the task of search and rescue," he said.

Truck 8 reported to staging. When Conner requested another truck, Captain Curtis Mayfield had a face-to-face meeting with him and was directed from staging to position his 100-foot aerial ladder at the base of the pancake collapse, almost directly in the middle of the Federal Building. Chairs, desks, computers, toys, debris, steel reinforcing rods and glass had to be cleared so the appara-
tus could back into position. Shannon reported he had several victims and needed help on the third floor. The tip of the aerial ladder was extended at a low angle to the top of pancake area which was nearly three stories high. A man was visible, lying face down on top of the big pile. The man, who had suffered a crushed leg and serious facial injuries, said it felt like there was someone underneath him. It was later determined that there was another person under him, but he was deceased.

The wind was blowing chunks of concrete. A chunk of concrete the size of a small microwave fell and hit the ladder. Computers, chairs, a stream of paper and rocks kept falling.

Truck 1 reported to Conner and was ordered to search the Water Resources Building. Firefighters entered the second floor via interior stairs. Firefighters were unable to walk anywhere in the building because of the debris. They located a man who had large lacerations on his back and the back of his head. Hun-
dreds of stitches were needed to close his wounds. Nearby a woman was found under a file cabinet that had fallen on her. Firefighters spent a lot of time digging for victims on all floors in many areas under books that had fallen from collapsed shelves.

Truck 5 firefighters worked their

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They could see that the crew from Engine 4 had located a live person. Daylight was visible where the blast had blown in the basement ceiling. File cabinets were turned over, water was over the firefighters' boots and electrical crackling could be heard overhead. A few bodies were located.

Truck 9 was then asked to position its 135-foot aerial ladder close to the building on 5th Street for possible rescues from the upper levels of the Federal Building. Firefighters were concerned about driving over debris as they made their way to their next assignment. As the apparatus approached the scene, it took several firefighters and volunteers to move large pieces of debris, concrete, bumpers and parts of vehicles. There was an abundant amount of help to help clear a path for the truck. When the truck was being backed into position several people were visible. Captain Bart Everett went up the aerial ladder first to check conditions. The people said they were able to walk.

The only place to spot the aerial ladder was directly under a large piece of hanging concrete. Pieces of concrete, chairs and other debris were still falling. The aerial was not at the best climbing angle and the ladder was not supported on the concrete floors, which looked unstable. Everett removed a woman. Corporal Clint Mollman assisted a third person down the ladder.

Truck 7 was standing by at Sixth and Robinson, checking on the walking wounded, when the crew was ordered to the front of the Federal Building. The crew had to maneuver around and make quite a detour, driving up and around several streets until they could back their 95-foot apparatus into position. Starting on the third floor Jackson and Corporal Kenneth Oleson found numerous blood trails. These led from where people had been sitting to the public stairways and down out of the building. Firefighters had to crawl over desks and file cabinets. From their vantage point on the upper floors, firefighters observed the Truck 8 crew removing their patient.

They also saw a boulder land five feet from the driver of Truck 5. If it had hit him it would have killed him. Finding more blood trails, it was obvious that many people had already exited the building.

A woman was located trapped in debris on the third floor. Truck 8 and Squad 18 observed a huge piece of concrete on her lower torso and lower legs. Many power and hydraulic tools were used to try and lift the concrete high enough to extricate her. Fire department chaplain Ted Wilson came by to comfort the woman.

A report was received that a possi-
The order was given to evacuate the entire building. Truck 8 and Squad 18 had been working for 20 to 30 minutes moving debris to extricate a woman pinned in the debris. Members of Truck 8 left the Squad to finish with the woman and exited the building.

From a position in the elevating platform bucket of Truck 7 firefighters had been checking the exterior walls and visible structural members for damage. Oleson could see people sprinting away from the area in all directions. "They weren't walking or running," he said. "They were sprinting." Because they were leaving in a hurry, Oleson asked Jackson, "Do they know something we don't know?" At that time a radio transmission told the crew of Truck 7 that because of a second possible device they were to get down. They reported later that the bucket wasn't going nearly as fast as they wanted it to go. When the elevating platform reached the first section of boom they climbed out of the platform and ran down the aerial ladder.

The aerial of Truck 8 would not retract. There seemed to be something preventing the aerial ladder from moving in any direction. Mayfield climbed the ladder and discovered a piece of reinforcing rod had hooked the ladder. He pried the rod away and the aerial moved. Mayfield held on. Once on the ground the aerial ladder's stabilizers were raised and the apparatus was driven away with the ladder still extended. Mayfield said they couldn't see anybody else in a six-block area.

Firefighters from Squad 18 remained behind during the evacuation to continue to work on the debris trapping the woman. It took quite an additional amount of time, but they finally accomplished their task and carried the woman to safety.

Up to this time civilians and medical personnel came to a medical base until officials could determine where they were needed. Initially it was unknown how many patients there were. Companies were letting the incident commander know how many patients they had and where they were located. Off-duty Oklahoma City firefighters and mutual-aid companies were reporting in. Many of the civilians and medical personnel stayed in base for a few minutes and then went on down on their own. It was chaotic with all the medical personnel trying to help until the bomb scare required that they all leave the area.

McMahon felt that the bomb scare was a blessing in disguise. It gave the incident commander and the fire department time to regroup. It allowed them to identify problems so they could be addressed. Despite the initial chaos the civilians who needed help, received treatment, rescue and transport. The bomb scare also allowed the police to set up a soft perimeter to control civilians and medical personnel who were freelancing. Safety and tracking were important. McMahon said, "When you don't have control of people going in and something happens, you don't know who and where they are operating." Apparently an unofficial request was broadcast by a local radio station, desperately asking all available medical help to respond to the scene. Davis added, "Medical personnel were coming in by the hundreds, walking right past the command post. At times firefighters working in the Federal Building had to remove protective clothing and helmets to protect the civilians."
A nurse who came to the scene to help was struck on the head by falling debris from an upper floor and died several days later. Cranes and backhoes were requested quickly from local contractors. The first large crane with at least a 50-ton capacity arrived in one hour.

McMahon set up functions in the ICS to let the system grow for days. An EMS group and a rescue group were established. Logistics was set up to keep track of special equipment. The community overwhelmed the fire department with items they could provide. Logistics and planning took names and phone numbers. Captain Mike Mahoney drove the mobile command post to the scene. The command post had to be moved several times due to the proximity of buildings with questionable stability. To assist the incident commander, Mahoney was sent walking around the perimeter of the blast site to make an assessment of the structural damage.

Many of the walking wounded helped carry litters for removal of the more seriously injured. Transportation to nearby hospitals was accomplished by private vehicles, ambulances, police cars and two buses that were brought in. A total of 204 patients were transported within the first minutes of the blast.

Information on extensive fire department pre-plans for the Federal Building noted that upwards of 700 to 900 people could be in the building during normal business hours. Davis noted that given the normal occupancy and with 200 people already transported to hospitals, there could still be 200 to 300 critical injuries, since they weren't coming out on their own. A mobile hospital was set up at Northwest Fifth and Harrison. Davis, responsible for all health activities, started ordering additional personal protective equipment, disinfectant and gloves within the first hour. Eventually respirators were ordered.

When the bomb squad gave its approval for operations to continue, firefighters re-entered the Federal Building and adjoining structures. Marrs directed Adams, in charge of support services, to leave the scene and go to dispatch to start a callback of the higher ranks from the off-duty shifts. The repair shop was advised to prepare every reserve rig and vehicle that could be placed into service. Eventually six to seven pumpers and several aerial ladders were placed into service with off-duty personnel.

Adams radioed Marrs to advise him that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had called and could not send any assistance until they were invited in on an official request. Marrs was told that two Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Task Forces were on alert and others would be notified. Marrs told him to make the official request but not to dispatch any teams other than those on alert until people with more expertise could determine whether they were needed.

Marrs then requested a general alarm, alerting all personnel on duty. Almost every piece of rolling stock headed toward downtown. Units were advised to stage at Station 1. Companies in outlying districts were left in place. Mutual-aid companies, many of which also heard and felt the blast, responded to the scene. Dispatchers were trying to keep up with what companies were at the scene and which ones were available so they could maintain coverage. Many companies were used to fill empty stations. Firefighters from all over the country called to help. Several foreign countries called to offer assistance.

Marrs realized early on that it was going to be a long-term incident requiring lighting, food services and portable toilets. An important finance item needed to be taken care of. Officials are unable to circumvent the city's purchase procedures unless an emergency is declared by the city manager. The finance director quickly established emergency purchase order numbers. The fire department business manager was ordered to check on the purchase orders and to address finance.

After the bomb scare, special operations was separated into three groups. Firefighters trained in high-angle rope rescue were used to search the third floor and above. Hazmat personnel were assigned to monitor the air from the ground to the third floor. Firefighters trained in collapse, trench and confined space rescue were directed below ground. When the primary search was completed rope teams were sent to check surrounding buildings up to six blocks away. Several one-story commercial buildings partially collapsed.

Truck 7 left staging and was positioned in the same location as before the bomb scare. The crew was then directed into the building to continue searching. Already on the second floor were police and other law enforcement personnel digging through the rubble. Jackson got their attention and explained that many firefighters were waiting outside, but he couldn't
bring them in until the police and others left. They pointed out some obvious bodies and then left the area.

Eventually it was determined that seven people had been killed outside the Federal Building: one was recovered in the parking lot across the street, two in the Water Resources Building and four in the Athenia Building.

One firefighter was moving victims when a woman who was trapped close by grabbed his hand. She was trapped between two floors and was still lodged in her chair. It took quite some time to remove her. She had only minor injuries.

Firefighters regrouped and were told “no freelancing.” When they searched the Journal Record building the stairways were covered with debris. Many people who had been sitting near the windows that looked directly toward the Federal Building were cut by flying glass. Blood was visible leading to the stairways. Glass shards were embedded into interior walls. Early on firefighters were told to go for the living and leave the dead.

Firefighters searched the Federal Building from the top down. One firefighter described the scene as looking as though somebody had taken the building and shook it. Debris and furniture were everywhere. In certain areas the debris was compacted tightly as it was blown from the front toward the rear of the structure. Voids were visible in other areas. Firefighters often became entangled in a web of wires that held dropped ceilings, computer, electric and phone lines. Firefighters constantly had to cut these wires.

As the search continued another possible explosive was found, inside a crate marked “explosives.” This information was communicated through channels and the building was evacuated once again. The county bomb squad left with the item. The command post was moved for a third time and was now set up in a fenced-off area that housed other command posts from the FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF), military, police and county officials. The police set up a hard perimeter with a check-in and check-out system. Fire department identification was needed, unless a firefighter had on protective equipment. Armed military personnel assisted the police.

Firefighters returned after the bomb scare and in the next several hours were able to locate only three more live victims. Several firefighters lost relatives or friends in the blast. Accessible portions of all floors were searched three and four times. Everything was powdery white; it was hard to distinguish anything. One little girl who was killed was located in the lightly covered white debris. Truck 7’s platform transported search dogs to the upper floors.

Southwestern Bell hooked up a

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After the bomb scare only three other hours a day. The EMS operation slowly de-
structured due to liability over the next few days.

Many off-duty firefighters responded to the scene to volunteer their services. Mutual-
aid companies also went to work in various functions. Many firefighters converged on the site from all over the country. Initially they were allowed to work, but that was curtailed due to liability over the next few days.

Firefighters continued to search. Jackson noted, "You couldn’t walk in a single room. I was very concerned for the concrete slabs that were hanging. You were constantly looking upward. They checked the major pillars for any cracks or structural defects." He stated, "It was something that pictures can't tell, television can't tell, only being there can you actually know the incredible devastation."

One woman was trapped in the basement area, where a huge portion of the floor was pinning her leg. Eventually a doctor had to amputate her leg so she could be removed. Just to reach the area, firefighters had to shed most of their protective clothing and portions of their uniforms.

During the first two or three hours between 15 and 20 people had been removed alive from the debris. After the bomb scare only three other people were removed — the first at 2:30 P.M., another at 4:30 and the last at 10:30. After that no one was found alive. The EMS operation slowly de-
escalated. If any victims still had been in the building, they were going to be trapped in the voids. Three ambulances would be on-scene 24 hours a day.

A rescue plan was formulated. Inspection of the structure was under-
taken by structural engineers. It was determined that shoring would be needed in key portions of the structure. Local contractors were requested and over a short period of time during the second and third day tubular steel shoring was brought to the site. Measurements were taken and the long, heavy steel, weighing about 10 pounds per foot, was manhandled by

Reduction of hanging debris was also undertaken. Concrete floor slabs and debris hung over the side of the building. Winds up to 40 - mph kept blowing debris onto personnel below. This debris was removed over a period of days. The larger pieces were drilled through and tied to other substantial supports in the building. Firefighters used a squirrel cage supported by a crane boom to work in removing the debris. During one 12-hour period over 500 pieces of hanging debris were removed.

Generators supplying portable lights in the building resulted in bad air. The air was monitored by hazmat personnel for any problems resulting from excess carbon monoxide. Concrete cutters, bolt cut-
ters, technical search equipment, listening devices were donated. A special evacuation signal was set up in case of impending danger. Several people around the site were equipped with boat horns. Four blasts signified that it was time to leave the area. The building was being shot every two hours or sooner if needed by transits, equipment used to determine whether there was any movement of the structure. Steel cables were used to tie pieces of the building together. Between the first and second floor at one side of the building, steel cables were put loosely in place. Hours later the cables were taut. The rescue process continued with removal of light debris and office furni-
ture. Portions of the building were then stabilized and then recovery. Eventually smart levels were used to check building stability. They were set to zero and would be taped or attached with epoxy. This device could detect any movement of the vertical supports. During night operations the power company installed new light poles. Generators and telescoping light towers from Tinker Air Force Base turned the night into day. Planning meetings were held every 12 hours. Several top members of the FEMA team discussed difficult deci-
sions with Shannon.

Several portions of the building were given nicknames. The "pit" was located in the center of the building where debris from the upper floors
A large crane operates as much of the hanging debris has been removed. Note "mother slab" present at top left corner.

Tubular steel shoring and wood shoring are used to support walls and floors.

Oklahoma Rescue Services Chief Mike Shannon examines wooden shoring on the lowest level of the Federal Building. Several live victims were found deep within this area.

Firefighters slice their way through concrete floors in the "pancake" area. Reinforcing rods had to be cut constantly.

More photos on pages 90, 91, 177 & 178
was hanging when the first-floor level disintegrated. The “cave” was the area where the split-level entrance to the building was located. To enter the building a person had to go down four or five steps into a courtyard. Two live victims were located there. The “pancake” was in front of the building. A floor plan was gridded into five-square-foot sections. The maintenance man noted where their desks were located. In about 90 percent of the cases where the people had been placed was where they were found.

A new medical plan was established. Anywhere from 50 to 150 rescue workers would be working on the site at a given time. Enough medical supplies to help 100 people were kept on-site in a mass-casualty trailer. Firefighters used garden sprayers to disinfect gear. Gloves were thrown away. Firefighters were also issued respirators with the highest protection because of the unknown hazards of blood-borne pathogens and possible asbestos. One person was assigned to walk around the site every two hours to pick up biohazard waste. A 40-foot refrigerated trailer was brought to the site. Eventually 9,000 pounds of bio waste was generated at the site. Six eye-washing stations were set up around the site. Portable toilets were set up, along with hand-washing stations.

Firefighters hated to decline anything anyone was willing to donate. When the weather turned cold one night somehow a news reporter found out that some out-of-state firefighters hadn’t enough warm clothing. Within minutes there was a traffic jam downtown of citizens who brought clothing from their homes or stores. Another news report stated that one of the firefighters looked like he had sun-burnt and needed some sun block. Within an hour dozens of people were stopping by with sun block. Other concerned people dropped off razors, toothpaste and other items for the rescue workers.

Members of the USAR teams were provided with temporary shelter in the Myriad Convention Center a few blocks from the scene. Food, clothing and almost a little city sprang up inside the center. A post office and manufacturers’ representatives with rescue tools and associated items set up shop. United Parcel Service sent and received packages.

After five days the risk of blood-borne pathogens was downgraded, but there was still the threat of bacteria in the bodies. Representatives from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the county and state health departments did a walk-through. They determined that there were excellent bio-waste controls. Decontamination and respiratory protection was good and could be downgraded. All personnel had been instructed to go through decon every time they finished a tour. This was then changed to include only those people who came in contact with blood. There were two hot and cold showers within a block of the site operating 24 hours a day. After several days the bodies starting decomposing. When a body was found the area was cleared of rubble, then personnel donned white encapsulating suits for additional protection while removing the body. Additional duct tape and reusable filters were ordered. It took 15 firefighters 24 hours a day to perform decon and pick up medical waste. Personnel sanitized and dried respirators. Morale was an important issue. It was a hard task to explain to the firefighters assigned to the medical sector that those jobs were just as important as being in the building.

Rescue workers reporting in for duty on the following days had to attend two safety briefings after picking up equipment. Each was outfitted with knee pads, gloves and a respirator. Next they were informed about the dangers to rescuers. A 10-minute briefing explained bio-hazards, how to use respirators, fit testing, how to use the respirators and medical dangers found in the building. To eliminate freelancing, firefighters checked in at the command post, stopped at resources to pick up equipment, went to rescue command for assignment, worked, then went to decon and CISD. Some firefighters left decon or CISD and returned to work. Fencing was used to make corridors where the personnel couldn’t go around. Three check points stopped the freelancing.

Everyone wanted a piece of the action, so to speak. Those companies just wanted to be allowed to complete a removal so they could feel a sense of accomplishment and respect the dead.

One person was designated a liaison with the medical examiner’s office. Rescuers would remove a body and turn it over to the medical examiner. The official body count came from Davis only when a body was recovered and placed into a holding trailer. Although identified, the bodies still trapped in the rubble were not included until they were removed. These numbers were then given only to Marrs. These stringent controls were in place because the media were reporting all sorts of numbers. There was an urgent sense that the public was being misled. Rescuers kept going...
with the thought that they still might find somebody alive.

Marrs said, "the sheer compactness of the rubble pile, as the number of days went by the likelihood that anybody was alive was decreasing."

Griffin said, "Everywhere you dug, you found a body. It was a tough time for everybody involved. The victims, families, rescuers. All the cards and letters from all over the world gave us the strength to go on and keep digging. It was a good feeling to know that we were not just in there by ourselves, that we had everybody behind us, and that really kept us going. Many rescuers may have reached their threshold for an entire lifetime, but they managed to continue."

Marrs added, "One of the things that made me most proud of this department was in the first few minutes the people out there put the incident command system in place. There was no alteration, the system expanded and was allowed to grow. All of the firefighters' training and skills and the equipment that the citizens bought for them all came together to make this incident run for 17 days the way it did. During this time I constantly stopped by operations, resource command, support at the department. They knew what they were doing and that it was an important part of the operation."

Griffin said, "The citizens applauded you, shaking your hand when you were leaving the scene. We couldn't have done it without the FEMA teams. We'll be there to return the favor. Hopefully we'll never need to."

Lessons Learned
- During medical training you have to be ready to face the fact that you don't always save the person.
- Be sure that all of the agencies are involved in the disaster plan not just public safety. The disaster plan is a template not etched in concrete but it must be able to be followed.
- A list of the suppliers of items and equipment that will be needed at a moment's notice for any contingency must be up-dated constantly.
- Think of the possibility of a long-term operation; fire departments usually think of a tornado or an airplane crash where units are back in service in 12 or 24 hours.
- Think about the safety of rescuers. The injury rate went up as fatigue set in.
- Safety officers must be placed in strategic locations.
- The fire department operated a 17-day incident with 90 minutes of fire; the rest was EMS and rescue/recovery.
- People making decisions could possibly use a small tape recorder with a battery pack and clip the microphone on the collar. This would help document the incident, instead of trying to remember everything that happened over several hours.
- You have to depend on the companies out in the field. They are the eyes and ears of the IC. If they have a problem, they will let you know.
- Isolate the IC and the other people in key management roles. People with suggestions swarmed those commanders.
- Use communications systems that have numerous tactical and command channels, possibly 800 MHz systems.
- Use cellular phones that are prioritized for the fire department.
- Unity of command. The faster you set up other agencies in a single location, the faster you will be able to communicate with other decision makers.
- Scene security was a major problem from the beginning. It took an elaborate system to overcome the problem.
- Require additional personnel early on to assist the IC. Three or four people were needed to deal with all the issues the IC had to contend with. A number of people were still gaining access to the IC from out of city agencies, medical personnel, civilians, volunteers, food service. They were all trying to provide help and information.
- Would like to have had a normal dispatch. A call to 911 then dispatch apparatus instead of the self dispatching from a management (continued on page 140)
standpoint would have caused less confusion.

- The community support kept firefighters and rescuers going. Thousands of postcards and drawings were received from all over the world. Personnel were physically and mentally worn out and this kept them going.
- Until some of the department heads went to the disaster management course they didn’t realize that when you had a disaster there were things that they were expected to do; they should not wait to be asked.
- The identification tagging procedures allowed too many people into the site. The department welcomes a track of who is working on site.
- They should not wait to be asked.
- Things that they were expected to do; they were doing.

- Hazards within the building needed to be outlined. Keep track of those hazards: were they addressed, being addressed and completed?
- Probably had too many people at the scene. It was a one-block incident with thousands to support it.
- Took burden off dispatch by setting up a command post at Station 1 to set up rotation. Everybody on every shift had a chance to go to the incident.
- Backed aerial apparatus in for optimum reach and in need of a hasty retreat.

Firehouse* would like to thank Chief Gary Marts and the staff of the Oklahoma City Fire Department for their assistance in the preparation of this report.

N.Y. Task Force (NYTF-1) 24-Hour Time Line

4-21-95

07:00  Relieved from duty at collapse site.
07:00  Task force relieved.
07:00  TF personnel load equipment to return to base of operations.
08:00  Unloading completed. Advised to get rest, but on standby, remain fit for duty and in contact with base at all times.
17:25  Task Force leaders briefing. Check for fatigue. Rotate teams. Discussion on which building should be searched. TF leader Shelley advises CCFD determines what building will be searched not FEMA. Medical team addressed dehydration for those doing strenuous work, rotate through rehab, plenty of fluids and rest. Logistics will be on site with equipment. Remaining logistics will remain at base. Trying to obtain another van for transportation. Rescue managers must have tools immediately available.
18:15  60 radicale part of equipment cache set up. Channels selected for direct point to point, tactical point to point, and repeater to base.
17:40  Begin loading vans and trucks.
18:05  Leaving for site.
18:20  On site roll call and briefing. Medical teams can be called at logistics. Teams should wash hands frequently and plan for R&R.
18:45  Begin working at site at 19:15.
19:15  Second briefing. Safety message. Be alert in and out of the collapse zone and beware of high winds. One team on pile. Confirmed DEA agent in pile, concentrate efforts on this agent.
19:30  Team briefed by Battalion Chief Ray Downey.
19:45  Team 1 will go on pile, others in basement.
20:00  TF 2-4 in old courthouse conducting secondary search.
21:00  Team 1 finds DEA agent in rubble. Winds in area are increasing. Safety officer Cassani will make an assessment.
21:40  Team 1 utilizing air hammers uncover DEA documents, given to DEA.
22:25  Member injured in Journal Record building.
22:30  Removed DEA agent from pile (doo).
22:45  Member being treated at rehab, returned to Convention Center.
23:25  Rain beginning, wind picking up, temperature dropping.
23:35  Started to retrieve tools from pile.
23:45  Heavy boat storms.
23:50  Team 1 redeployed to basement of main building. Rake shoring completed by team 2. Team 3-4 complete search in Journal Record building, then to rehab.

4-22-95

00:30  Logistics pick up 12 foot long 6X6 lumber for shoring.
01:30  Teams 3-4 work on second floor conducting void and floor search.
02:00  All members removed from the building while structural engineers conduct evaluation, all members to rehab.
02:25  All teams reenter the building.
02:45  Find victim in rear second floor, begin extrication.
03:25  Body removed.
03:35  Body count 69.
03:40  Requested by hazmat specialist for MSDS sheets for insecticide/deflant being used.
04:00  Found another female victim in rear of second floor (doo).
04:20  Weather report, rain, heavy thunder storms, with high winds approaching 20-30 mph. Logistics erect temporary shelter to protect equipment cache on site.
04:30  Team 2 reports finding three bodies in various voids, still not removed from rubble pile, identified the area.
05:00  As per Task Force Leader all operations ceased due to severe weather conditions.
07:00  Task force relieved.
08:00  Team returned to base.