

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE

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LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE

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EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK

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MARCH 12, 2014

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Interview of: JAMES E. LEONARD and
 ANTHONY W. DeVITA, JR.

New York City Office of
 Emergency Management
 165 Cadman Plaza
 Brooklyn, New York

Tuesday,
 September 30, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE
 Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

RAVI CHHATRE, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C.

KALU KELLY EMEABA, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

FRANK McCARTON, Deputy Commissioner
Office of Emergency Management
New York, New York
(Party Representative)

LEON HEYWARD, Deputy Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation

LEONARD SINGH, Chief Engineer
Gas Distribution Services
Con Edison
(Party Representative)

CHRIS STOLICKY, Utility Supervisor (Safety)
New York State Department of Public Service
(Party Representative)

SONJA ORGIAS, Assistant Counsel
New York City Fire Department
Bureau of Legal Affairs
(Representative on behalf of Chiefs Leonard and Devita)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. CHHATRE: Good morning. Today is Tuesday, September 30, 2014. We are currently in New York City's Office of Emergency Management Facility located at 165 Cadman Plaza, Brooklyn, New York. We are meeting regarding the investigation of natural gas distribution pipeline leak and multistory structure explosion that occurred on March 12, 2014, in Harlem, New York.

My name is Ravi Chhatre. I'm with National Transportation Safety Board located in Washington, D.C. and I'm Investigator-in-Charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation number for the accident is DCA-14-MP-002.

I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this room that we are recording this interview and we may transcribe it at a later date. Transcripts will be provided directly to the interviewees for review and identifying any typographical errors. The transcripts may be posted in NTSB's public docket.

Also, I would also like to inform Chief Leonard and Chief DeVita, that you are permitted to have one other person present with you during the interview. This person is of your choice: your supervisor, a friend, family member or, if you choose, no one at all.

Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your name, the organization you work for, your title, business contact information such as building address, and whom you have

1 chosen to be present with you during your interview.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: It's James E., as in Edward, Leonard, L-
3 e-o-n-a-r-d. I'm a Deputy Assistant Chief in the New York City
4 Fire Department. My office telephone number is [REDACTED]. My
5 e-mail is [REDACTED].

6 MR. CHHATRE: And who have you chosen to be with you?

7 CHIEF LEONARD: Fire department legal, our attorney.

8 CHIEF DeVITA: Anthony W. DeVita, Jr., Deputy Chief, New
9 York City Fire Department; phone [REDACTED]; e-mail
10 [REDACTED]. Also chosen the fire department legal
11 representative to be present with me.

12 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you much.

13 Now I'd like to go around the room and have each person
14 introduce themselves. Please state your name, spelling of your
15 name, your title, organization that you represent and your
16 business contact information. Starting from my left.

17 MR. HEYWARD: Leon Heyward, H-e-y-w-a-r-d, New York City
18 Department of Transportation, Deputy Commissioner; phone number
19 [REDACTED]; e-mail address [REDACTED].

20 MR. STOLICKY: Christopher Stolicky, S-t-o-l-i-c-k-y,
21 New York State Department of Public Service. E-mail is
22 [REDACTED].

23 MR. McCARTON: Frank McCarton, Deputy Commissioner in
24 the Office of Emergency Management; [REDACTED];
25 [REDACTED]. I'm the New York City party rep in the

1 investigation.

2 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, K-a-l-u, K-e-l-l-y,
3 E-m-e-a-b-a, NTSB investigator. My e-mail address
4 [REDACTED].

5 MS. ORGIAS: Sonja Orgias, Assistant Counsel, New York
6 City Fire Department, Bureau of Legal Affairs, 9 Metro Tech
7 Center, Brooklyn, New York 11201; [REDACTED] is my office
8 number. My e-mail is my first name, [REDACTED].

9 MR. SINGH: Leonard Singh, Chief Engineer, Con Edison
10 Gas Operations. [REDACTED]. Con Ed's party rep on this
11 investigation.

12 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you. What we're going to do is
13 we're just going to go around the table, ask questions, and I'll
14 begin. The typical order we'll follow is NTSB will go first, then
15 we'll have PHMSA, PHMSA not being here, then we'll go over to New
16 York City regulators, and then we'll go over to the City, and then
17 we'll go with Con Edison in the sequence. And if you will kindly
18 please, since we are conducting two together, identify yourself
19 when you're answering the question so the transcriber will know.

20 INTERVIEW OF JAMES LEONARD and ANTHONY DeVITA, JR.

21 MR. CHHATRE: And if you can just walk us through on the
22 day of the accident, what happened, how did you hear about it; you
23 know, kind of walk us through since we were not there for close
24 almost -- I wasn't there almost for a day and a half. So it will
25 be very helpful, just tell us what happened.

1 CHIEF DeVITA: Want me to start off? Okay. This will
2 be Anthony DeVita. It was approximately 9:30 in the morning on
3 March 12th, and I was sitting in the -- in my headquarters at 207
4 West 77th Street on the west side, monitoring our fire department
5 frequency, Manhattan frequency, and I heard a report coming from
6 the east side in the area of 116th, 118th Street and Park Avenue,
7 of a report of an explosion. Then that followed by our dispatcher
8 telling the companies -- they sent themselves out to the address
9 or the location of the -- where the actual explosion, the general
10 area. As they were proceeding in, they were getting more phone
11 calls and that was being transmitted over the Manhattan frequency,
12 my office.

13 So I left the firehouse and responded to that general
14 location. We didn't have an address yet. And the first arriving
15 fire companies, Ladder 26 and Engine 58, they came upon the scene
16 of what eventually became two five-story dwellings that were --
17 that had collapsed and were on fire. They had transmitted the
18 appropriate radio code signals, which were a 10-60, which is in
19 our codes signifies a collapse, some sort of a major collapse.

20 So I was responding in, monitoring our department radio,
21 and I was able to pick up some of the handy-talkie, our radio
22 frequency conversations from the units at the scene, and from my
23 perspective, just from the sounds of the transmissions, that there
24 was a very serious collapse and fire that had taken place.

25 When I turned onto 116th Street from the west side, over

1 the horizon, I could see a large plume of smoke rising up over the
2 area of 116th Street and Park Avenue. We finally did verify that
3 that was the intersection. We still didn't have an address
4 because of the amount of smoke and fire and destruction.

5 By that time, I arrived. We established a command post.
6 I transmitted additional alarms to get more collapse help and fire
7 department units on the scene to assist with fire extinguishment.
8 I knew that we'd have to institute our collapse rescue plan. At
9 that point, I arrived. I established a command post at 116th
10 Street and Park Avenue under the elevated train line, and
11 proceeded to just start trying to get a handle on the extent of
12 the collapse and the fire and where my units were operating, and
13 to try and transmit this over to the incoming fire department
14 units, namely, Chief Leonard, who was responding.

15 So that's pretty much up till, you know. So then at
16 some point, minute later, I handed command over to Chief Leonard,
17 and then he took command and I took an operational role to take,
18 you know, handle the operations.

19 MR. CHHATRE: Going back to some of the -- fill-in the
20 blanks here, when you say you were monitoring the radio frequency,
21 who reported to you? How do you get the information?

22 CHIEF DeVITA: The -- we have -- our radio frequency,
23 each borough has its own frequency and Staten Island and the Bronx
24 are on one frequency, but we have a radio frequency dispatcher, a
25 fire dispatcher, speaks to the fire companies on a mobile radio.

1 Every fire company on the road has a mobile radio. So I listen to
2 that in my office. When I'm not on the road, I have also a radio
3 in the office and I can pick up on all, you know, radio -- all
4 types of radio traffic, whether it's minor fires, minor
5 emergencies or expanding incidents. And so I could hit the ground
6 running when I leave the firehouse; I'm aware of what's going on.
7 And that's basically our dispatcher talking to the fire companies
8 who are, you know, on the road or mobile.

9 And when Ladder 26 and Engine 58, who -- they're on 5th
10 Avenue and 112th Street. When they heard this explosion, they
11 transmitted to our dispatcher, which they called it in themselves
12 and said we heard an explosion, we see smoke, we're going to
13 respond. And that's where I was listening in. So I knew that
14 something was -- it was -- it sounded like it was going to be an
15 expanding type incident or emergency.

16 MR. CHHATRE: So it wasn't like 911 call?

17 CHIEF DeVITA: This one, this one, as far as I know,
18 didn't. It came -- our fire department units heard it and they
19 self-dispatched. They didn't have to call 911. They bypassed
20 that and they went right -- took it in themselves and notified our
21 dispatcher. And then 911 calls I'm sure ensued soon thereafter
22 because multiple, multiple calls were coming from the local
23 residents that there was a collapse and a fire.

24 MR. CHHATRE: When you say you were listening to
25 dispatch, you're talking about your dispatcher's conversation

1 between the different units?

2 CHIEF DeVITA: Correct. Correct.

3 MR. CHHATRE: And when 911 calls, does it come through
4 your dispatcher? How does that process work?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: There is -- 911 comes into Metro Tech,
6 into -- it's across the street from 9. What's the address?

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 11.

8 CHIEF DeVITA: 11, thank you. 11 Metro Tech is the 911
9 receive center NYPD, and we have our resources in there also, fire
10 department dispatchers and 911 dispatchers. The calls come into
11 -- that come into 911 go to 911 dispatchers, and then anything
12 related to fire usually goes right to -- they patch through to the
13 fire dispatchers, and they add more information. So there's an
14 information gathering from 911 dispatchers and then it makes its
15 way to the fire dispatchers, in the same giant floor but across,
16 like separate, but they're all linked together.

17 MR. CHHATRE: So just to clarify, 911 -- if I call 911,
18 and 911 calls fire department, Metro Tech dispatcher and --

19 CHIEF DeVITA: More or less, yes.

20 MR. CHHATRE: And then the Metro Tech dispatcher will
21 broadcast it on your -- on all frequencies or just your frequency?

22 CHIEF DeVITA: Right. Well, yeah, we don't really have
23 -- we have the capability to monitor the police frequencies but
24 it's on a different channel. So we're more concerned with our
25 Manhattan fire radio.

1 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: If we had to, we could switch, but we're
3 monitoring Manhattan. So all those calls that come into 911, we
4 don't hear them. They're just -- they just sort of get patched
5 through to our dispatcher.

6 MR. CHHATRE: 911 is managed by the police department?

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

8 CHIEF LEONARD: Can I just clarify something --

9 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

10 CHIEF LEONARD: -- if I may? The 911 system, the fire
11 alarm dispatcher will be seeing they're getting multiple calls on
12 this type of -- I would have to go back and look on how many
13 calls, but they would see multiple calls coming in for that, that
14 job.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Right.

16 CHIEF LEONARD: So people calling 911.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, so many people call 911.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: Right. It's patched, right -- it's
19 almost an instantaneous patch. The NYPD call receiver gets the
20 information and says it's a fire and then transfers that
21 particular call to the fire department dispatcher, just to clarify
22 that.

23 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. It's almost like instant --

24 CHIEF LEONARD: Right.

25 MR. CHHATRE: -- instantaneously.

1 CHIEF LEONARD: They say it's a fire, they just -- they
2 take the information --

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

4 CHIEF LEONARD: -- and they transfer the call to the
5 fire department.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Do you recall what time you were at
7 the scene?

8 CHIEF DeVITA: Okay. This is DeVita again. Yeah, I
9 would say somewhere around -- right after 9:30 in the morning. I
10 don't have the exact time of arrival, but 9:30, 9:40.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Within minutes?

12 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes, minutes, yes.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Can you describe the scene? What I'm
14 really trying to find out is when you arrived, did you see any
15 hole on the street with the water flowing? I mean, if you can
16 describe the accident scene for me.

17 CHIEF DeVITA: No. Upon arrival, there was heavy smoke.
18 There was heavy fire coming from the footprint or the remains of
19 what -- at this time I wasn't positive. I thought maybe we had
20 one building. I wasn't sure if it was two buildings. It was
21 difficult to determine based on the amount of devastation that was
22 present. But what I saw was smoke, basically engulfing the whole
23 area, making visibility difficult, with fire, a heavy fire
24 condition, from my perspective on the front side, on the Park
25 Avenue side of the structure. I couldn't see all the way to the

1 back because of the visibility but I did see heavy fire condition
2 on the front.

3 There was many feet of, maybe 5, 5 feet deep, maybe up
4 to the top of cars, of bricks and structural members in the middle
5 of the street, pushed out underneath the elevated line. There
6 were buildings around the surrounding -- surrounding buildings
7 that had broken windows and structural damage. It was a chaotic
8 scene. But there was no obvious water leak. There was no obvious
9 hole in the street. The street was covered with, like I said, the
10 debris and the building that had blown out. So there was nothing
11 visible as far as the water condition or structural damage to the
12 street at that time.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Did you, DeVita, how close could you go up
14 to the ground zero?

15 CHIEF DeVITA: How close? We -- probably the middle of
16 the street was where the -- where Chief Gells, who was the first
17 arriving -- he was the incident commander. And so when I arrived,
18 he was standing on top of this pile in which was the middle of the
19 southbound lanes of Park Avenue. So, you know, what is that, from
20 the middle of the street to the building line, you know, 20 feet
21 away.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. He was that close.

23 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, right.

24 MR. CHHATRE: On Park Avenue itself?

25 CHIEF DeVITA: Right. Right in the middle of Park

1 Avenue on top of a pile of bricks and timbers and, like I said,
2 there were cars all over. But maybe 20 feet away, something like
3 that.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Can you walk us through what actions were
5 taken then once you arrived?

6 CHIEF DeVITA: Okay. Once I arrived, like I said, we
7 announced the location of command post which is for the
8 information of our incoming fire department units, our incoming
9 staff and incoming agencies, other city agencies. So everybody
10 forms up in the same area and it -- you know, make sure the
11 incident command system is -- it operates and is put into effect
12 correctly and all the heads of agencies come.

13 So we announced the command post. I ensured we had a
14 staging area set up for our units that were responding on
15 additional alarms because I, you know, I felt with that amount of
16 devastation, I didn't want too many people coming in until we got
17 a good idea. We had enough units for the initial search and
18 investigation. I just kept other units at a staging area until we
19 knew how much more of a commitment we needed from units.

20 And at that point I made contact with Chief Gells from
21 the 12th battalion and I got a preliminary from him, what his
22 actions were to that point, what had been searched. We had a
23 building, I guess 1642, on the south side that was standing but
24 had sustained heavy structural damage. I wanted to make sure that
25 was being searched within the limits of safety due to the amount

1 of fire and the structural, and so we were in the process of
2 searching that. And I had to get an idea where all my fire
3 companies were operating for accountability purposes and safety.
4 So in this brief preliminary with Chief Gells, I asked him where
5 all the companies were operating, where our other -- we had
6 battalions operating on the 1642 side. We had companies operating
7 in the rear, behind the collapsed area, and then in the multiple
8 dwelling on 117th and Park, that corner.

9 So my job was to make sure I knew where everybody was,
10 establish sectors, sector each area off, so I would just be
11 speaking to one commander in each sector to make communications a
12 more efficient link to each of the operational areas that we
13 established. And from that point, I had to set up a radio command
14 channel so I could just speak to the commanders. There's a lot of
15 very chaotic scene -- a lot of radio traffic as far as searches
16 and amount of fire and stretching of hose lines and raising
17 ladders. There was a lot of tactical radio traffic. We
18 established or I established a command channel so I just spoke to
19 the chiefs in each of these sectors I just spoke about. So it was
20 just a one-on-one, and then they spoke to their fire companies in
21 their area of responsibility. So --

22 And then at that point, we just, you know, made sure the
23 searches were going properly, the hose lines were being stretched
24 to the proper location, members were operating safely, and, you
25 know, of course, the whole time I'm monitoring the tactical

1 frequency and the command frequency for any information I would
2 need to, you know, more effectively run the operation.

3 MR. CHHATRE: When you say establish sectors, is that
4 like a standard practice for the fire department? I mean, I'm
5 reading a lot of interviews and somebody in Sector 3 and Sector 4
6 -- I want to understand how you do that.

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes. It's -- we establish the sectors
8 for command and control. I don't have to speak to -- if I have
9 three engineer companies and two ladder companies on the scene,
10 instead of them all trying to get information to me, I have a
11 chief who is in charge of that sector. Let's see, a geographic
12 sector in this case, in this operation would be 1642 and anything
13 on that corner, on that southwest corner of 116th and Park. I put
14 a chief in charge of that sector with his three engines and two
15 ladders and whatever else he's operating with, and he speaks to me
16 and instead of having five companies trying to speak to me. So
17 that's the benefit of sectors. I have somebody in control of it,
18 the communications become easier and more effective, and then I
19 just -- and he takes that and just reports back to me on progress
20 in his area of responsibility.

21 MR. CHHATRE: Well, on this map here, and this is really
22 Frank's map, where was the first command post established? Can
23 you just mark that for me?

24 CHIEF DeVITA: It is -- I think it's -- I think your
25 hand is on it right now.

1 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: It's right there, that little box with
3 the -- that's it.

4 MR. CHHATRE: This one?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: No, no, actually it was closer to --

6 MR. CHHATRE: Should I give the map to you?

7 CHIEF DeVITA: No, that's all right. It was right
8 there.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Right here.

10 CHIEF DeVITA: Just right -- sort of under the L, a
11 little further east, like just under --

12 MR. CHHATRE: On this side?

13 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, it's right about there.

14 CHIEF LEONARD: It was underneath the L.

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, it was underneath. Right --

16 MR. CHHATRE: Underneath the railroad?

17 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: This is Chief Leonard. I moved the
19 command post back under the L for force protection, and the
20 command post would be --

21 MR. CHHATRE: Right here.

22 CHIEF LEONARD: -- would be protected by the overhead
23 structure.

24 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Okay. So it was underneath the
25 railroad tracks here --

1 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes.

2 MR. CHHATRE: -- someplace. Okay. Somewhere in here,
3 you think?

4 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

5 MR. CHHATRE: So the sector will not necessarily means
6 the four sections or four quadrants? They can --

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Right. You can call it quadrants,
8 sectors. Basically you're just dividing up like --

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

10 CHIEF DeVITA: -- a clockwise, you know.

11 CHIEF LEONARD: Let me talk about the -- continuing on,
12 but do you want me to talk about sectors?

13 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

14 CHIEF LEONARD: We had the change of command. You want
15 me to talk on --

16 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, go ahead. Go ahead, sir.

17 CHIEF LEONARD: All right. I was the -- I'm normally
18 assigned as the Brooklyn borough commander, but on that day I was
19 also covering the Borough of Manhattan, and I was notified by our
20 fire department operations center of a major collapse in
21 Manhattan. So I started out with them first. One of the first
22 things, I had communications with my -- with the fire dispatcher
23 by landline. I had them know location of Metro North to be sure
24 that all train traffic was shut down. All right. Coming in, I
25 want to know the location of the incident command post, which was

1 given to me.

2 When I arrived, it was very chaotic. I had spoken to
3 the police commanding officer of emergency service, a Chief
4 Giordano, just tell him that -- let me get a handle. We've got
5 the incident command post set up, let me get a handle on what's
6 going on.

7 At that point I met up with Chief DeVita, met up with
8 Chief DeVita and Chief Gells, and we had a discussion about
9 transition of command. Basically, in others words, what had
10 happened, what was there, what did we know, where our operators --
11 where our units were operating, any potential people trapped or
12 whatever.

13 So at that point I took command. Myself and
14 Chief DeVita came back to where we were setting up the command
15 board. We allowed Chief Gells to run the overall operation at
16 that point. We had a second alarm assignment on the scene.

17 At that point, we -- there was a couple things we --
18 simultaneously going on. Firefighting operations were going on.
19 The department was also instituting a collapse rescue plan at that
20 point. But as the incident commander, it's my job to set up as
21 this is a single command under SIMS, a single command incident,
22 with the FDNY as the incident commander.

23 At that point we're going to set up our command board
24 and we're going to sector, sector this area. Sectors can be done
25 geographically. That way we know what resources we have in that

1 sector. It will prevent -- it gives us good communications. It
2 reduces our span of control to roughly 1:5. We make sure that we
3 have a sector supervisor in that area.

4 So initially we set up four sectors. Sector number 1
5 was the front of the building. Sector number 2 was the two
6 buildings going to 116th Street. Section 3 was the rear of the
7 building, and Sector 4 was the building to the right going to that
8 corner.

9 With discussion, we established the command channel so
10 we had good communications. We had good sector supervision. We
11 had adequate resources on the scene. And we also had a discussion
12 with the chief of rescue services and we decided at the incident
13 command to establish a rescue group, sector groups, and in that
14 group, we had a rescue company, a squad company, a hazmat company
15 and two special operations companies. They were to operate on the
16 pile. In other words, the hazmat units were for meter turn or
17 monitoring because at this time we did not know what caused this
18 explosion. In other words, it was quite an explosion, and this
19 day we just did not know. So we metered for any chemicals. In
20 other words, all the various force protection things that we're
21 going to do.

22 So at that point we had four sectors established and we
23 had a rescue operations group that was instituting our collapse
24 rescue plan. There was an active rescue going on in the rear of
25 the pile, where we eventually removed, I think, one or two people

1 out of there.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

3 CHIEF LEONARD: Also made, you know, contact, we
4 established the medical branch with our emergency medical service
5 people with that.

6 At that point we also started to realize that there was
7 damage to buildings on the south side of 116th Street and there
8 was also damage to buildings on the east side of Park Avenue. At
9 that point we had an alarm assignment of three engines, two trucks
10 and battalion chief at the staging area. We brought them up to
11 the staging area and we established a fifth sector, which was --
12 we named it the East 116th Street South Sector, which was
13 responsible for 116th Street on the south side, and the north side
14 -- I'm sorry, and the east side of Park Avenue. They were given
15 the assignment of search and evacuation of all those buildings.

16 We also had consultation with NYPD and the MTA police,
17 and it was determined at that time, because we knew we had debris
18 on the railroad tracks, that we would allow the NYPD and the MTA
19 police to search that area on the railroad tracks, just because it
20 was an area that we could -- didn't need to commit people to.
21 They're more experienced with their own railroad, and they did
22 that both for life and for evidence collection with that.

23 So we basically within those first couple minutes, we
24 structured this incident to, in other words, understand the
25 incident command, understand the protocols under SIMS in the City

1 of New York.

2 MR. CHHATRE: I just want to make sure. So your Sector
3 1 will be the front?

4 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, that's 1.

5 MR. CHHATRE: That's number 1.

6 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Then number 3 is --

8 CHIEF LEONARD: Three is the rear of the building.

9 MR. CHHATRE: -- on the back, right?

10 CHIEF LEONARD: Right.

11 MR. CHHATRE: And then number 2 was right here?

12 CHIEF LEONARD: The left. In other words, this whole,
13 this whole -- these two buildings right here --

14 MR. CHHATRE: Will be number 2?

15 CHIEF LEONARD: -- this is Sector number 2.

16 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

17 CHIEF LEONARD: And then this whole, this whole sector
18 here is 4.

19 MR. CHHATRE: Number 4.

20 CHIEF LEONARD: And then the rescue, and then the rescue
21 group operated on the pile.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Rescue on the pile itself?

23 CHIEF LEONARD: On the pile itself.

24 MR. CHHATRE: That would be rescue group.

25 CHIEF LEONARD: That was the rescue group.

1 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And the fifth one was established
2 on the east side of 116th?

3 CHIEF LEONARD: With this into here.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Okay, this all was number 5?

5 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, sir.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

7 CHIEF LEONARD: Now each group will have a sector
8 supervisor. Each group will be told what radio channel to be on.
9 They're all on our primary command.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

11 CHIEF LEONARD: So we have -- in other words, we have --
12 we actually have probably -- we have primary tactical that our
13 units are on. We have the fire department dispatch radio that
14 we're on. We also have primary command channel that we're on, and
15 also EMS units are also operating on their own citywide frequency,
16 that the EMS units are operating on.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Earlier you said you called to stop the
18 rail traffic?

19 CHIEF LEONARD: I called my -- I called the Manhattan
20 dispatcher.

21 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

22 CHIEF LEONARD: Manhattan supervised dispatcher. And
23 that was also put out on the radio to make sure train traffic on
24 Metro North was stopped.

25 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. They called Metro North to stop the

1 traffic?

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Right. There's standard procedures how
3 to stop -- there's standard notification procedures that the fire
4 department has with the railroads to make these notifications.

5 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. These are all standard protocol?

6 CHIEF LEONARD: All standard protocols in place.

7 MR. CHHATRE: So you also mentioned the collapse rescue
8 plan. So that's also a pretty standard protocol?

9 CHIEF LEONARD: We have, we have a document on a
10 collapse rescue plan. In short, it's a five-step plan. It's
11 reconnaissance of the collapsed area. In other words, then we
12 will remove people right on the surface. We will -- the third
13 step will be we will tunnel into areas or examine voids. The
14 fourth step will be selected debris removal, and the fifth step
15 would be general debris removal. All with -- these are all life
16 safety operations.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. I guess you guys used the term of,
18 earlier, the fire engine and ladder. Can you --

19 CHIEF LEONARD: All right. Well, there's two -- there's
20 a couple different types of units. Engine companies are the
21 pumpers as you see, in plain speak. The engine company has two
22 basic duties. One of them is the extinguishment of fire. The
23 second major duty is they are the primary emergency medical
24 service responders. They're certified responders. So -- but most
25 of these engines were for fire extinguishment that day.

1 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: The second, the second type of apparatus
3 we have is a ladder company. You'll see either they have a --
4 their type of apparatus is either a 100-foot aerial ladder or a
5 75- or 95-foot bucket type of truck.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

7 CHIEF LEONARD: All right. Their primary mission is
8 search and rescue. Force -- their primary mission is search and
9 rescue.

10 All right. We also have -- you know, in other words, we
11 have squad companies, which are engine companies with enhanced
12 training and capabilities, especially in the hazmat area. We also
13 have rescue companies; there's only five of them in the city. The
14 firefighters are much higher trained and they are taught to
15 operate in -- they have the ability to tunnel; they have the
16 ability to shore; they have extensive collapse experience with
17 that. But the primary -- in other words, in the City of New York,
18 there's 197 engine companies and there's a 143 ladder companies.

19 MR. CHHATRE: 197, you say?

20 CHIEF LEONARD: 197 alone, 197 engine companies.

21 MR. CHHATRE: And how many ladder companies?

22 CHIEF LEONARD: 143 ladder companies.

23 MR. CHHATRE: And that's for the entire City of New
24 York?

25 CHIEF LEONARD: That covers the entire five boroughs,

1 yes.

2 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Chief, do you recall approximately
3 what time you arrived on the scene?

4 CHIEF LEONARD: It was probably close to 9:50,
5 approximately that time.

6 MR. CHHATRE: And did you see any water, any hole --

7 CHIEF LEONARD: Not at all. I saw exactly what
8 Chief DeVita had mentioned. We had, you know, heavy smoke
9 condition, heavy fire condition, massive amount of debris on the
10 street especially in front of the building. Most of the entire
11 street was totally covered in debris a few feet high, even
12 possibly even more. There had been a fence that we wound up --
13 there was a fence right along here that we wound up cutting, but
14 the debris was right up into the fence.

15 MR. CHHATRE: But I think there was some kind of a -- I
16 remember some like 4-H Club car there, some like plants and
17 chickens or something like that in that area.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: No, well, it was just an area -- what it
19 did was it protected the -- I guess there was a parking lot -- I
20 think there was parking there, but it was just the area underneath
21 the L.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

23 CHIEF LEONARD: But there was, but the debris was right
24 up into the -- right into the street.

25 MR. CHHATRE: Could you drive on Park Avenue in front of

1 the street?

2 CHIEF LEONARD: No, it was totally blocked.

3 MR. CHHATRE: Totally blocked. So nobody --

4 CHIEF LEONARD: Totally blocked, could not drive on it.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are you talking about a fence in
6 front of 1644 or the fence --

7 CHIEF LEONARD: No, it's the fence underneath the L.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- underneath the L?

9 MR. CHHATRE: Under the L.

10 CHIEF LEONARD: Under the L.

11 MR. CHHATRE: And I have a couple of questions, I'll
12 visit those at the very tail end, to understand the protocols, but
13 other than that --

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah.

15 MR. CHHATRE: -- I'll pass it onto Kelly.

16 MR. EMEABA: Good morning once again. I have a quick
17 question to Mr. DeVita. Are you with Engine 58 and Ladder 26?

18 CHIEF DeVITA: No, no. I'm with Division 3, which is
19 located on West 77th and Broadway. Engine 58 and Ladder 26 are
20 two units at -- under my command, but they operate out of the east
21 side on 5th Avenue and 112th Street.

22 MR. EMEABA: Okay. From what you mentioned earlier, you
23 were the first people to arrive on site.

24 CHIEF DeVITA: Engine 58 and Ladder 26 were the first
25 two units, one engine company and one ladder company, to arrive.

1 And then I arrived minutes later, maybe 10 minutes later.

2 MR. EMEABA: Okay. Were you able to interview those
3 Ladder 26 and Engine 58 people that arrived first?

4 CHIEF DeVITA: Can you repeat that?

5 MR. EMEABA: Did you talk to -- have you been able to
6 speak with those who were the occupants --

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Oh, since --

8 MR. EMEABA: -- of Engine 58?

9 CHIEF DeVITA: -- or that day? Since the operation?

10 MR. EMEABA: Since the incident, yes. Since they got
11 there before you.

12 CHIEF DeVITA: On that morning or just after the
13 operation, critiquing it?

14 MR. EMEABA: After the incident.

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Oh, after.

16 MR. EMEABA: Or, even that morning.

17 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes. Well -- right. Upon arrival, they
18 were heavily engaged in their operations. They at that point were
19 reporting into Chief Gells in the 12th Battalion, and Chief Gells,
20 in fact, was reporting to me. So I was -- I knew what they were
21 doing but I wasn't talking to them directly. That's the command
22 channel Chief Leonard referred to. I was talking to Chief Gells
23 and he was talking to 58 and 26 and a lot of other units on a
24 tactical channel. So I knew what they were doing but I wasn't
25 having personal conversations with them. They were heavily

1 engaged in searching and fire extinguishment.

2 Since the collapse and explosion, yes, I have, I have
3 spoken to them --

4 MR. EMEABA: Okay. You did?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: -- about the operation, yes.

6 MR. EMEABA: Going back a little bit, even before the
7 arrival to the site. I'm talking about the minutes of
8 communication between your people, the assistant men that about
9 9:30 a.m. or 9:30 hours, Engine 58 and Ladder 26, transmitted a
10 verbal alarm to the dispatch. Can you explain more what does that
11 mean? How does the verbal alarm comes and how was it done?

12 CHIEF DeVITA: A verbal alarm is an alarm that comes
13 technically within a couple of blocks of your firehouse in any
14 direction. If someone comes to the firehouse and knocks on the
15 door and says I have a medical emergency, I have a fire, any kind
16 of -- anything that would require a fire department response,
17 would be considered a verbal if it's reported to the firehouse.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: Let me clarify this. Chief Leonard
19 speaking. Normally under normal circumstances, somebody calls the
20 fire department or calls 911, and through our procedures, we get
21 dispatched. A verbal alarm is when we are actually reporting, we
22 see a fire, we see an accident, or somebody comes to quarters and
23 we initiate the process through our dispatchers from us. Do you
24 follow what I'm saying is? In other words, somebody hasn't called
25 911 and it came to us. We either saw it, heard it, or somebody

1 told us about it, and we call our dispatcher and say, listen, we
2 just had a fire happen in front of quarters, and now the
3 notification process goes the other way, and they will send
4 appropriate resources to that.

5 MR. EMEABA: Okay.

6 CHIEF LEONARD: So if we're driving down the street and
7 we see something, it's called a verbal alarm.

8 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So in this instance, within the 9:30
9 hours, how was this verbal alarm received or how was it generated?

10 CHIEF LEONARD: Well, from my understanding is they
11 heard it at first.

12 MR. EMEABA: Yes.

13 CHIEF LEONARD: They actually heard the explosion and
14 started out the door as soon as they heard the explosion, and then
15 subsequently they realized where it was, they're going in that
16 direction and, in other words, it becomes obvious where this
17 incident is, the incident's at 116th Street and Park Avenue.

18 MR. EMEABA: Okay. And, Chief DeVita, you mentioned you
19 arrived just a few minutes after the Engine 58 and Ladder 26 got
20 on site. You did establish the incident command?

21 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

22 MR. EMEABA: Okay. From the time you established the
23 incident command, did you ever have opportunity of going to the
24 site itself, the actual location that the explosion occurred?

25 CHIEF DeVITA: Was I at that site before --

1 MR. EMEABA: Yes.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: -- that day?

3 MR. EMEABA: No. After you arrived to site, you
4 established the incident command, correct?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

6 MR. EMEABA: From what you mentioned earlier.

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

8 MR. EMEABA: From the time you established the incident
9 command, can you remember leaving the incident command to go to
10 the site of the incident, the actual front?

11 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes. Oh, yes. It wasn't that far away.
12 The intersection was the command post, underneath the elevated
13 line, and the buildings were within -- or the remains of the
14 buildings were in view, and it wasn't a fair walk to go from the
15 command post to the operations area.

16 MR. EMEABA: Okay.

17 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

18 MR. EMEABA: Prior to your establishing the command post
19 or incident command post, the Engine 58 people and the Ladder 26
20 people that arrived before you, can you give us a little bit of
21 narrative what they were doing already before your arrival?

22 CHIEF LEONARD: Let me, let me just say what's going on,
23 Chief Leonard. It's the policy of the New York City Fire
24 Department that we operate under the incident command system. The
25 first arriving unit establishes incident command, all right, and

1 as each superior officer arrives, transition the -- command is
2 transitioned to that next level of command. We also have
3 extensive protocols that we don't show up at every fire and say,
4 hey, what are we going to do? They have standard operating
5 procedures what -- every engine, every ladder company, has
6 standard operating procedures of what they need to do.

7 And when they show up, that 58 Engine -- actually
8 there's video of them. Their first job was to hook up to a --
9 hook their engine up to a hydrant, get water in the line and begin
10 firefighting operations. The ladder companies have specific areas
11 of responsibility to search and rescue. This is all
12 predetermined. It's all standard operating procedures. And the
13 first battalion chief on the scene is going to ensure that those
14 -- whether he has sufficient resources on the scene or the
15 standard procedures being implemented, do we need additional
16 resources. Once -- which he did, that we needed additional
17 resources. Now that generates a response of a next level of
18 command, which is now the deputy chief.

19 The deputy chief comes in and he has standard operating
20 procedures about what level of command, what he needs to do, and
21 he evaluates, does he have sufficient resources on the scene; what
22 is going on; is the incident command system being implemented as
23 per department procedures? At that point it expands to such a
24 level that it requires the response of a staff chief, which I am,
25 and then I come in and I take it, eventually relieved by the chief

1 of operations, chief of department.

2 So this is all standard operating procedures. It's all
3 well documented in our books that companies know what to do when
4 they get there. So those units were complying with standard
5 operating procedures of the New York City Fire Department when
6 they arrived on the scene. So command was established right away,
7 and then it just transitions to where we need to be.

8 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So -- and I wanted to hear that in
9 -- based on what you said, he did not establish the command post.
10 It was already established and transferred over to him?

11 CHIEF LEONARD: What Chief DeVita does, because under
12 our standard procedures, usually the command post -- in other
13 words, when he says establishes a command post, we have a visible
14 board which is given to deputy chiefs that -- with a tent that we
15 can visibly, and it gets to a point that we need to write down
16 what we're doing. So actually the command post is the location of
17 that first battalion chief.

18 The command post subsequently was moved where we
19 established the command board, with EMS's command board, and that
20 became the command post for the interagency city command post
21 where now we physically put that board up. We have a board that
22 we can track with actually much like an aircraft carrier, where
23 they have tabs with numbers of every unit, and we put them -- we
24 draw a picture and we put the unit there. So we can look and we
25 can say 58 Engine is at this position right here.

1 MR. EMEABA: Okay. Thank you. I have a question for
2 Mr. DeVita. You mentioned there was poor visibility, and the
3 roadway is covered -- which is Park Avenue, more or less, or
4 everywhere covered with bricks. How was the visibility's
5 condition; how do you think in any form did it affect your Engine
6 58 and Ladder 26 personnel who was actually fighting the fire?

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Well, it goes back to -- this is Chief
8 DeVita. It goes back to what Chief Leonard just said about
9 standard operating procedures. We have -- we're confronted with
10 the collapse of the two buildings and there was fire. There was
11 reduced visibility due to the smoke. The engine company hooks up
12 to a hydrant for -- to secure a water source. The ladder
13 companies begin their search and rescue, and that would be if the
14 visibility was great or the visibility is poor, it's just part of
15 the initial steps we take. And then as we spend more time at the
16 scene, we start to assign companies to areas we can't see that
17 well from our vantage point, whether it be the number 2 sector on
18 116th Street or the buildings in the rear or on the fourth sector
19 on 117th and Park.

20 So we would have done similar operations regardless of
21 the amount of visibility if there was a fire present. If it was
22 great visibility or poor visibility, we would still institute our
23 standard procedures for fire with a collapse and structural damage
24 throughout the site.

25 MR. EMEABA: Okay. But in this case, you mentioned

1 there was poor visibility, correct?

2 CHIEF DeVITA: Poor, yes.

3 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So do you think or based on your
4 discussion with your personnel that was actually out there on the
5 fire, fighting the fire, were they able to tell you what they saw
6 close to this vicinity, which is property 1642, 1644, inasmuch as
7 you had bricks all over the place, what did they see, based on
8 your discussion with them? Did you discuss with them?

9 CHIEF DeVITA: The first arriving chief, Chief Gells,
10 you're speaking of I guess?

11 MR. EMEABA: Um-hum. Yes.

12 CHIEF DeVITA: We discussed -- yes, we discussed all of
13 that, the attack on the fire, the progress of that, where he had
14 his resources placed around the perimeter and what their
15 operations were, the status of their search, searches for victims,
16 and the status of the hose line placement and operations. So,
17 yes, we had that conversation.

18 MR. EMEABA: Okay. And you did mention that you did not
19 see evidence of water on the roadway and so on and so forth?

20 CHIEF DeVITA: Not at that time. Not at that time, no.

21 MR. EMEABA: Those individuals that arrived there first,
22 when close to the fire or the buildings, did they say the same
23 thing, they did not see water or whatever on the roadway?

24 CHIEF DeVITA: I can't speak for them, but I would say
25 that based on what I saw on arrival, I would guess that they had

1 the same view I had, but I can't speak for them on that.

2 MR. EMEABA: Okay. And that goes, you know, leads me
3 back again. When you arrived, did you go straight in front of
4 these properties or were you at the command post?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: I went straight to the front of the
6 building, and I walked over the pile of debris to do a face-to-
7 face with Chief Gells who was standing in the middle of the street
8 on top of the debris pile. That's where my -- that was my first
9 conversation with anybody at the time at the scene. But I did
10 have to go -- I did come from the 116th and Park intersection to
11 get to him.

12 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So how close can you say you were to
13 1642?

14 CHIEF DeVITA: From the middle of the street to the
15 curb, whatever that distance is, and -- as I guessed before, 20
16 feet or it could have been 15; it could have been 25, but it was
17 from -- the distance from the middle of the street to the front of
18 the building, whatever that is.

19 MR. EMEABA: Uh-huh. Okay.

20 CHIEF DeVITA: So pretty, you know, close. Close.

21 MR. EMEABA: And you mentioned that you had multiple
22 activities, roles you had to play; you had to move around, check
23 on the individuals at different sectors. Do you think the
24 multiple role you were involved in did not allow you to take a
25 closer examination of the environment?

1 CHIEF DeVITA: Say that again. What kind of role?

2 MR. EMEABA: You mentioned you had multiple roles.

3 CHIEF DeVITA: Multiple, multiple.

4 MR. EMEABA: Which is visiting the other sectors that
5 were set up.

6 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, not visiting. It was all done, it
7 was all done by radio --

8 MR. EMEABA: Radio.

9 CHIEF DeVITA: -- radio communication.

10 MR. EMEABA: While you remain at the command post?

11 CHIEF DeVITA: Right, right. That's the benefit of
12 having the radios and these channels, these two channels at this
13 point. We could listen to the tactical operations and could also
14 communicate with the sector commanders to make any adjustments or
15 assemble units or anything that they need to -- where, you know,
16 can be their -- his resource to take information and relay that to
17 command, incoming command; if he needs more help, if he sees
18 something, if they have victims that become visible. So it's done
19 by radio, all that reconnaissance, not a personal --

20 MR. EMEABA: Okay. Because I overheard that when you
21 were answering Ravi's question, you mentioned going down to E-117
22 Street area and all that, that was one comment with that.

23 CHIEF LEONARD: Let me just -- Chief Leonard. We're not
24 tied to that command post. There are times when we will take --
25 in other words, I was on the same pile that he was. I also went

1 to the rear of the building, just to get a quick look. In other
2 words, so I can get a better lay of the land when they can explain
3 to me what is going on. Sometimes just a quick look will give you
4 -- so it's not like we're standing in front of that command post
5 and tied to that command post. We want to stay at the command
6 post as much as possible, but we also have to look to see to get a
7 feel for what's going on.

8 MR. EMEABA: Okay. All right. Thank you. I'll pass
9 at this time.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Chris.

11 MR. STOLICKY: Good morning. This is Chris Stolickey. I
12 don't know a lot about fires, but I have a tremendous amount of
13 respect for the work you guys do. I'm more focused on the gas
14 side of the incident. Looking -- I mean, I read through the fire
15 reports I was told to last night. I just have a couple questions.
16 Early on there's mention of having to change the water line
17 because you were basically losing flow and pressure in the water
18 mains. So that's the indication of the water main break. Do you
19 have a recollection of when that happened?

20 CHIEF LEONARD: At what time was that?

21 MR. STOLICKY: Well, it's hard to follow this.

22 CHIEF LEONARD: For the simple reason, there was a time
23 came in the afternoon that we needed to get into the street and we
24 disconnected all those lines just to get those lines out of the
25 way, in other words, so heavy equipment could come in so they

1 wouldn't go over our lines.

2 MR. STOLICKY: Right.

3 CHIEF DeVITA: Not early on. That wasn't early on
4 decision.

5 CHIEF LEONARD: That wasn't early on.

6 MR. STOLICKY: It wasn't -- okay. It's early -- well,
7 it's on page 4. But it just says, it was determined that the
8 hydrant E-58 was connected to water supplied by water main and
9 needed to be shut down due to a water main leak in the exposure 1
10 street. Right --

11 CHIEF DeVITA: That was way, that was way --

12 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, I wouldn't say that that was early
13 on.

14 MR. STOLICKY: Okay.

15 CHIEF LEONARD: But you would have to interview them
16 directly to find out. If that's what they wrote on the report or
17 whatever, I would ask them.

18 MR. STOLICKY: Okay. That would be E-58?

19 CHIEF LEONARD: Engine 58.

20 MR. STOLICKY: Got it.

21 MR. CHHATRE: They're on the list.

22 MR. STOLICKY: Okay.

23 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, okay.

24 MR. STOLICKY: And just for my benefit, or I guess
25 everyone's benefit, but -- you guys have some type of meters that

1 you measure natural gas levels with.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, we do.

3 MR. STOLICKY: And there's an indication here where they
4 monitored -- it says, monitored exposure 2, 2A and 4 natural gas
5 levels. Can you talk a little bit about what that means?

6 CHIEF LEONARD: They were constantly monitoring the gas
7 levels. I don't know if it was recorded, but I know at one point,
8 probably about 3 or 4:00, we had LEL, and actually we had a
9 secondary explosion in the street. So we have three types of gas
10 meters that we use, but those initial units on the scene are going
11 to be doing firefighting operations, but the hazmat squad and the
12 rescues should have been mandatory monitoring for any type of
13 gases. Like I said, we did not know what caused this when we
14 first came in. And actually I had a discussion with -- the police
15 bomb squad came up and said what did I think, in other words, with
16 that, because it was just in this day and age when you have a
17 massive explosion, it could be. But the thing is, what we're
18 worried about at that point is life safety operations.

19 MR. STOLICKY: So what would a 2A natural gas reading
20 mean?

21 CHIEF LEONARD: 2A, I'd have to -- in other words, let
22 me just refer to the gas emergencies if I could. Off the top of
23 my head, I don't know.

24 CHIEF DeVITA: 2A meaning the grocery store, isn't it?

25 CHIEF LEONARD: Oh, oh, oh. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

1 So in other words, the exposure --

2 MR. STOLICKY: Okay. So those aren't readings, those
3 are -- okay.

4 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, 2A is --

5 CHIEF LEONARD: I'm sorry.

6 MR. SINGH: What page are you on?

7 MR. STOLICKY: On page 11.

8 CHIEF DeVITA: Just take the sectors, and if they start
9 getting letters, that means they're just --

10 CHIEF LEONARD: 2A was the corner store. 2A was -- 2A
11 is this 95 -- is this building right here. That was a one-story
12 store.

13 MR. SINGH: Just for clarification -- Leonard Singh --
14 exposure 1, 2, 3, 4, what were they? What did they say was the
15 sectors?

16 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, but what happens is, too, like in
17 other words, exposure 2 was one building. So in exposure 2, the
18 building next door to exposure 2 is now exposure 2A, and it would
19 go down the block that way. So we just labeled the sectors
20 basically based on the exposures but there was more exposures in
21 that sector than -- it went that way. It just gives us a way to
22 identify what building we're working in.

23 MR. CHHATRE: So exposure 2 is exposure in Sector 2?

24 CHIEF LEONARD: Exposure 2A is -- in other words, the
25 exposures, when you look at them, standing in front of the

1 building, looking at the building. The building to the left is
2 exposure 2. The next building to 2, going to the left is 2A, 2B.
3 The building to the rear is 3, 3A. The building to the 4 side is
4 the building to the right. If there's a building adjoining that,
5 it's 4A. In other words, then we just -- we could just identify
6 it. So, in other words, we might give an assignment to a ladder
7 company, a ladder company 1-2-3 comes in, and says we need a
8 primary search of exposure 2A, and we'll know what building he's
9 going in.

10 MR. CHHATRE: So 2A meaning -- building in front of you
11 is number 1. To your left is 2.

12 CHIEF LEONARD: Right.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Next to that will be 2A and 2B and so on.
14 Okay.

15 CHIEF LEONARD: For us, we do this every single day.
16 It's just when -- for a person not familiar with it, I understand
17 it can become a little difficult, but for us, it's just the way we
18 talk.

19 MR. STOLICKY: Yeah. That's all I have.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

21 MR. STOLICKY: Thanks.

22 MR. CHHATRE: City.

23 MR. HEYWARD: Sure. Either one of the Chiefs, Chief
24 Leonard or Chief DeVita, could you describe what the front of the
25 building looked like on the street for us?

1 CHIEF LEONARD: The front of the building, in other
2 words, when I first got there, I had to ask Chief DeVita, what did
3 it -- what was there? That's always -- what was there? And
4 because -- and then, you know, was it one building or two
5 buildings; was it under construction? But the basic building had
6 basically collapsed down straight and fallen out into the street.
7 So from the street line, like I say, against that fence line,
8 think about a gradual incline going up to where now it's almost it
9 collapsed down to a second floor level. The entire five-story
10 building had compressed into an area about two stories, and then
11 with the resultant brickwork and building falling out into the
12 street, on an angle where it was stopped by that fence.

13 So if you were standing in the middle of the street,
14 between that fence and say the curb line, you were probably -- 5
15 feet high?

16 MR. DeVITA: Yes.

17 MR. HEYWARD: And explain to me, were there cars there?
18 Were there pedestrians there? Were -- when you arrived.

19 CHIEF LEONARD: Well, we didn't know if there were
20 pedestrians there because we -- and eventually we found out there
21 were. It was right inside that doorway where they tunneled in and
22 they recovered that one body. There were cars there. There were
23 also cars in the street adjoining to it. But there were cars,
24 pedestrians, we just didn't know at that time, and that's why
25 we're doing our searches.

1 MR. HEYWARD: So the street was completely covered with
2 debris, with cars --

3 CHIEF LEONARD: In front of those two collapsed
4 buildings, exactly.

5 MR. HEYWARD: Describe to me, did you smell the odor of
6 gas at all?

7 CHIEF LEONARD: If you ask me now, I can't remember
8 smelling anything other than a lot of smoke. In other words,
9 there was just a lot of smoke in that whole area. Specifically
10 gas when I first got there, no.

11 MR. HEYWARD: Okay. There was a time though during the
12 incident that the command post was moved due to the smell of gas.
13 Do you recall that at all?

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Due to what?

15 MR. HEYWARD: Due to the smell of gas.

16 CHIEF LEONARD: I don't think we ever actually moved the
17 command post. It was just further underneath the L, but I was
18 standing -- that was later on when we had that secondary
19 explosion. We got 100 percent LEL in the corner building. We
20 were getting LEL, 100 percent LEL in the manholes, and then it
21 ignited and the entire street lifted up when we were standing
22 right there.

23 MR. HEYWARD: Okay.

24 MS. ORGIAS: May I, may I add a point of clarification,
25 when you say corner building?

1 CHIEF LEONARD: The -- in other words, exposure 2A. In
2 other words, we were standing on the -- we were standing right at
3 the northwest corner of 116th. In other words, we're standing --
4 at that point, I'm going to -- if I could just have my pen. At
5 that point, we are standing at about right here. I remember
6 standing right here when this thing went. So we're standing about
7 right here. So that -- roughly speaking, that's the northwest
8 corner, all right, right there. But that was later on in the
9 afternoon, if I remember. I think that was, I would have to say,
10 3 or 4:00 in the afternoon generally.

11 MR. HEYWARD: So you're describing a secondary explosion
12 after Con Edison cut and capped the system, stopped the flow of
13 gas?

14 CHIEF LEONARD: I do not know what, what -- in other
15 words, Con Ed was working furiously in a lot of different holes at
16 that one time, and like I said, I -- just on a personal note,
17 those guys from Con Edison doing those holes did work -- I'll tell
18 you what, they did an unbelievable job working where they were
19 working. They really, really did. I was very impressed by their
20 operations. Because they had to cut it -- they were working in
21 four or five different ways, that I could see --

22 MR. HEYWARD: Um-hum.

23 CHIEF LEONARD: -- and they were jackhammering through
24 real thick concrete and stuff. Yeah, in other words, I don't know
25 if that was residual gas. I don't know the -- where that gas came

1 from. I don't know if it was in the ground, whether it was still
2 active leaks. I can't -- I do not know that.

3 MR. HEYWARD: Okay. And then either one of you -- since
4 you were first arriving, Chief DeVita, maybe you can describe the
5 amount of fire upon arrival. In your opinion, was this a gas fed
6 fire or was it just burning debris secondary to the explosion?

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Well, just like I said, when I was, I was
8 probably 6 or 8 blocks away, and I could see the smoke go over the
9 horizon, which based on my experience in the fire department, that
10 amount of smoke, which was a heavy, a heavy black and brown and --
11 it indicated to me that we had a heavy fire condition and that was
12 some blocks away. On my arrival, that was confirmed. There was a
13 heavy fire condition. I didn't -- again, I was of the same
14 thought. I'm not sure what caused this or what kind of a -- was
15 it a terrorist act or -- I'm not sure. Was it just a collapse, a
16 general collapse due to, you know, a construction process that
17 wasn't proper and then it just happened to, you know, sever some
18 -- you know, caused a -- a fire resulted?

19 So the gas fed piece, I -- it's not something that
20 jumped out at me. It wasn't -- I didn't get hit in the face with
21 a natural gas odor. But at some point over the transmission, and
22 it could have been that Engine 58 again, and when you speak to
23 them, there was a transmission about we may have a gas fed fire
24 here. And that comes from the fact that you're putting water on
25 this fire and it's still a low torch proportion. You know,

1 normally you hit the fire and it's small pockets and the color of
2 the smoke changes. This was a fire would go out, the fire would
3 ignite. It was not lessening in intensity based on the amount of
4 water we were putting on it. So that did come up from one of the
5 fire companies. And then later on, I did get a passing -- you
6 know, there was obviously a lot of smoke which could have masked
7 the smell of gas, but I did get a whiff of gas at some point
8 during, you know, during the operation.

9 MR. HEYWARD: I'm good, Ravi. Thank you.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Lenny?

11 MR. SINGH: Good morning. Leonard Singh, Con Ed.
12 Thanks again for taking your time out today. A couple of
13 questions. I think some of it was touched upon, but I just want
14 to get my perspective on it. In terms of the fire, was there a
15 concentration -- the fire concentrated in one area of the pile or
16 the two buildings?

17 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, definitely. Definitely more --
18 the fire -- well, it was definitely more in 1644, definitely more
19 fire.

20 MR. SINGH: Back of the building, middle of the
21 building?

22 CHIEF LEONARD: More towards that exposure 2 wall there
23 was more fire. But there was a lot of fire, and like I said, in
24 the back of that building, I never got to the back of that
25 building for a little while so I don't know what the fire

1 conditions were in the back of that building, but they were
2 operating on that pile, but there was a good concentration of fire
3 in the front.

4 MR. SINGH: This is more of along the lines of the
5 question about the hydrant and the pressure. In terms of the
6 operation of your truck, the pumper, I guess the pumper trucks,
7 when they suck from the hydrant, do they kind of keep their own
8 head pressure or it relies on pressure from the hydrant?

9 CHIEF LEONARD: No, they're relying on the pressure from
10 the hydrant, but there's a couple reasons why you could, you could
11 run away from water. In other words, you know, the city maintains
12 -- depending on where you are in the city -- we need a minimum of
13 10 psi intake, but depending on the size of the main and how much
14 water is being pulled from that main, there are times where we
15 need to switch our apparatus to a bigger main. In other words, we
16 had five tower ladders operating at that time. A tower ladder at
17 that point is probably putting out about 1,000 gallons of water a
18 minute. So depending on that size of that main, whether it, you
19 know, be -- 6 is small, 8, 10, 12, 24, we could run away from
20 water, and, you know, that's what we do with that. So why we're
21 running away from water? Don't know.

22 MR. SINGH: Yeah, I think both of you said you didn't
23 smell any natural gas or any odor of gas given the smoke and all
24 the stuff that was burning. You did mention that rescue operation
25 was looking -- doing search and rescue at 1642 and you mentioned,

1 you know, hazmat procedures.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah.

3 MR. SINGH: When you went into 1642, I guess they would
4 use their LEL devices or whatever gas meter you have to take some
5 measurements. Do we know if there was any indication of natural
6 gas present during that rescue operation?

7 CHIEF DeVITA: In 16- --

8 MR. SINGH: In 1642.

9 CHIEF DeVITA: In 1642, there was -- there were reports
10 of gas; they were picking up gas on their meters, yes.

11 MR. SINGH: And would that be documented in any reports
12 anywhere?

13 CHIEF DeVITA: It's probably in the fire report. I know
14 Ladder 26 was in there initially and -- so from their perspective,
15 when you bring them in, they'll be able to give you that
16 firsthand. And then as more units came in with more sophisticated
17 meters, they were sent in also, which should be reflected in their
18 reports. But to my knowledge, there was reports of gas in the
19 1642.

20 MR. SINGH: Right. And that was the initial -- sometime
21 in the morning, the initial response?

22 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, I would say so, yes.

23 CHIEF LEONARD: Before noon.

24 MR. SINGH: Chief Leonard, you mentioned something about
25 a secondary explosion you said probably 3, 4:00 in the afternoon.

1 Would that again, would that also be in the report, the timeline
2 documented somewhere in your logs?

3 CHIEF LEONARD: Don't know. I doubt it.

4 MR. SINGH: Okay.

5 CHIEF LEONARD: I doubt it. Were you -- Frank, were you
6 there when that happened?

7 MR. McCARTON: Yeah, I was there.

8 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, so he was standing right there,
9 too.

10 MR. SINGH: Obviously a lot of debris in the street to
11 be removed to get -- to do a rescue operation. What methodology
12 was used to remove that debris? Do you remember?

13 CHIEF LEONARD: Initially they were removing it by hand.
14 In other words, they were removing it by hand. At some point we
15 had -- the fire department has a Bobcat. We brought that Bobcat
16 in, but that was probably a while. And eventually when we were
17 sure that the street was searched, the contractors brought in,
18 they had -- I guess it was one of the city agencies, but ask Frank
19 -- had heavier construction. But the fire department did have
20 Bobcats operating and a front-end loader.

21 MR. SINGH: I think that's all I have for now, Ravi.
22 Thank you very much.

23 MR. CHHATRE: Yes, this is Ravi, NTSB. A couple of
24 follow-up questions. I think Lenny asked this already, but I just
25 want to clarify. The excavation in front of 1642 and 1644, do you

1 remember when it started removing the debris from the street?

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Well, in other words -- Chief Leonard.
3 It was from the very initial part because we had to search all
4 through that debris, and then eventually the street became clear
5 of debris and that's when we noticed that at one point the street
6 seemed to be collapsing at that point. The hole had fallen and
7 the street seemed to be giving way at that point in the afternoon.
8 But we had ongoing operations because, like I said, eventually we
9 got into that front doorway of the -- where the doorway had been,
10 and we recovered a body right inside that front door.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Do you recall roughly what time?

12 CHIEF LEONARD: Well, I --

13 MR. CHHATRE: If you don't, you don't. I'm just asking.

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, that would be -- I don't have that
15 right on me.

16 CHIEF DeVITA: The original, the first victim in other
17 words, what time that was?

18 MR. CHHATRE: No, when this debris was kind of cleaned
19 up and I think the Chief --

20 CHIEF LEONARD: Well, in the street -- that was in the
21 afternoon. In other words, Frank McCarton could probably -- in
22 other words, when the street -- at what point were we talking
23 about plating the street?

24 MR. MCCARTON: Later in the afternoon.

25 CHIEF LEONARD: Right. In other words, talking about

1 probably 3, 4.

2 MR. McCARTON: 3:30, 4:00.

3 CHIEF LEONARD: Because that was at the same time that
4 that secondary explosion had happened.

5 MR. CHHATRE: So secondary explosion around 3:30, 4?

6 CHIEF LEONARD: It seemed that as -- it seemed that as
7 we cleared the street of debris, that's when the odor of gas came
8 back.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

10 CHIEF LEONARD: All right? So in other words, we
11 definitely had more of an odor of gas as we cleared the street.

12 MR. McCARTON: We cleared the cars. We cleared the
13 street.

14 CHIEF LEONARD: We cleared the street, cleared the cars,
15 you know, various things, and then all of a sudden now that's when
16 we got LEL 100 in the store and that's when we had that explosion.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Now that cleaning operation, do you have
18 any equipment like a tractor-hoe or --

19 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, we were using backhoes. We were
20 using front-end pay loader. I'm sorry. Yeah, we were using a
21 Bobcat and a front-end loader. They were both fire department.

22 MR. CHHATRE: And that was in front of this area here?

23 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, exactly.

24 MR. CHHATRE: And where the ground was, ground was later
25 on determined to be sinking.

1 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, that was when --

2 MR. CHHATRE: But the equipment was there on that
3 location earlier?

4 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, but we couldn't -- in other words,
5 as we cleared debris, then we realized the street was sinking. So
6 then we couldn't operate the -- we couldn't have -- because we
7 were having interagency meetings at that point, what, every hour
8 or whatever, and it was determined that we would need to plate the
9 street to bring in the heavy equipment, the grapplers and stuff,
10 to get into the -- more into this building. And we noticed that
11 the -- it started off as a small hole and eventually spread out.

12 MR. CHHATRE: I guess what I'm trying to -- I'm always
13 trying to create a timeframe in my mind, and my question is where
14 the hole later on was in front of 1642 --

15 CHIEF LEONARD: Um-hum.

16 MR. CHHATRE: -- close to that, was there any heavy
17 equipment operating before the hole was discovered?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The pre-clearing was initiated
19 from the northerly direction, pushing south.

20 MR. CHHATRE: South.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And maybe coming from that fence
22 forward, but mainly we -- that's how we accessed the area, from
23 the north, so that the Bobcat and the front-end loader were
24 coming, basically coming in from the north to the south
25 approaching that area. And when it became clear to us that we

1 started to see -- when we cleared it, it started to go downhill a
2 bit, that's when we backed off and --

3 CHIEF LEONARD: Right.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- had a meeting and said, you
5 know what, we don't want any of our machinery falling in; we're
6 going to stop right here and then address other possible solutions
7 like plating and then fill eventually came into the picture. But
8 we didn't -- there was no heavy machinery on that part. That was
9 the by-hand area and then we attacked from north to south.

10 MR. CHHATRE: And then you discovered the hole?

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

12 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So that was a non-machinery area.

14 MR. CHHATRE: And if you were to arrive at the scene,
15 I'm just trying to find out what kind of protocols and procedures.
16 The Chief mentioned earlier you have all kinds of protocols and
17 procedures. Do you have a gas emergency protocol and procedure
18 for evacuating any building, I mean, in case there's a gas odor --

19 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, we have --

20 MR. CHHATRE: -- in a similar structure?

21 CHIEF LEONARD: We have a gas emergency protocol. It's
22 a training bulletin. It's a -- you had provided them, the NTSB
23 with this.

24 MS. ORGIAS: Yes.

25 CHIEF LEONARD: You know, it's a 23-page document on gas

1 emergencies. There's also, in other words, what procedures.
2 There's also a quick tactics chart from the type of incident, from
3 a minor indoor gas leak to a major indoor gas leak, outdoor gas
4 leak, underground gas leak. There's all sorts of tactics or, in
5 other words, procedures that we have in place for what is going
6 on.

7 MR. CHHATRE: When did you send that?

8 MS. ORGIAS: Twice. In August I submitted it to Ben, I
9 believe, directly. And then I submitted it --

10 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. I need to go back and track that.

11 CHIEF LEONARD: Do you want this? I got another one --

12 MR. CHHATRE: If I can have that.

13 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah. Sure. In other words, this is
14 a --

15 MR. CHHATRE: Great.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's okay to give it to him?

17 MS. ORGIAS: Yes, yes.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: Okay.

19 MR. CHHATRE: So this is the protocol here for
20 evacuating for a gas odor?

21 CHIEF LEONARD: Right.

22 MR. CHHATRE: And typically a building structure like
23 that, how long it takes to evacuate a building like that?

24 CHIEF LEONARD: It depends on the situation. In other
25 words -- I ran the numbers. Ending in June -- I'm sorry, for the

1 period of 7/1/13 to 6/30/14, we had 17,849 confirmed gas leaks
2 that the New York City Fire Department responded to. Okay, those
3 are the final dispositions of those. Those are 911 calls. Those
4 are where we actually went and we found some sort of gas emergency
5 that we mitigated, from the most simple leak in a stove to the
6 Park Avenue collapse. So how fast can we evacuate a building?
7 It's hard to say. You know, are people sleeping or not sleeping?
8 It's very difficult to say.

9 MR. CHHATRE: That's all I have.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have, if I may.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can you just point out, Chief
13 DeVita or Chief Leonard, exactly where the hole was when it was
14 discovered on the map for us all.

15 CHIEF LEONARD: Okay. Well, is that blue circle
16 supposed to be the hole or --

17 MR. CHHATRE: That's where the water main break was
18 identified --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

20 MR. CHHATRE: -- by Frank.

21 CHIEF LEONARD: Okay.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's where we identified it.

23 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, well, I think it --

24 CHIEF LEONARD: I thought it was --

25 CHIEF DeVITA: I'm thinking more like over here

1 somewhere.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, I'm -- actually I'm even
3 thinking --

4 CHIEF DeVITA: You're going further?

5 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah. I'm even thinking more over
6 here.

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, it was --

8 CHIEF LEONARD: Because remember there was a column
9 here? There was a column from the -- that was supporting the
10 railroad track.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Right.

12 CHIEF LEONARD: It was about right in here, and we
13 actually were worried about that because of the tracks, and we had
14 the MTA bring their engineers in, and they said, no, those
15 footings went down to bedrock, that you didn't have to worry about
16 that. But in other words -- in other words, if you -- because
17 eventually the street had a pretty big decent size hole, but I
18 would say, in other words, if you put it in there, that's --

19 CHIEF DeVITA: It was around there somewhere.

20 CHIEF LEONARD: It was around there.

21 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, it was -- if that's the water leak,
22 it was north of that, whether it was right at the building lines
23 or --

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Does that help at all? It's a
25 picture of the streets.

1 CHIEF DeVITA: Do you mind if I take it closer?

2 MR. EMEABA: We're not talking about two different
3 things here?

4 CHIEF LEONARD: Which are the collapsed buildings?
5 These are the collapsed buildings.

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) talking about.

7 CHIEF LEONARD: In other words, I'm going to -- in other
8 words, looking at this, I'm going to say directly almost like in
9 the middle of the street between these two columns. In other
10 words, it definitely -- there's the column we were concerned
11 about, not this column because this is going -- I think.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So a little north of that E there
13 then, I guess, right?

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Right. A little, a little north of
15 that, where the letter E is.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Let him look at it, Ravi.

17 MR. CHHATRE: So that -- where will that put it?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So the E in -- I just messed it
19 up. I'm sorry.

20 MR. CHHATRE: So we can say -- was it 1644?

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Which could have been, could have
22 been at the party wall between 1644 and 46, somewhere around
23 there.

24 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, that's --

25 MR. CHHATRE: Somewhere in there in the middle, in the

1 middle of the street?

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Somewhere in there in the middle of the
3 street, exactly. That's where we originally noticed it.

4 MR. CHHATRE: So somewhere in here, you would say?

5 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, that's putting it right between
6 where me and him are. That's a pretty good representation right
7 in there.

8 MR. STOLICKY: So it that the physical collapse or the
9 sink hole? There's two things, right?

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That was the hole, right?

11 CHIEF LEONARD: That was the hole.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Down at the street.

13 MR. SINGH: That was the hole where you could actually
14 see beneath?

15 MR. LEONARD: That was right at the crater. That was
16 the crater. That was the hole. I don't know --

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Not the decline. The decline
18 started much further --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right, the initial hole was at
20 that point.

21 MR. SINGH: Right.

22 MR. CHHATRE: And that's where the water was coming out?

23 CHIEF DeVITA: I never saw water coming out, but there
24 was --

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There was never water was coming

1 out.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: -- when they finally got a look in there,
3 that's -- you know, they had to take the grapplers to expand this
4 opening and that's when we were able to see that it was undermined
5 and there was a water condition or water pipe running through that
6 area, but not until -- nobody was getting close to that because
7 that was like, you know, a jet engine there every so often, you
8 know, fire would blow out of it. So nobody was getting close to
9 it until they started opening it up and --

10 MR. SINGH: Chief DeVita, so you said a grappler. Was
11 that the --

12 CHIEF DeVITA: That's the thing that --

13 MR. SINGH: -- backhoe or that was Russo's big machine,
14 right? That was our machinery?

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, yeah, that was probably Russo.
16 Yeah, the thing with -- it's got the, you know, the --

17 CHIEF LEONARD: We don't have a grappler. So it was
18 whoever the contractor was.

19 MR. SINGH: So that would have been later in the day
20 when Russo got on the scene?

21 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes, yes, later in the day when they
22 opened the street up.

23 MR. HEYWARD: So just to be clear, while you were moving
24 the debris from north to south --

25 MR. CHHATRE: Identify yourself.

1 MR. HEYWARD: Leon Heyward.

2 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

3 MR. HEYWARD: New York City Department of
4 Transportation.

5 So while you were moving the debris from north to south,
6 you eventually uncovered --

7 CHIEF DeVITA: And we're not pushing it south. We're
8 taking it and --

9 MR. HEYWARD: You're picking it up and --

10 CHIEF LEONARD: Some of it, some of it went underneath
11 the L.

12 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

13 CHIEF LEONARD: (Indiscernible) that fence.

14 MR. HEYWARD: So you're actually just moving it.

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

16 MR. HEYWARD: You pick it up and then you take it
17 someplace --

18 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.

19 MR. HEYWARD: -- and dump it somewhere else?

20 CHIEF DeVITA: It's not being pushed south, but --

21 CHIEF LEONARD: Actually really what we're doing is just
22 trying to move the debris so we can search the debris.

23 MR. HEYWARD: Right.

24 CHIEF LEONARD: So in other words, it wasn't debris
25 removal. It was selected debris removal for search purposes.

1 MR. HEYWARD: Right.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: Not for to remove it for anything else.

3 MR. HEYWARD: Right, right, you just wanted to see what
4 was in it?

5 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes, exactly.

6 MR. HEYWARD: And then you came upon the hole. At some
7 point you came upon the hole while you were searching through the
8 debris?

9 CHIEF DeVITA: It was more of a decline, more of a
10 depression in the road we came across. That was our first
11 indication that --

12 MR. HEYWARD: That something was going on.

13 CHIEF DeVITA: There was something was going on.

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes.

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Not a hole, a depression like --

16 MR. HEYWARD: Okay. So you --

17 CHIEF DeVITA: -- it sunk.

18 MR. HEYWARD: So there was depression --

19 CHIEF DeVITA: Um-hum.

20 MR. HEYWARD: -- and then at some point there was the
21 hole?

22 CHIEF DeVITA: As the debris removal continued --

23 MR. HEYWARD: Continued.

24 CHIEF DeVITA: -- some of it again by hand, because we
25 knew that it was an area that we didn't want to put heavy

1 machinery into, it became more obvious there was a --
2 MR. HEYWARD: A hole.
3 CHIEF DeVITA: -- an actual crater, yes.
4 CHIEF LEONARD: Yeah, there was a physical hole.
5 CHIEF DeVITA: A physical hole.
6 MR. HEYWARD: So as you -- as the debris was being
7 lifted away --
8 CHIEF DeVITA: Yes.
9 MR. HEYWARD: -- you eventually found a hole?
10 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.
11 MR. HEYWARD: That there was a hole down there?
12 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.
13 MR. HEYWARD: And when you came upon the hole, was it
14 just debris in it? Was anything happening? Like there was no
15 water in it? Was anything -- other than debris --
16 CHIEF DeVITA: Initially, we didn't really -- we weren't
17 able to see in the hole because it wasn't that big. It was
18 only, you know --
19 CHIEF LEONARD: Eighteen inches, 2 feet?
20 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, yeah, about this, 18 inches round,
21 something like that.
22 MR. HEYWARD: Okay. All right.
23 CHIEF DeVITA: So there was really no way to look in
24 other than -- you really couldn't -- you could see it was just
25 like -- you didn't see dirt. You didn't see gravel. It was just

1 a black hole, like there was nothing there.

2 MR. HEYWARD: Right. Oh, okay, so it was --

3 CHIEF DeVITA: It was a black hole.

4 MR. HEYWARD: Okay.

5 CHIEF DeVITA: You couldn't see if it was 6 inches deep
6 or 20 feet deep.

7 CHIEF LEONARD: Or you couldn't see whether there was
8 water in it.

9 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

10 CHIEF LEONARD: In other words, there was no --

11 CHIEF DeVITA: We didn't hear water gushing.

12 MR. HEYWARD: Nothing coming out?

13 CHIEF LEONARD: Nothing coming out.

14 CHIEF DeVITA: It wasn't a geyser.

15 CHIEF LEONARD: All we know was that slowly the street
16 was sinking --

17 MR. HEYWARD: Right.

18 CHIEF LEONARD: -- as we covered the street, the street
19 was sinking.

20 MR. HEYWARD: Right, right.

21 CHIEF DeVITA: And that's where the secondary and
22 tertiary -- how many explosions occurred afterwards? That was one
23 of the points of exhaust for the gas.

24 MR. HEYWARD: Right. So the explosions didn't happen
25 there. The explosions happened away from there.

1 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, it's hard to -- there was --

2 MR. HEYWARD: No, I mean, the later explosion.

3 CHIEF LEONARD: It's hard to say because, like I say, I
4 was standing on the corner like we had mentioned before, and the
5 manhole and the sewer were right behind me and in front of me
6 blew.

7 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah.

8 CHIEF LEONARD: They blew right there. They heaved.

9 CHIEF DeVITA: Right. It was hard to tell where exactly
10 it was because you felt, like every now and then, like you'd feel
11 a big -- like a vibration, like a mini earthquake or something.
12 And like we had a piece of the building still standing of 1646.
13 We were worried about that coming down because of the, these --

14 CHIEF LEONARD: Vibrations.

15 CHIEF DeVITA: -- residual explosions and vibrations,
16 yes. So that was it. It wasn't -- it didn't really tell us too
17 much other than that there was a hole and it was, based on our
18 experience, on my experience, undermining somehow of that street.

19 MR. HEYWARD: Right. Underneath the street.

20 CHIEF LEONARD: We know -- put it this way. This is
21 Chief Leonard. It was undermining of the street, cause unknown at
22 that point --

23 MR. HEYWARD: Right.

24 CHIEF LEONARD: -- that we needed to address.

25 MR. HEYWARD: Okay.

1 MR. CHHATRE: That's all I have.

2 MR. EMEABA: Kelly from NTSB. Just to get to what you
3 just mentioned now, you said there were undermining of the street
4 that needed to be addressed. Which location are you referring to?

5 CHIEF DeVITA: Of the initial -- well, in that -- where
6 we made those Xs, just I guess north of the blue circle.

7 CHIEF LEONARD: In other words --

8 MR. EMEABA: Which of them did you identify --

9 CHIEF LEONARD: Okay. Let me just -- these Xs represent
10 where we estimated that first hole was.

11 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

12 CHIEF LEONARD: But the undermining of the street ran
13 like, in other words, an area that big. Would you concur with
14 that?

15 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, yeah.

16 CHIEF LEONARD: Because what happened is, in other
17 words, so then it's just slowly sloping down. So in other words,
18 you know, at this point. But we couldn't see in so we don't know
19 how much of the street was actually undermined. All we knew that
20 there was a slope developing. And that's why I'm saying this
21 column over here, we were concerned about that because it ran all
22 the way over to that column. So, you know, what are we talking?
23 A 20-foot diameter slope?

24 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, yeah.

25 CHIEF LEONARD: The total slope from the outside where

1 it's level, slowly going down --

2 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

3 CHIEF LEONARD: -- probably a 20-foot diameter, would be
4 that.

5 MR. EMEABA: I mean, I listened to what both of you
6 said, the clearing of the road actually started on the north end
7 going south picking the debris and taking them away, not really to
8 scrape through, correct? On your arrival when you had your fire
9 engine and the ladder engine or ladder truck, before the clearing,
10 where were those equipment stationed while the work was being
11 done, while the fire was being fought?

12 CHIEF LEONARD: I'm pretty sure 58 Engine was right on
13 the corner on that hydrant on that corner. If I remember
14 correctly, I think there was a hydrant right here, and that's
15 where Engine 58 was. When I got there, there was a tower ladder
16 right here, right. There was another tower ladder right over here
17 somehow, a tower ladder over here. Then there was a -- was there
18 a tower ladder over in this area?

19 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, there was --

20 CHIEF LEONARD: They had come down --

21 CHIEF DeVITA: Yeah, there was two --

22 CHIEF LEONARD: You have to look at the pictures. The
23 pictures -- there's a lot of pictures of where the tower ladders
24 were positioned, and those tower ladders, the positioning early on
25 was the initial position of those tower ladders.

1 MR. EMEABA: Okay.

2 CHIEF LEONARD: So if you get an overhead picture early
3 on, which I know they do exist, I've seen them, that would show
4 you the exact position.

5 MR. EMEABA: Yes, and --

6 CHIEF LEONARD: And the apparatus are well marked, so
7 you should be able to pick out the numbers.

8 CHIEF DeVITA: Right.

9 MR. EMEABA: So you were fighting the fire from 16th
10 [sic] Street?

11 CHIEF DeVITA: We were fighting the fire from 116th
12 Street. We were fighting the fire from Park Avenue. And then we
13 had people who had brought hose lines in through this corner
14 building. There was a walkway and from here, this was a, like a
15 -- I'm going to say a park.

16 MR. EMEABA: Yes.

17 CHIEF DeVITA: But they --

18 MR. EMEABA: A playground.

19 CHIEF DeVITA: A playground. But they put ladders up
20 and they had hose lines up into the rear because that's where they
21 rescued the one lady from. The Rescue 1 accessed that -- this
22 part of the building remained standing. There was that one --
23 that corner here --

24 MR. EMEABA: Yes.

25 CHIEF DeVITA: -- but the rest of it had come down.

1 They rescued her off that pile. She was -- I think there was two
2 people rescued in the back. But they had come in through this
3 building opening into the playground, put ladders and hose lines
4 up and came in through the rear of the building.

5 MR. EMEABA: Okay.

6 CHIEF DeVITA: And that's where they were operating,
7 back there.

8 MR. EMEABA: One more question. At the beginning, it's
9 mentioned and based on evidence, there were vehicles on the travel
10 lane and there were vehicles at the roadway.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm sorry. What were they? I'm
12 sorry.

13 MR. EMEABA: There were vehicles on the travel -- that
14 south travel, traveling lane on Park Avenue, which is in front of
15 the property. I mean the Park Avenue south direction has two
16 lane, one for parking, one for driving, correct?

17 CHIEF LEONARD: Um-hum.

18 MR. EMEABA: And we had, you know, at the time of the
19 incident, there were vehicles on the road, driving road, driving
20 path lane, and then there are some that were in the parking lane.
21 After the incident, the vehicle that were trapped in the traveling
22 lane and the vehicle that were parked on the parking lane, when
23 were they removed from the time you arrived?

24 CHIEF LEONARD: It was a while before they were removed
25 because we -- in other words, I would say -- well, it was ongoing

1 up until the -- I'm trying to think in the afternoon.

2 CHIEF DeVITA: It was later in the afternoon. It was
3 later in the afternoon and they --

4 CHIEF LEONARD: When the last vehicles, when they
5 brought in the police department tow trucks. But some of those
6 vehicles that were right in front were pushed underneath the --
7 under the L, like I think the FBI agent's car and a couple of
8 other cars were under there, but then there were other cars pulled
9 forward onto 116th Street.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They were all moved to the north,
11 correct?

12 CHIEF LEONARD: No, they were all moved to the -- I
13 think they were moved to the south, weren't they? Because that
14 was one of the things, we were talking about disconnecting --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Break lines, right?

16 CHIEF LEONARD: Right, we had to break the lines to get
17 those tow trucks in. And they were moved to 116th Street, but
18 others were moved east under the -- because remember all those
19 damaged cars were sitting there?

20 MR. EMEABA: Pushed them under there, right.

21 CHIEF LEONARD: Pushed them underneath there. Some of
22 them were done by PD. Some of them were done by us.

23 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So you mentioned this, some were
24 moved by towing truck?

25 CHIEF LEONARD: Yes.

1 MR. EMEABA: And what other equipment did you use in
2 moving them?

3 CHIEF LEONARD: I'm pretty sure we used our Bobcat.
4 Didn't we use our Bobcat with chains, just to drag them out of
5 there? I'd have to -- I don't know exactly but it's just my
6 recollection that they were using our heavy equipment to -- as
7 they removed rubble, chained, just to get it out of the way and
8 clear that street. And then later on, the police -- they may have
9 been pulled like forward a little, just to clear the front of the
10 building, and then the police came with their tow trucks and then
11 physically removed them from that block.

12 MR. EMEABA: Okay. And at the time that the vehicles on
13 the parking lane in front of 1642 and 1644 were towed away or
14 removed, however means, did you people or did anybody see a hole
15 in front of 1642 where we have the water break?

16 CHIEF DeVITA: I'm not sure of the timing of that. I
17 would say when those vehicles were being removed, I'm not even
18 sure how deep the debris was still in that area, so I don't know
19 if the hole was visible to anybody at that point. And if it was,
20 it wasn't made known to me and I didn't personally witness it,
21 witness the hole at that time.

22 MR. EMEABA: Yeah, the reason I ask that question is
23 that based on the fact that vehicles were parking on there and
24 there were -- the debris would have actually fallen on top of the
25 vehicle and the vehicle, whichever one that was parked in there,

1 would have actually blocked the position of this hole, we're
2 talking about the water break. That's why I asking when the
3 vehicle was removed or whichever vehicle, you know, was the hole
4 observed or not?

5 CHIEF LEONARD: Chief Leonard. I can't answer that. I
6 do not know that. I do not know.

7 MR. EMEABA: Okay. Thank you.

8 MR. CHHATRE: Anybody have any questions?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm all set.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't have any questions.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you so much for coming. I know you
12 are very busy people, and we appreciate you spending your time.

13 Off the record.

14 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE
 LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE
 EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK
 MARCH 12, 2014
 Interview of James Leonard and
 Anthony DeVita, Jr.

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-14-MP-002

PLACE: Brooklyn, New York

DATE: September 30, 2014

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber