TIP OF THE HELMET TO: The members of Engine 93 and Ladder 45 and Battalion 13 for taking the lead in a “Make a Wish” event for a young man named Michael Schatzel. Countless hours were expended in the 3-day event to make this person an honorary Firefighter. Special thanks go to Lieutenant Mike Ciampo and Fr. Brian Doyle of Ladder 45.


TIP OF THE HELMET TO: The members of Engine 45, Ladder 58, Battalion 18 and all the other members of Battalion 18 for running the annual memorial service at the Firefighter’s Monument on Riverside Drive on September 11th 2015. In addition, the members of Engine 45, Ladder 58, and Battalion 18 (both past and present) raised enough money to purchase and donate a “Fire Family Transport Van” in memory of Lieutenant Patty Sullivan L-58 who died of Cancer as a result of 9/11 World Trade Center exposure.
Throughout the 1970s, the Bronx experienced an incredible amount of fire duty. As the calendar turned to 1980, the heavy fire duty in the Bronx showed no signs of abating. The night tour of August 8, 1980 started as a typically busy tour in the Bronx. It was a hot night and units went from Box to Box responding to the alarms being transmitted by the Bronx Fire Dispatchers. At approximately 0115 hours, an “All Hands” was transmitted for a fire on Bathgate Avenue and E. 180 St. Due to the heavy activity, some units responded to that box from a distance. However, at 0137 hours, Bronx Fire Dispatchers transmitted Bronx Box 3107 for a structural fire at 4251 Third Avenue (at the Southwest corner of E.178 St.). Engine 46 was in quarters. As they turned the corner onto Third Avenue from the Cross Bronx Expressway service road, fire could be seen shooting into the sky from blocks away. At 0141 hours, Engine 46 arrived at the fire and transmitted a 10-75.

There was heavy fire on all floors in two vacant wood frame buildings. Fire was blowing through the roof. The buildings were three stories in height and were attached. They were made of “braced frame” construction. The windows on the ground floor were covered with tin. 4251 Third Avenue was a corner building. The amount of fire encountered on arrival created a large fire front and a flying brand problem.

Engine 46 and Engine 88 stretched 2 ½ inch hand lines and began attacking the fire.
Battalion Chief James Slevin of Battalion 19 arrived at the fire and special called a Tower Ladder. Ladder 33 was dispatched. At 0144 hours, he transmitted the “All-Hands”.

The first two ladders to arrive (Ladders 56 and 38) were aerial ladders. They left the front of the building available for the incoming Tower Ladder. Ladder 56 and Ladder 38 began examining Exposures 3 and 4 for extension from radiant heat and flying brands.

During this period of time, Third Avenue was being excavated. The two lanes on the West side of Third Avenue (the lanes closest to the fire) could not be used to set up fire apparatus. Ladder 33 arrived at the Box commanded by Lieutenant Roy Levesque. The other Firefighters working in Ladder 33 were: Fr. Bill Spinelli, Fr. Kevin Lavelle, Fr. Ed Gordon, Fr. Don Cloud, and the Chauffeur, Neal Gray. Fr. Gray set up Ladder 33’s apparatus in the middle of Third Avenue. Ladder 33’s apparatus was 55 feet away from the fire buildings. The boom was approaching full extension in order to effectively operate on the buildings.

Battalion Chief Tony Alt, Battalion 18 and Deputy Chief Carlos Rivera, Division 7 arrived at the Box. D.C. Rivera ordered all hand lines to be shut down and large caliber streams be used. Engine 88 supplied Ladder 33’s apparatus and Engine 46 operated their apparatus mounted Stang Nozzle on the fire. Battalion Chief Alt was sent to the rear of the buildings to supervise operations in the rear.

Rescue 3 was commanded by Capt. William Ryan. They arrived at the box and conducted a perimeter examination of the building, looking for trapped occupants and collapse indicators. They started pulling the tin off the buildings so Ladder 33 could have access to the fire on the lower floors. At 0206 hours a minor collapse occurred in 4249 Third Avenue. This prompted D.C. Rivera Div. 7 and B.C. Slevin Battalion 19 to establish collapse zones and conduct a roll call to make sure everyone was out of harm’s way.
In Ladder 33’s bucket was Lieutenant Levesque, Fr. Spinelli, and Fr. Gordon. Their boom was near full extension as they operated over the excavation area of Third Avenue. They were being aggressive in attacking the fire with the large caliber stream of the tower ladder. They were moving closer to the building so that the powerful stream could penetrate into the building.

Fr. Jay Jonas of Engine 46 was operating the Stang Nozzle on Engine 46’s apparatus. He was relieved on the top deck of the pumper by another Firefighter and he went to the street. He was watching the operation of Ladder 33 from E. 178 Street. The bucket of the tower ladder was positioned at the second floor and aiming their large caliber stream upward to the top floor. Suddenly, a loud “crack” was heard and instantly the corner building collapsed on top of Ladder 33’s bucket. It was an “inward/outward” type collapse. The entire building collapsed (a global collapse). The boom of Ladder 33’s apparatus dipped downward and went back upward. The bucket and the Firefighters inside it were covered in rubble from the collapse.
The Chauffeur of Ladder 33, Fr. Neal Gray, immediately lowered the boom closer to the ground. Rescue 3 rapidly started rescue operations to get the trapped Firefighters out. A “Mayday” was transmitted.

At the time of the collapse, the nearby fire on Bathgate Ave. and E. 180 St. was under control and units were in the process of taking up hose lines. The Firefighters who were operating at the nearby fire heard the “Mayday” and came running to the collapse.

The rescue efforts to remove the trapped and injured Firefighters moved quickly. In short order, the trapped Firefighters were extricated and carried into the rear of Rescue 3’s apparatus. Both Lieutenant Levesque and Fr. Gordon were on the outer sides of the bucket. They both sustained similar serious injuries. The railing of the bucket was pushed into both men and they suffered internal injuries. Fr. Spinelli was operating the Stang Nozzle in the bucket and that seemed to protect him from the injuries sustained by Lieutenant Levesque and Fr. Gordon. All three men were transported to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. Both Lieutenant Levesque and Fr. Gordon required surgery. Fr. Spinelli was released from the hospital the next day. Lieutenant Levesque, Fr. Gordon, and Fr. Spinelli all made it back to full duty.
The fire was placed “under control” at 0229 hours. However, units were on the scene for a “watch line” for most of the next day to extinguish pockets of fire.
Thanks to the following people who contributed to this essay: Lieutenant Roy Levesque (Ret.), Lieutenant Bill Spinelli (Ret.), Lt. Kevin Lavelle (Ret.), Fr. Chris Roberto E-48, D.C. Vincent Dunn (Ret.), FDNY Photo Unit, FDNY Fire Records Unit.

**RANDOM THOUGHTS ON BRACED FRAME BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND COLLAPSE:**

Braced frame buildings are susceptible to inward/outward collapses.

Braced frame buildings are even more susceptible to inward/outward collapse when it is a corner building or a building without attached buildings.

Braced frame buildings are in greater danger of collapse when the fire is on a lower floor. The lower floors carry more weight and there is no increase in size of the structural members to compensate for it. The mortise and tenon joint of the corner posts support more weight than those on the upper floors.
This construction makes the failure of that joint a total building collapse (a global collapse).

There may be no collapse warning signs of a potential inward/outward collapse of a braced frame building. The only collapse indicator would be a heavy fire on a lower floor attacking the mortise and tenon joint.

The taller a wood frame building is, the more susceptible it is to collapse. Three story wood frame buildings collapse more often than do one or two story buildings.

In braced frame construction, there are four corner posts. Attached to these corner posts are girts which are attached by mortising out the corner post and creating a tenon on each end of the girts. The girts support the 2x4’s which make the framing for the walls.

Braced frame structures are constructed in a similar fashion as are high rise buildings. The gravity resistance structural elements are large primary structural members. High rise buildings have columns and girders. Braced frame wood frame buildings have corner posts and girts. The 2x4’s for the outer walls support no weight other than their own and the exterior sheathing and fire escapes if the building is so equipped.
The factors that contribute to the inward/outward collapse of a braced frame wooden building are:

1. Fire Destruction of Bearing Walls
2. Failure at the mortise and tenon joint
3. Exterior wall overload

Fires in wood frame buildings can be described as three dimensional fires. There may be fire inside the building, inside the walls, and on the exterior of the walls. The bearing walls in these buildings are combustible.

When operating a tower ladder master stream at a fire weakened building in danger of collapse, the bucket floor should be a distance greater than the height of the wall above. Strongly consider a flanking strategy when operating a master stream at a fire weakened building.

No matter how large the main structural elements are of a braced frame building (corner posts and girts), they are only as strong as the mortise and tenon connection. The corner post has holes cut in it to accept the tenon of the girt. The tenon of the girt is smaller than the girt. Anything that is less massive is inherently less fire resistive and less collapse resistive.


Deputy Chief Jay Jonas,
Division 7
Roy Levesque E42 (top)
Capt. Ryan R3 (top right)
Rear of fire building did not collapse (bottom right)