



Quackenbush Warehouse Fire - Paterson Fire Department's History

John Tippett

Hello and welcome to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation podcast series honoring the sacrifice of firefighters killed in the line of duty. I'm John Tippett, director of Fire Service Programs. And on behalf of Board Chair Troy Markel and Executive Director Ron Siarnicki, I would like to thank you for joining us for this series. This episode brings us to Paterson, New Jersey, where we will discuss the 1938 Quackenbush warehouse fire that took the lives of five Paterson firefighters: Deputy Chief James Sweeney and the majority of Engine 5's crew, Captain John Devenport and fireman Louis Rodeski, Matthew O'Neill and William Lynch. We're honored today to have as our guests, subject matter expert Paterson Fire Chief Brian McDermott. Chief, thank you for having us.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

Well, you know that the thanks goes to you and what the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation does to increase awareness for firefighter safety throughout this entire country. So really, I thank you for being here in the great city of Paterson, where we have the Great Falls, great food and just great family here. So, I consider my firefighters here family great.

John Tippett

Well, thank you, Chief. Appreciate that. With Paterson's long history, let's go back to 1938 and talk about a little bit about what the city and the fire department was like in that era.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

The city was all about mills. There was silk mills that were dotting the landscape here. This was the silk industry, the silk, I guess, Mecca. And, you know, slowly that went away across into the fifties, into abroad, into China. But during the thirties where it was, it was going good with that. And so we were dotted with mills and warehouses.

And this was, you know, we didn't have all these suburban malls here. So this was the center of everybody's universe for shopping. So Quackenbush, my brothers, and a number of others, our main street was just bustling, full of people. It was just what you've seen in old pictures, a fire that happened in that in those days was akin to a movie, you know, so we'd get people that

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

would just line the streets to see a fire and marvel at the fire, especially downtown.

And these big metal fires, they'd get thousands of spectators that would watch these fires. With that, we had a bigger fire department, of course, because things are more difficult to operate. It wasn't as easy and as quick as the electronic notifications we get through our paging systems. We don't have, they didn't have the diesel fast fire engines with, you know, with effective hoses and pumps.

You know, they still had their motor driven at that point, but certainly much different. They were operating with 13 engines, three ladder companies, and a satellite squad company. And they fought the fires with no Scott packs, no air packs. You know, that was still almost in that bearded era where you got to take your beard wet and then cover your face with a rubber band, old school leather lung type.

You know, one of the things that we have all thankfully learned from and we benefited from technology with that SCBA, they didn't have that. So what they were doing was basically overcoming them and, you know, taking years off their life with every fire that they would go to. Sure. And the fires there were probably in a realm of about 400 to 450 fires a year at that point.

Of course, record keeping was different. And one of the things that I focus on is the handwriting and journals and the way that they wrote and spoke about fires in that day. And if you look at the news articles reporting for these fires, they just so eloquently get across what happened at these fires and mostly the heroism and hard work of our firefighters.

It's pretty...it's a unique read. What I used when I see those old, old journals with the beautiful script writing. And of course, more importantly, the fact that of the respect that the news reporters had, how they wrote about how the firefighters fought so valiantly and use just beautiful words to describe what they did. And that goes to today, it's the same thing of what we do. And we should be using those same words.

John Tippett

Absolutely. This is a great point to point out that there are two gentlemen that have been very instrumental in preserving Paterson's history, Dr. Thomas Dayspring and retired Deputy Chief Kevin Hancock brought this fire to our attention. And as you mentioned, Dr. Dayspring, in one of our off camera conversations, has been the department historian and really done a lot of research here. So how did you come to learn about the Quackenbush fire?

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

I can tell you I came to learn about the fire was when I first came on the job. I had a great fire Captain Scott McGillvary. I was at Engine Company 6 on the south side of the city, and he made sure that I learned about each fire, that I learned from it. And what he would do is drive around the city and point out areas where these happened.

You know, Frank Mancinelli and he starts talking about the church roof collapse, or we start talking about the firefighter that fell off the fire engine and why we have the man-saver bars, which we call the Bittner Bars for our Walter Bittner. He made sure I knew where they were. So, if there was a plaque anywhere in the city, he made sure to take me to it and show it to me and say, "This is where it happened, and this is what happened."

And over the years, as you grow, you just go along in life and it kind of just stays in the back of your mind. And as I grew, I made sure to turn the lessons I learned from Captain McGillvary over to those that worked for me. And then when Dr. Dayspring and Deputy Chief Hancock and some others stepped up and really took this to life and put the pictures into the website and started really focusing on making sure that our people were properly honored, that's when it really hit home for me. I think. And, you know, passing this on to those that we mentor is very important.

John Tippett

Tell us about the March 12th fire at the Quackenbush warehouse. Give our listeners a sense of what was happening that day.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

It's a warehouse in the back of the Quackenbush Department store that was right on Van Houten Street. Very, very busy, right off of Main Street, very busy downtown area. For us, it's part of our historic district. Then it was the bustling Mecca of shopping. It was like going down Fifth Avenue in New York City, in New Jersey, here, actually.

But it was where everybody was when the firefighters arrived and they found heavy fire. They went, they tried to make an attack and they backed out like so many fires that we've been to. And just as they backed out, they threw heavy master streams at the fire and when they backed out to the safe location, they were able to put the fire out.

What's different for this fire is, it wasn't during the active firefight thing, so to speak, or the active part. The initial attack on the fire. They had this fire under control. They knew that the fire at the building itself was dilapidated. And what the individuals here were trying to do was say, how do we effectively take this building down this wall that's leaning so precariously?

Fire Chief Brian McDermott

How do we take this wall down to make it safe for our citizens, for the firefighters, that we can walk away from this building? And it's not going to fall on anybody. And in doing so, the bricks, heavy bricks, tons of bricks fell on them and killed them.

John Tippett

It's super tragic event. And, you know, the fact that it occurred during what we might consider to be the overhaul phase is one of those things that makes it not necessarily more heartbreaking, but just it just makes more poignant about how dangerous the job is. It's not just about when the active fire is going on.

Fire Chief Brian McDermott

I think we can use the word preventative. I think, you know, when we talk about now what we learned today, you know, that post-control overhaul face. Right. Of course, we're wearing our SCBA masks because of the noxious gases, carbon dioxide, and such. But now it's, we're going to take real stock in the stability of that building.

We have different tools and different gauges and training that have us understand where the building is and we're big into that risk. Nothing to gain. Nothing. Right. What are we going to save by putting the firefighters inside at this point? And I could tell you, as a chief officer, I still watch when we pull firefighters out of a building, when we know that it's not the right time, of course, you got to come out.

One more minute, Chief. One more minute. I get that. I get it. I did it. But that's where now we know, and we're much better at saying, all right, let's keep ourselves alive. The buildings, the building, you know, we're going to risk, you know, a lot to save a lot. We're going to risk ourselves to save lives. But when it comes down to property, when all life is out of the building, and that property is just precariously sitting, you know, we can drop a transit on it.

And if we see a quarter inch of movement or more, that building is going, you know, we look at aside from this, we see this very commonly in chimneys, you know, especially in these old urban centers where you see chimneys that are rising up, you know, 15 feet and going above the peak of the building down low on a peak, 45-degree peak building, you know, and they are prone to collapsing.

Now, you know, with brick, you know, it's pretty difficult. You know, now it's that building is unsafe. Everybody out. Establish a collapse zone with brick. We try to do that two and a half times the height of the building if we can. Of course, naturally here, you can't do it because it's urban, you know. So, we're going to flank the building when we see this.

And we've had numerous events in my years and numerous fires that are very, very similar to this, where, you know, first the heat drives you away from these

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

buildings. But then once the fire is out and you have a chance just to assess the building, of course, we're looking immediately at the structural support. We're looking at cracks, creaks, moans, groans.

We're looking at shifting windows and doors. And of course, now we have the benefit of with our rescue company where we have knowledge to use a site transit and which we've used on two occasions. It's not a common tool that we that we use, but in a building such as this where I say if we're going to put firefighters in, let's just throw to transit on it, throw laser, and let's see what happens.

And that also comes into the demolition. And not just like for us, we mentioned earlier about the demolition machine for us, which was professional demolition, where, you know, this is, we have to understand this is beyond us. Let's take this building down. I don't believe that that was at their disposal back then. You know, you're talking for them.

That's this is something where, you know, it was let alone firemen getting in there and just getting it done. You know, if that if it was, then they'd probably hook a line, a rope to it, and pull it from the building over because they were in that. You know, I say it takes a G.E.D. to get this job and I call that a get 'er done, you know, because that's what firefighters then and now do, they just get it done.

And it's, you know, but now we're learning that's the key from this is that, you know, we respect what they did and the hard work that they did. And don't ever diminish, I would never diminish the work that they did that day. But what I do say is that because of them, we learned something, and we learned this nationwide through the national courts and making sure that the people read them, it's very important to read the news reports.

John Tippett

Yeah. And that's really our purpose of today of sitting down and looking at these events from decades ago. Tell us a little bit about this man. It was Deputy Chief James Sweeney, Captain John Devenport, Firefighter William Lynch, Firefighter Matthew O'Neill, Firefighter Louis Rodeski. So Devenport, Lynch, O'Neill, and Rodeski were on the same engine company. So, yes, you know, as you've gone through your career, you make decisions about, you know, you bring a crew with you to do something.

And, you know, Chief Sweeney, at some point in time, singled out Captain Devenport and brought him in there. And just by stroke of tragedy, all five end up dying in the fire. So, what can you tell us about them? Can you humanize them a little bit for us?

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

Yeah, well, I can tell you this. I could tell you first of all, Deputy Chief Sweeney from what we read, was one of the most respected chiefs. He was one where you went, where he would say to go because you trusted in a fearless leader. I guarantee you that Captain Devenport was brought in there because of the trust brought by Deputy Chief Sweeney that he had and the crew of Engine Five.

And that's one of the things that, you know, even now today you'll see, is when you look at some of your more experienced leaders who say, all right, these are the guys and gals I'm going to bring in to do this job because they have such experience to get it done. And that's what this was, that day.

You know, and to humanize them, you know, it's just like, and I was in Ladder 3 growing up as a firefighter, and I had just a great crew. I had a great captain. I had three great partners, firefighter who's with me that we worked together as a crew. And I can empathize with the crew that day because they were going together just like I was with Ladder 3 who happened to be partnered with Engine 5 in the same firehouse.

You know, and any one of us, any one of us firefighters are them. And if I was going to humanize them, I would say they're me. You know, they're you. They're the youth that we have in this job right now. And you have the young three firefighters here following their captain, following their deputy chief. And they're doing the job that they're being told to do, and they're doing it with dignity.

And my humanizing is that we are them still almost 100 years later, we are them. And we would do the same thing. We're going to follow. We're going to do, we're going to work hard for our leaders, our bosses, are we're going to trust in them. And I think in this day, it's almost like it's an anomaly here.

And I can tell you, we've had here some very close calls and in particular in braced frame structures here where we've almost had divine intervention here, where we had I give you one instance where very similar to this, we had a braced frame, constructed three-story corner building on our Main street, and the deputy chief, who is an excellent deputy chief and very experienced, the fire is in the post control overhaul.

Everybody was out. We were letting the water drain off and he said, "All right, guys, let's get back in and put this fire out". At that very moment, an intoxicated driver drove through, went right through it, into an ambulance, almost hit into our rehab area where there were about ten firefighters. Instead of going into the building, everybody went over to the scene.

Fire Chief Brian McDermott

We tended to the two injured firefighters and ambulance. We kind of all just like wiped our forehead and said, "Wow, thank God that nobody died here. Wow." We turned back we went back to the deputy chief at the time. Everybody's about to go in, and the entire building pancaked inward out, not pancake. It was that typical spiral inward, outward collapse that you would see in a brace frame construction building, just like the books would tell you.

I mean, I was after I looked back and said, "Wow." I remember studying the inward-outward and the brace frame construction. But just like that, the building looked pretty good, just like it did here for these gentlemen. The building looked good. We can get in. We go into these buildings all the time. Let's put this out. And a building just down.

And it was flat. It was flat. Every firefighter would have been dead or trapped and almost at divine intervention. And we've had that happen on several occasions.

John Tippett

There's a term kind of moving around the industry now called the "compelling urge." And I think you alluded to it earlier about once the fire is under control, once we know all the people are safe, it's a good time to just check and recheck ourselves and make sure that we're not still leaning forward, still operating out of that compelling urge that we've got to get in there and put that fire out.

We had, I say we as an industry, had a tragedy in York, Pennsylvania. Yes. A similar type situation. And I think what we're trying to do with these sort of podcasts and other efforts to end fatalities and in your generosity of time, is to try to remind firefighters of making sure that you're in the right mode and frame of mind when it comes to certain elements of the fire ground.

You know, there comes a point when the is time for the energy to be checked or reset. And you, as you said, in honor of their sacrifice, make sure we're paying attention to these kinds of lessons. So, are there any descendants of these gentlemen working for Paterson today?

Fire Chief Brian McDermott

No. However, what we do, we have an annual memorial firefighter, a line of duty death memorial that we have every year. It's right here at our headquarters. We do it the first Sunday in June, and we reach out to descendants and we invite them to come and they come. And it's interesting to see some people more finding them.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

You know, our battalion chief, Michael Tomlin, is just an amazing person and he just seems to find people from families. He's looking. But he just finds them, and we make sure that they all get invited, that they can come and see the descendants there, their grandfather, their great grandfather, that they can see them being honored. And we see a lot of them praying when the families come.

They're bringing their three younger ones and kind of teaching lessons and showing, look, this is your lineage. And it's pretty powerful for us to see that we get to do that for people and kind of bring peace to some, you know, especially when it gets to with line of duty deaths. And we see that with, we've reached out we have some that are generations old that come to our memorial mass, and it's really inspiring to see them come.

But as far as these five, there are no direct descendants.

John Tippett

Chief, this was the largest loss of life in the department's history. Can you tell us a little bit about what happened after the fire to the department? How did the department react? How did they rebuild Engine 5's crew? You know, is there anything out there about that?

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

Well, let's first start with this. After the fire, somebody has to come home. So Firefighter Miller was the lone survivor of Engine 5. And in a powerful moment, he responded back to quarters where Chief Coyle was chief engineer, chief of department, as we call it now. Chief Engineer Coyle was there, and he reported in a solemn moment, saluted the chief and said, "Engine 5, reporting back to quarters." Chief Coyle saluted him back.

He said, "I'm all alone, Chief." And it was, it's powerful and apparently was so powerful that Chief Coyle couldn't take it and passed out. And because of the love of his firefighters and he was brought to the hospital, Saint Joe's, and he was treated and of course, released. There was just, he was overcome by what had just happened to his friends, his family.

And, you know, to this day, you know, I think what was done to rebuild is what, unfortunately, all of these large loss of life departments do, is they move on, and they remember, you know, I don't have to go into the tragedy in New York City. Of course, they remember. That's the first thing. Never, ever forget your people, always honor your people, and the job goes on no matter what.

We sought to provide that protection. So, it's the rebuilding phase. It's the rebuilding of those companies and putting strong people into those positions, to not so much fill the void, but to continue their hard work. And, you know, that's evidenced by all of these large loss of life fires, the fires throughout history where there have been large loss of life.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

That's one of the things you kind of think about, is how do you go on? You know, I know today we focus on critical incident stress debriefing. We do that on a regular basis, even with, not even with, but with civilian loss of life. Right? When we've had some disastrous loss of life, or we had a quadruple fatal fire in I think it was 2001 on East 31st Street, everybody there was so impacted by it.

We've had, you know, fires where they find people bound and murdered. You know, we, of course, medical calls with domestics and children. And, you know, we're trying to focus now on rebuilding or being resilient with our psychological approach to continuing being a firefighter, not just rebuilding, putting somebody back in the spot, but trying to ensure that we have coping mechanisms for how to deal with it, because everybody's going to deal with it differently.

And it's so important these days. It is so important to recognize the signs of symptoms of firefighters that are going through mental stress, which would be exacerbated by this. You know, and how do we how do we recognize that? How do we deal with it and making sure that if you do recognize it, don't ignore it. And I think that that's one of the things that's so important in the rebuilding phase.

It's not just putting butts in a seat, so to speak. It's about making sure that we're caring for those that loved everybody there. I mean, I can't imagine, I don't want to imagine, if it were to happen here while I'm chief and I know even when I lost my friend Scott Rogow here, I came on a job with Scotty.

You know, it's very impactful, right? So how do you go on? Different people will deal with it differently. But what we're doing now, and I think what we're doing more so as organizations throughout the country and not just here, you know, is not doing that macho thing over, Hey, let's just get back on a break. Let's get this gallows humor going and start bustin' chops, which we're going to continue to do.

Right. That part of it goes. But I think equally or as important or more so important is that we do that incident critical incident stress debriefing, that we do a very quick intervention right away after kind of gauge the individual to a health evaluation individual. How's their blood pressure? How are they feeling? What's their pulse like? How are they physically at that moment?

Can they continue for the day? And then, of course, not just ending there, then a few days later, a full team evaluation was critical and sort of stress debriefing. And we've gotten to the point that we're doing that and we're doing it regularly. I know here in Paterson, I rely on union members to do that and I don't attend.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

I don't want anybody to feel like there's the pressure of the chief looking down because I am both an imposing figure and I am the chief. So, I understand that. So, it's most important that they get into a comfortable atmosphere free of pressure so that they can just let it out and of course give them the contacts for afterwards.

Anybody that seems through your signs and symptoms to be struggling a little more should be privately spoken to and given other options as well. And that's now, that's for us. That's been pretty new in the last four or five years for us, and we're still perfecting it. But we have great resources through the New Jersey FBA Firemen's Mutual Benefit Association, which we are a Local Number 2 and 202 where our union presidents are doing a very good job in maintaining that.

So as soon as this happens, somebody is on it. Even before I get the call, before I get the call, that's something tragic has happened. There's already a call out, and they're already making those calls to psychologists, psychiatrists or religious faith-based leaders that we had an intervention team for a little bit. COVID kind of thwarted that for a bit.

But we're going to get back on that. But we're still making sure that we get that. So I think when it comes down to how do you rebuild, how they rebuild back then, I don't think it was with that intensity. Sure. And, you know, when I look at this, I look at like we talked about earlier, how are we getting better?

You know, and in some in some cases, you know, our youth on the job don't even realize why we're doing what we do, which is why what you're doing is so important in getting the word out and getting this the historical perspective. It's good to know why you are where you are. How do we get there? Where do we start and where do we go from here?

You know? And that's how we get better. That's how we expose our gaps and that's how we help fill the gaps, you know? And none of us are perfect, myself included. But we are. But I think what I'm seeing now is just an overall intent for the fire service to focus on the fire service and its overall mental health, especially in tragedies like this.

The Worcester six, I mean, the list goes on and on, unfortunately. But, you know, we learn from them. And I know the Worcester six was very big here. It hit a lot here because it's a very, very similar city to Paterson and our Jersey City here and Newark. It's very much a brick city like us. And we had a huge contingent there.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

I remember coming back and we learned from it. You know, Boston Fire Department with the wind driven fire very big on focusing. How do we learn from this, everybody? How do we get better from it? And you know what we're seeing and post-fire and recovery talk about policy, too, you know, and I can't speak for what the policy was during this time and what they did to make it better.

But I can say that because of the tragedy that occurred in Boston, for example, that the Paterson Fire Department developed its own wind driven fire policy, and we started training on that. And we're learning from the different tragedies so that we don't repeat them, so to speak. And they were just and such. And not to diminish the work they did.

Please. You know, I want to make sure everybody knows that what they and others did was what we would all do. Right. And how do we learn from that? You know, that's the other phase of it, not just mental, but how do we afterwards, how do we make things better for the future? And I know just looking at this, you know, I guarantee you that at that point and I wish I could have that crystal ball and look back and talk to the firefighters back then and see what they did.

And if we had access to all of their records, because we don't you know, we try to get as much as we can. And that's where Dr. Tom Dayspring comes in and being such a tenacious researcher, him and others, that that participate in our history. But it'd be really nice to see what their policies were at that exact moment afterwards.

And if they changed that, I wish I could know if they added new policy in result of post control. Overall, you know how do they approach buildings now after the check for stability? You know, the assessor from the outside from a safe location or they did they still continue to go in.

John Tippett

Right, Right. Well, you mentioned Dr. Dayspring again, and I think this is a great time to inject that through his great work. There's a phenomenal website that has been put together for Paterson, about line of duty deaths, a lot of information about the Quackenbush fire, photos of the gentleman, the firefighters that were killed, four photos of the firefighters that survived, news articles about the individuals kind of in-depth history.

You talked about how the newspapers treated the news in those days. So as part of our follow up material, we'll make sure that we feature that so people can get a sense of, you know, see who these who these men are. The B shift. There's a photo of the B shift that shows Captain Devenport and his entire crew, including Scofield and Miller, who ended up in Miller, drove the pumper back.

According to that account, Scofield was in the in the alleyway, picking up hose. And then there was another gentleman named Sam. So, another fireman, Sam, who was detailed or was off on another fire. So, he talked about how serendipitous things can occur. The Foundation does have elements now to assist incident commanders, chief officers, and company officers that lose a firefighter.

So, we have come a long way from just having people just having to suck it up and take it home. Yeah. Coyle's account is pretty, very moving, especially Miller having that sense when he reported to quarters, I guess it was a tradition that the engine would tell the chief they were back in quarters. Miller was the driver.

I would assume that was always the captain's duty to do that. But Miller, even in that moment of shock and loss, still maintained his decorum to follow through the procedure. So, you know, the information about Coyle in the news articles talked about that. You mentioned that it would be something you never wanted to deal with on your own in your own career.

And I think, you know, any of us that have been in those leadership positions, always there's you try as hard as you can to do it. All right. But even when you do it, all right, something can still go wrong. And part of our effort is to make sure we honor the people that had something happen to them even when they thought they were doing it. All right.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

And that's just part of the dynamic nature of being a firefighter. You can absolutely follow everything to a tee. And I have not been to one fire that's been exactly the same. There's always something and something unexpected. And that's rare that you know, us as IQ based decision makers. You know, we work on the cues that we see, and we have to make split-second decisions and putting all those cues together and hope that your experience, which helps which those cues, we, I've seen that before.

It goes right into the brain. All right, good. Stay away where it might trip you to go to a different way even sometimes that can play tricks on you, you know, caution, education, practice, practice, practice. I've personally have been known as the dentist. They used to call me that because I like to drill, you know, which I can tell you is not the most popular thing.

When I was younger. I think that culture is changing a little bit. It was more, you know, when I was younger, every single day I went to work. Every day I was guaranteed a building fire or seven, right. And that was every single day, sort of like, why are we doing this? There's a fire. I'm going through a fire today, guaranteed.

I'm going to a fire today. So, I'm going to learn at the fire, you know, And of course, in every fire we always learned. But that does not even, if you're in the busiest of houses, it's you still have to make sure that you hone your skills no matter what.

John Tippett

I think it's safe to say when Chief Sweeny took Engine 5's crew in the building, they didn't go in there with the thought that the walls are going to fall on us.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

Of course not.

John Tippett

So it is, you know, it is incumbent on us, you know, in this generation, to bring that tragedy back to the forefront of people's consideration so that when you do go to that fire because you do hear firefighters say, well, I go to a lot of fires. So that means I'm better and I have more experience.

Well, you know, did you go to one fire a hundred times or did you go to 100 fires once? And I think that's part and parcel of where we're going here. What is it about the Quackenbush fire that sort of sets it apart?

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

Well, it's our largest life loss, you know, of firefighters. So, when we look at that, that puts us into a different place. Historically nationwide. You know, when you lose five firefighters at once, you have five full generations of families that have now been capped. I think that's really the biggest thing for us is that as that being the largest loss of life of firefighter life in one fire, it gives us a different focus to say, wait a minute, you know, let's step back and say, you know, if we're in that one position and we lose a full crew, we're losing generations of people, you know?

And I think that's where the focus comes for me. I could say the focus comes in that just that large loss of life. I just like to give the final thought that I want firefighters from my city here in Paterson and others to take stock in the types of buildings that you have throughout your cities and understand construction right.

That's one of the biggest things that we need to see. And I the benefit of being a contractor for many years and, you know, building buildings for years, I understand construction. A lot of the youth today coming in. They're not really being taught that. So, if you were going to take anything out of this and what the these firefighters went through and their family suffered through, I think put some focus on understanding and construction, not just for fire spread, but for building collapse potential.

There are great books out there that can teach you all about building early collapse. They collapse, what types of collapses you would have with types of buildings? You heard me earlier talking about brace frame construction and collapse. I didn't make that up. I read that being a reader is important and being a professional and expert in your craft, whether you are a career firefighter or a volunteer firefighter, I want you to make sure that you understand things that can kill you and that goes with majoring on construction, because that will tell you where the fire is headed and that will tell you where the building's going and how it defeats gravity.

Right. Every building defeats gravity. This building defeated gravity on that day. Gravity won, right. So understand the signs and symptoms again of building collapse from the outside and from the inside. And lastly, risk nothing to gain nothing. Do that situational assessment to ensure that you are in the best position possible for life safety. And there's times where we'll do it from a distance.

**Fire Chief Brian
McDermott**

And every firefighter like you said, that urge right to get in there, which I have that same urge still, I still want to get in, get dirty, and get it done. But we have to understand that there is a time not to do that as painfully as it is. Sometimes there is a time not to do that. So do that risk assessment.

Understand what a risk assessment is and why you do it, and equally as important, how you perform a risk assessment. So get into reading. So understand construction, understand flame spreading and collapse as it pertains to construction and give yourself that opportunity to be safe by performing that effective risk assessment so that you're not putting yourself or as an incident commander or leader, you're not putting those in unnecessary harm when it just does not need to be.

John Tippett

But Chief McDermott, I want to thank you very much for your time and hospitality, along with the members of the Paterson Fire Department that have been so gracious to allow us to come in and visit with you today. So we also want to recognize retired Deputy Chief Kevin Hancock for contacting us and suggesting we revisit the Quackenbush tragedy and certainly, a special thanks goes to Dr. Thomas Dayspring for his compiling of information and deep reverence for the Paterson Fire Department.

He's the individual most responsible for what we see up on the website, and we'll have the information provided where people can go visit the five firefighters killed at the Quackenbush warehouse and other firefighters killed in Paterson are forever remembered in Paterson and at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland, on the grounds of the National Fire Academy.

Deaths occurring prior to 1981 are recognized at the Memorial's Walk of Honor, while deaths occurring after 1981 are recognized on the Memorial Wall. Three Paterson firefighters Walter Bitner, John Nicosia and Scott Rogow are listed on the National Memorial. The remaining line-of-duty deaths are part of the Walk of Honor. We want to extend a special thanks to Rob Maloney and Greg Thall from Cool Water Productions for producing the podcast and related materials, and also note that the frameworks for our podcast are steeped in the 16 Firefighter Five Safety Initiatives that can be found on the firehero.org website.

So, until next time, be vigilant, stay focused, share knowledge and honor every sacrifice.