

[Tatum]: It's 2:30 pm. A gas line explodes in Indianapolis. The blast is felt blocks away, and smoke is seen more than ten miles away. Six houses are destroyed, and 50 other houses are damaged. One person is injured, and one person is killed.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[SFX 1]

[SFX 2]

FROM W-H-J-E, THIS IS FIRST RESPONDERS 411, GETTING YOU THE INSIDE SCOOP ON FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE CARMEL AREA.

[SFX 3]

I'M TATUM PRATI

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[SFX 4]

[Tatum]: This occurred on July 21st of 1997. It happened when a 20-inch gas main was apparently punctured by a backhoe during construction. It is unclear why the gas ignited. Sometimes, things like this happen during construction.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Tatum]: Gas leaks are more common than we think. They occur somewhat frequently in Carmel because of the constant construction and renovation. On December seventh of 2016, there was a gas leak due to boring equipment with the installation of fiber optic cables. Captain Chad Hughes of Fire Station 46 was dispatched on this day. This was just one of the hundreds of gas leaks that he has been on throughout his years as a firefighter.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[Captain Chad Hughes]: It was a nondescript day, very routine. And about eleven a.m., we dispatched for the gas leak. What was going on that day, they were installing fiber optic cable, fiber optic lines out in the western part of, northwestern part of Clay Township, in the Carmel area. And the fiber optic company was using a boring machine, and they hit a gas line.

[Tatum]: Boring. Drilling a hole, tunnel, or well in the earth.

[Captain Hughes]: Which resulted in a very long duration, a very long day on a very cold day for us that we remained out there until the line was, the leak was secured by the gas company. So we had to be there on a stand by capacity monitoring the leak to make sure the levels were not dangerous or in any other homes that were surrounding the area.

[Tatum]: While the gas line was fairly small, it was six and seven feet deep in some areas due to the changing elevation. Most gas lines are only around three feet deep. This meant that there was a lot of digging when trying to fix it.

[Captain Hughes]: Because of the way the gas lines are laid out in that neighborhood, they didn't want to lose service to the nearby residents. So they had to bypass the leak. And in order to do so, they had to dig four different lines, like I said, due to the way the gas line matrix was designed in that neighborhood. And the layout, it required four holes.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Tatum]: Back when Captain Hughes first began his career as a firefighter, they would help dig right where the gas leak was. That has now changed because of safety precautions. It is much safer to dig on both sides of the leak and shut it off from there. With the increased safety today, these sorts of things take much longer. In total, they spent six hours out in the cold fixing the leak.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[Captain Hughes]: Well the biggest thing is you're on alert for so long for hours on end. It is somewhat taxing because you're wearing your gear, you're basically in standby mode, and we're monitoring with our gas monitors for a long duration. And so it wears on you as far as the external, the elements, and the temperature, and the wind, and the operations that's going on by the construction company. So it can be challenging for that long of a time to remain vigilant and kind of on your toes. So, yeah, it's a little bit draining on you physically and just kind of mentally as well.

[Tatum]: The day was taxing. Heavy equipment, being on alert the whole time. But in the end, it paid off. The firefighters did their job and helped keep the community safe.

[Captain Hughes]: Yeah, that's probably the most satisfying. And the gratification of knowing that the leak's been stopped, and there's no further danger that really presented itself to the residents. And everybody can go on that live in the area with the normal routine can kind of be implemented at that point. So everyone can kind of go about their business. And the road opens back up. And the kids don't have to be dropped off at the school bus, you know, three or four blocks away. And everything returns to normal.

[MUSIC BED STARTS]

[Tatum]: With all of the construction around Carmel, we can count on plenty more gas leaks. But we know that the firefighters are prepared and will keep us safe. Not only with gas leaks, but with fires and other emergencies, too. We can always count on them in times of crisis. For WHJE, this has been Tatum Prati. More stories like this can be found at whje.com.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]