The Everard Bath House was constructed in 1890 by James Everard, an Irish Brewer. It was constructed as a “Romanesque” structure. It was designed to be operated as a “Turkish Bath”. It was a successful business at the turn of the century, operating in the “Red-Light” and gambling district known as the “Tenderloin”. Its clientele evolved to mostly homosexual men after the 1950s.
The Everard Bath house was a four-story structure. It had two straight-run stairways and a scuttle ladder that led from the top floor to the roof. At the time of the fire, the building was owned by Mr. Irving Fine. It consisted of 135 cubicles which contained a small bed and a chair. Each cubicle had four walls, but no ceiling. The ceiling was a common ceiling for each floor and it was well above the height of the top of the cubicles. This created an open-area above the cubicles. A cubicle could be rented for a 12-hour period of time for $7.00.

The front windows were painted over and covered with sheetrock and wood paneling. This would prove to be an operational impediment during the fire.

The Certificate of Occupancy for the building was for a Bath House, pool and a Dormitory. It was granted in 1920 with the provision that people could not stay more than 12 hours at a time. Otherwise, they would have to make several upgrades to the building.

In August of 1976, a sprinkler system order was issued. Mr. Fine, the building owner, had one year to comply with the order. The building was on-track to have the sprinkler system finished and connected to the water supply on June 1st, 1977. The FDNY ordered the sprinkler system because it was suspected that it was operating more as a hotel than a dormitory.
In the early morning hours of May 25, 1977, New York City was basking in the glow of another Spring day. However, the day would turn into tragedy as the day progressed. At around 0600 hours, a mattress fire occurred on the second floor of the Everard Bath House at 28 West 28th Street in Manhattan. The cause of the fire was careless smoking. There were 80-100 patrons in the building at the time. The occupant of the cubicle where the fire started thought he put the fire out and then simply flipped the mattress over. The excitement of the fire subsided and the patrons of the Bath House went back to their cubicles. The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) was never called.

At the 31st Street firehouse at around 0700 hours, Firefighters from Engine 1 and Ladder 24 were finishing up a night tour. On-duty in Engine 1 was Lieutenant William Rand, Firefighters Robert A. Hartman, John E. Rogers, Fred A. Selland (L-24 Det.), and Thomas Sweeney (E-3 Det.). On-duty in Ladder 24 were Captain Lawrence Goldblatt (Cov.), Firefighters Ronald R. Rotter, William B. Loughlan (Det. E-1), Leonard W. Smit, Dominick Camastro, and Eric L. Erickson.

At around 0700 hours at the Everard Bath House, Mr. Raymond Walsh, 20 years old, was awakened from his slumber by heat and an orange glow coming from the bottom of his door to his cubicle. He opened the door and saw flames
coming from the cubicle across from his. This was the same cubicle where the previous mattress fire was. The plywood covered walls were on fire and the fire was rapidly extending to other areas. He yelled to alert other occupants of the fire and he ran for the stairs.

Mr. Michael James was on the 2nd floor when he saw an orange glow. Within a short period of time the halls filled with thick smoke and the electricity went out in the dormitory. Panic quickly started setting in.

At 0704 hours, Manhattan Fire Alarm Dispatchers started receiving telephone calls reporting a fire at 28 West 28th Street. Manhattan Box 661 was transmitted. Engines 1, 16, 26, Ladders 24, 7, and Battalion 7 were dispatched.

Engine 1 arrived at the Everard Bath House first. Lieutenant Rand saw fire coming out the windows on the third floor and 8 to 10 people hanging out the windows on the 4th floor. There were people on the ledge of the 2nd floor trying to escape the choking smoke and searing heat. Occupants were jumping. Lieutenant Rand transmitted the 10-75. An additional Engine and Ladder were requested to respond due to the extreme life hazard.

Engine 1 stretched a 1 ¾ inch hand line up the west-side straight-run stairway (exposure 2 side). Engine 14 arrived at the fire and they assisted in the stretch. Engine 1 advanced the hose line to the third floor.
They moved in on the fire on the third floor. After advancing the hose line a few feet, Engine 1 found an unconscious person. They passed the unconscious person back to the Firefighters from Engine 14 who were in the stairway. Engine 1 pressed on. After a few more feet, another unconscious person was found. This unconscious person was also passed back to Engine 14 in the stairway. They continued to advance the hose line. They were pinned to the floor due to the high heat and heavy smoke condition.

Ladder 24 arrived at the fire. Captain Goldblatt saw the extreme life hazard that was playing out before them. They approximated there were 25 to 30 panic-stricken people calling for help. He and his forcible entry team went inside the building to start a primary search. Fr. William Loughlin and Fr. Leonard Smit raised a 35-foot portable ladder to a 4th floor window on the west side of the building. Firefighter Dominick Camastro raised Ladder 24’s aerial ladder to the roof so that Ladder 24’s Roof Firefighter, Ron Rotter, could get to the roof. Then, Firefighter Camastro re-positioned the aerial ladder to a window on the east side of the building on the 4th floor. Once the aerial ladder was in position, trapped occupants began to self-evacuate on the aerial ladder. It is unknown how many fire victims self-evacuated down Ladder 24’s aerial ladder but there were many.

Firefighter William Loughlin climbed the fully extended 35-foot portable ladder. The ladder was being stabilized by Fr. Smit. Fr. Loughlin started pulling trapped people up over the five-foot high window sill and onto the portable ladder. This caused the portable ladder to shift several times. Fr. Smit struggled to keep the ladder from falling. Eight fire victims were removed in this effort. After the last victim was removed from the window, Fr. Loughlin and Fr. Smit entered the window to perform a search. Neither Fr. Loughlin or Fr. Smit had self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) on. They couldn’t fit through the small window with their SCBA’s on.
Firefighters Loughlin and Smit started their search of the 4th floor. They found an unconscious person and dragged him to the window where Ladder 24’s aerial ladder was. Fr. Eric Erickson of Ladder 24 received the victim on the aerial ladder. Both Fr. Loughlin and Smit went back to continue their search. Fr. Loughlin found another unconscious victim about 20 feet deep into the occupancy. He dragged the victim to the same window as before. He and Fr. Smit hoisted the unconscious victim onto the aerial ladder. By this time, Tower Ladder 12 was on the scene and operating. The last victim was placed into T.L. 12’s bucket to be removed to the street. Firefighters from Tower Ladder 12 started doing Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on the victim while bringing him down in the tower ladder bucket.

Firefighters Loughlin and Smit then resumed their search of the 4th floor. However, conditions continued to deteriorate. The heat was becoming unbearable. Both Firefighters dove for Ladder 24’s aerial ladder. Soon afterwards, the entire 4th floor flashed over.

Deputy Chief Daniel T. Murphy of the 3rd Division arrived at the fire. He checked in with the 7th Battalion as to what assignments have been given out. The time was approximately 0715 hours. He transmitted the 2nd alarm.
On the 2^{nd} alarm, Ladder Co. 3 arrived and were led by Lieutenant Gilbert Murtha. Also working in Ladder 3 were Firefighters John “Jack” Fogarty, Robert Ribbe, Edward Donnelly, Herman Roccabruna, and George Duffy. Deputy Chief Murphy ordered Lieutenant Murtha to take his Firefighters to the 3^{rd} floor for search. The fire was showing out of the 4^{th} floor windows in the front with a heavy smoke condition coming from the lower floor windows. They arrived at the 3^{rd} floor and Engine 34 had a hand line in operation. The heat was so intense that they could only advance their hose line a few feet toward the rear of the building. The smoke was banked down to the floor. Through the force of the leadership of Lieutenant Gilbert Murtha, Ladder 3 made entry onto the 3^{rd} floor.

Lieutenant Murtha, Firefighters Ribbe, Fogarty, Duffy and Donnelly of Ladder 3 began their search of the 3^{rd} floor. They advanced past Engine 34’s hose line and began searching the cubicles on the floor. As they moved deeper into the floor, Firefighter Donnelly found an unconscious male in front of room 227. He called out for help. Fr. Ribbe was not far away. They were able to drag the fire victim toward the exit. They were met by fire which was about to cut off their exit. They made it past the fire and were able to remove the victim to the stairway and take him down to the 2^{nd} floor. They began CPR at this point. Eventually, they removed the fire victim to Bellevue Hospital’s Ambulance.

Firefighter George Duffy of Ladder 3 began his search. He broke off on his own while performing his primary search. With the extremely heavy smoke condition and high heat, Firefighter Duffy became disoriented. His position was getting more precarious by the second. He finally was able to make contact with the other members of Ladder 3. He made his way to safety.
Firefighter Jack Fogarty of Ladder 3 began his search to the left of the hose line and started searching the cubicles heading toward the rear of the floor. As he was progressing down the center aisle, he came upon fellow Ladder 3 Firefighters Ribbe and Donnelly. They were removing an unconscious victim. He continued past them. The heat was beginning to reach dangerous levels. Firefighter Fogarty found an unconscious victim at room 215. The victim was large and he had a difficult time dragging him due to the heat which forced him to stay on his knees. He dragged the victim to the front of the dormitory, he encountered flames. He continued to drag the victim and made it to the stairway. He was assisted in taking the fire victim down the stairs. Once they made it to the 2nd floor, they began CPR. The fire victim was removed to Bellevue Hospital’s ambulance.

Rescue 1 arrived at the fire led by Lieutenant Anthony P. Limburg. When Rescue 1 arrived at the fire, they had to stop their apparatus a block away from the fire due to the heavy smoke filling the street. On Rescue 1’s apparatus was Firefighter Robert L. Burns. Firefighter Burns was off-duty. He reported to work early in preparation for the day tour. Upon arrival, Battalion 7 told Lieutenant Limburg that there were reports of numerous people trapped in the rear of the
building. The members of Rescue 1 climbed the stairs. They were thwarted by the extreme heat from the fire in making it to the rear of the occupancy. They took a 2 ½ inch hand line and began operations on the fourth floor. They encountered fire wrapping around them as they advanced the hose line and made searches along the way.

Firefighter Burns went to the roof to see if there was an alternate way to reach the trapped occupants. He brought with him the roof rope and life belt. He made it to the roof and spoke with Firefighter Ronald Rotter, the Roof Firefighter from Ladder 24. He informed Fr. Burns that he could hear trapped people from the rear but couldn’t see them. The smoke coming out of the rear windows was thick. He secured the roof rope to the chimney on the exposure 2 side. Fr. Burns called out to any trapped person at the windows to “stay there” and that “they were coming down to get them”. He performed a single-slide evolution. He got down to the 4th floor level and landed on the setback of exposure 2. He swung his body to the rear windows where he grabbed the window sill. He hoisted his body into the window. He searched the immediate area of the window and called out for any person in distress. There was no answer. He was forced to abandon his position due to the smoke and heat. He swung back to the exposure 2 roof set-back. He then climbed the interior of exposure 2 and assisted in roof operations.
Rescue 3 was special-called to the scene of the fire at 0715 hours. They were led by Lieutenant James J. McGowan. Also in Rescue 3 were Firefighters Alfred Will, Dan Cleary, Larry Young, George Lynch and James Heslin. They arrived and received orders from Assistant Chief John J. Fogarty of the Manhattan Borough Command. They were told to report to Deputy Chief Joyce inside the fire building. They administered first aid and removed four people to the street. Lieutenant McGowan, Fr. Will and Fr. Heslin climbed the stairway on the exposure 4 side of the building. Firefighters from Rescue 1 were operating a hose line and told Lieutenant McGowan that there may be more victims trapped. The members from Rescue 3 took a hand line to the third floor and operated there until ordered to withdraw due to a Tower Ladder being used.

Upon return to the lobby, Deputy Chief Joyce told Lieutenant McGowan of
Rescue 3 to take a hose line to the third floor via the exposure 2 side stairway. They maintained this position as long as they could due to the heavy fire on the floor. They had to back down to the second floor. It was here that they attempted a coordinated attack with Rescue 1. They were ordered to leave the area due to a possible collapse. In a last effort, they entered the second floor and found two more fire victims. In total, Rescue 3 found 11-12 fire victims in their operations at this fire.

Assistant Chief Fogarty transmitted the third alarm, and later the fourth alarm. The arduous fire fight and the effort to revive the estimated 20 10-45 code 2s was taking its toll on the Firefighters.

Tower Ladder 18 was special called on the third alarm. Firefighter Bob Rainey was on-duty in TL 18. He recalled that they used a combination of hand tools and saws from the Tower Ladder basket to remove the plywood that covered the front windows. Once a window was opened, heavy smoke enveloped the Tower Ladder basket.
Eventually, the top three floors collapsed in the rear. This made a final secondary search for fire victims extremely difficult. FDNY units operated there throughout the day and through the next day, looking for people who couldn’t get out in time.
There were numerous Firefighters performing CPR on fire victims on the sidewalk on 28th Street. The benefits of the FDNY’s E.M.T. program was on display at this fire.

Fire Patrol 1 responded to the fire. Two of the Fire Patrol members that responded, who were part of the E.M.T. program, were Jimmy Coyle and Patrick “Paddy” Brown. These two Fire Patrolmen performed CPR on five persons and revived them. Paddy Brown was treated for exhaustion after performing CPR for more than an hour. Historical Note: Paddy Brown would be appointed to the FDNY later that year in December. He would become one of the more highly decorated members of the FDNY in his career. He died on September 11, 2001 at the World Trade Center while operating as the Captain of Ladder 3.

The fire was declared “Under Control” at 0845 hours. There were 9 fatalities. With the extreme life hazard that was presented to FDNY units at this fire, the amount of fatalities could have been much higher. If it wasn’t for the actions of the Firefighters who responded to Manhattan Box 661, the toll of human life would have been much greater.
As a result of their heroic efforts at this fire, the following members and units were recognized by the Board of Merit: Fr. William B. Loughlin, Engine 1 (Class II and the “Commissioner Edward Thompson Medal”), Fr. John P. Fogarty, Ladder 3, (Class II and the “Thomas E. Crimmins Medal”), Fr. Leonard W. Smit, Ladder 24 (Class III), Fr. Edward T. Donnelly, Ladder 3 (Class III), Fr. Robert E. Ribbe, Ladder 3 (Class III), Fr. Ronald R. Rotter, Ladder 24 (Service Rating “A”), Fr. Robert L. Burns, Rescue 1 (Service Rating “A”), Captain Lawrence Goldblatt, Ladder 24 Covering (Service Rating “A”), Fr. Fred A. Selland, Ladder 24 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. Eric L. Erickson, Ladder 24 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. William E. Hamilton, Engine 1 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. John E. Rogers, Engine 1 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. Thomas Sweeney, Engine 3 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. Stephen T. Casse, Engine 16 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. Donald W. Ribbe, Ladder 7 (Service Rating “B”), Fr. Lewis A. Bentivegna, Ladder 12 (Honorable Mention), Fr. Carl J. Kruse, Ladder 12 (Honorable Mention), Fr. Richard M. Hansen, Ladder 12 (Honorable Mention), Unit Citations awarded to the following units: Engine 1, Ladder 24, Ladder 7, Engine 14, Ladder 12, Rescue 1, and Division 3. A Unit Citation Honorable Mention awarded to Rescue 3
Most hotel/motel fires can be handled by standard operating procedures for similar type apartment buildings. Non-fireproof (NFP) hotels are handled in a similar fashion as fires in tenements. Fires in motels can be handled in a similar fashion as fires in garden apartment buildings. Fires in high-rise hotels are fought in a similar fashion as high-rise apartment houses.

One thing that all types of hotels/motels have are transient occupants. They are not familiar with
their surroundings. Most occupants do not know where the secondary exit is. Panic can ensue when occupants are not familiar with their surroundings. At fires in NFP hotels, vertical ventilation is essential. The stairs and halls will quickly fill with smoke adding to the disorientation of the occupants.

If a hotel has a Fire Safety Director, he should be located at the Lobby Command Post with the Incident Commander. The Fire Safety Director can provide much needed information about the building and its guests.

Most NFP hotels and Fire Proof (FP) hotels are sprinklered. This may stop the rapid spread of fire, but we will still have a smoke condition to deal with. A smoke condition from an operating sprinkler system was operating will have high levels of carbon monoxide.

At a fire in a hotel/motel, the sprinkler Siamese must be supplied by an Engine Company. A fire can run away from the water supply of a sprinkler system. The Chauffeur of the Engine supplying the sprinkler Siamese must be alert for a call to shut-down the sprinkler system. Supplying the Siamese by-passes the outside stem & yoke valve. Sprinkler systems are shut down only when there is a charged hose line stretched
to the fire area, and when the water coming down is cool. If the water coming down and hitting Firefighters is hot, the sprinkler system is still hitting fire.

At the Everard Bath House fire, the wall coverings were flammable paneling. The flame spread from this paneling was tremendous. Along with the lumber used to construct the cubicles, each floor was a lumber yard.

At the Everard Bath House fire, the front windows were covered with plywood and paneling. This made horizontal ventilation extremely difficult.

Straight run stairways run from front to rear. Each floor landing has a different orientation in the building compared to the other floors. This is important because when going above the fire with straight run stairways, the stairway itself is over the fire occupancy.

As is the same with many fire disasters, a delay in transmitting the alarm to the Fire Department was deadly. Now, automatic alarms with central station tie-in or a sprinkler flow alarm would transmit the alarm in addition to telephone calls to the Fire Alarm Dispatchers.

Some hotels have long hallways. If these hallways have carpeting, it is important to stretch hose lines to the point of deployment before charging. Once the hose line is charged, it will cling to the carpeting making advancement of the line difficult.

If operating at a larger hotel, try to obtain a master key so entry can be made quickly into the rooms. At least one master key per floor should be sent to the upper floors.

Deputy Chief Jay Jonas, Division 7
Thanks go to the following people who contributed to this essay: Captain Bob Rainey (Ret.), Lieutenant Joe Berry (Ret.), Fire Alarm Dispatcher Steven Scher (Ret.), Firefighter Dominic Camastro (Ret.), Firefighter Jack Fogarty (Ret.), Members of Engine 1, Ladder 24, Rescue 1, Engine 14, Division 3, Katy Clements (FDNY Photo Unit), Leslie Ifill (Fire Records), Captain Michael Kinnane (Executive Officer Fire Operations), Fire Marshal Glenn Sweeney, Lieutenant Michael Conboy (Rescue 3), Battalion Chief Joe Liselli (Battalion 7), Lieutenant Anthony P. Limburg (Ret.), Lieutenant James McGowan (Ret.), Deputy Chief Vincent Dunn (Ret.), Firefighter Chris Roberto (Engine 48).

CAPTAIN JOHN S. MOSCHELLA, ENGINE 26 (RET.), Passed away on Saturday December 8, 2018 from injuries sustained at Manhattan Box 5-5-8087 which was the rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center. May he rest in peace. Never forget!

FIREFIGHTER DANIEL C. BOVE, ENGINE 251 (RET.), Passed away on Monday November 26, 2018 from injuries sustained at Manhattan Box 5-5-8087 which was the rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center. May he rest in peace. Never forget!

PARAMEDIC MARTHA STEWART, STATION 8 (RET.), Passed away on Sunday November 18, 2018 from injuries sustained at Manhattan Box 5-5-8087 which was the rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center. May she rest in peace. Never forget!

EMT JOSEPH A. RODRIGUEZ, STATION 58 (RET.), Passed away on Friday November 23, 2018 from injuries sustained at Manhattan Box 5-5-8087 which was the rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center. May he rest in peace. Never forget!