

construction of the building. Gradually, however, fire, police and job superintendents began to account for the men on the site this day.

In the first of many staff meetings on the site of the disaster, county, State, Federal and officials of the primary contractors initiated the massive support requirements for search and rescue efforts. The two most pressing problems were lights and specialized construction equipment. Neither was available in quantity to effectively and safely continue rescue efforts into the night.

Fort Belvoir, headquarters of the U. S. Army Engineer Corps, responded with a complement of flood lights mounted on jeeps, while Andrews Air Force Base, in nearby Maryland, sent a battery of portable airfield lights. The Washington, D. C. Fire Department responded with its light unit and the Bethesda Chevy-Chase rescue squad sent its heavy duty squad for lights.

Front end loaders, bulldozers, cranes, compressor trucks and a host of other equipment were amassed. It was decided that the primary efforts would be directed in the area of the garage, initially. This was due to the severe hazards left by the jagged rip in the building. Heavy concrete slabs were folded in accordion-like fashion down both sides of the collapse as high as the 22nd floor. Shoring, sheet metal duct work and other debris dangled precariously at all levels.

Late Friday night two structural engineers were hoisted by crane through the collapse void to inspect each floor to the roof. As a result of their findings, it was decided to totally destroy the smaller section as it was too dangerous to work inside or nearby. Demolition of the smaller section began on Saturday morning, and on Sunday night, March 4, after repeated blows from a 4,000 pound wrecking ball, the smaller section collapsed totally in one spectacular motion.

The search for survivors continued throughout Friday night and into the next day and was to continue for 15 days. Early the following morning, heavy construction equipment was positioned in the garage area. Jackhammer teams cut the concrete slabs into 10-foot squares. As they moved across the

surface of the garage, front end loaders lifted each piece gently, while Fire Service personnel searched beneath it for victims or survivors. If nothing was found, acetylene torches cut the reinforcing rods and cables laced throughout the concrete. The rods and cables were under tension, and as they were cut, they had the tendency to whip violently. Fortunately, no one was hurt seriously during this particular operation. This technique, however, was used around the clock for eight straight days. At one point, more than 70 ten-wheeled dump trucks per hour passed through the disaster site, were loaded and then sped to a pre-arranged dumping site.

As if the garage area were not dangerous enough, scores of 100-pound propane bottles were smashed and leaking. Repeatedly, operations were halted while explosion meter readings were taken. Visible bottles were isolated or removed, while those leaking beneath the concrete slabs were pin-pointed and avoided.

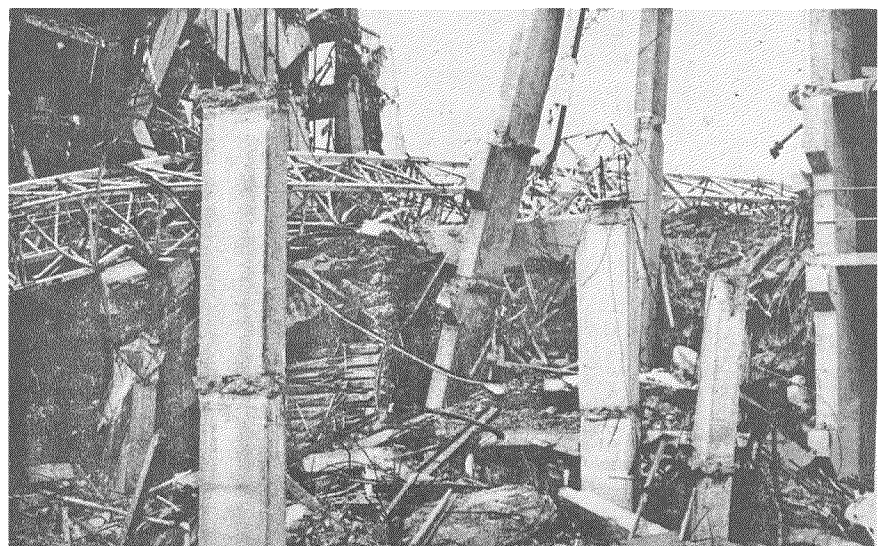
By the end of the eighth day, the garage area was completely cleared; four fatalities and one survivor had been found. The 100-ton climbing crane which had fallen onto the original collapse pile was cut into sections and removed. At this point, six men were unaccounted for; Chief Alexander ordered a daylight-only operation around the primary collapse. Fire fighters and construction men worked directly beneath the remaining section of the high-rise and on top of the original pile of material from the collapsed section under conditions which were by no means safe.

In the building itself, another worker, fleeing down the stairwell, realized he could not outrun the collapsing floor. Without looking or hesitating, he jumped from the eighth floor. Almost unbelievably, he landed in a 10-foot pile of sand, shook himself once or twice and walked away unhurt. Another workman leaped from the 18th floor onto a scaffolding cable and slid to safety.

Nighttime operations would entail undue risks to all personnel. On the 10th continuous day of search, the last known victim was removed from the scene.

It has been estimated by contractors on the scene that the total debris removal supervised by fire service personnel was somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 million pounds. One demolition contractor remarked that in his thirty years' experience, he had never seen so much debris removed in so little time. He considered that what had been accomplished in a few short days would normally have taken four months or more.

It would be difficult to mention each and every auxiliary group which responded to the disaster and supported the men involved in the rescue efforts; however, special mention of at least one, the Salvation Army, should be noted. They maintained around-the-clock service in the form of hot food and drinks. For men chilled by cold rain and physically exhausted from long hours of tough, dangerous work, their mobile canteen was a welcome sight.



SOME TOUGH QUESTIONS ON AIRLINE SAFETY

Lawrence Gonzales

Wednesday, October 31, 1979
9:45 A.M.

(Outline Unavailable)