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Fire rig alerted to Asiana victim before running her over

Jaxon Van Derbeken

Updated 11:14 pm, Thursday, January 9, 2014

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A dashboard camera aboard a San Francisco Fire Department rig driven by firefighter Jimmy Yee, shot this image as the rig approached Asiana Airlines crash victim Ye Meng Yuan, in the foreground and partially obscured by foam. The rig ran over Ye seconds later.



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The driver of the first of two San Francisco Fire Department rigs that struck a 16-year-old survivor of the Asiana Airlines plane crash in July was alerted less than 15 minutes earlier to avoid the girl as she lay on the ground, newly obtained camera footage shows.

The footage, taken by a dashboard camera aboard the rig and reviewed Thursday by The Chronicle, sheds new light on the circumstances surrounding the death of Ye Meng Yuan. She survived the crash at San Francisco International Airport, but died after being hit by the fire rigs, according to the San Mateo County coroner.

Several firefighters who responded to the July 6 crash have told investigators they believed Ye was dead and that they had concentrated on rescuing passengers and crew members who were still aboard the burning Boeing 777. No one has reported checking her vital signs, however.

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The rig camera's footage shows that although the plane had crashed just a few minutes earlier, passengers were gone from the area where Ye lay crumpled, and at one point a firefighter walked past her without looking down.

Sprayed with foam

It also shows that the first rig that ran over Ye sprayed much of the flame-retardant foam that came to obscure her from firefighter drivers. When the rig initially pulled up to the plane, the girl was lying on bare ground, the footage shows.

The Chronicle reviewed a copy of the footage supplied by a source, who stipulated that it not be posted online because of its graphic nature.

The recording shows the rig, driven by firefighter [Jimmy Yee](#), approaching the scene within minutes after the 11:27 a.m. crash, black smoke curling above the wrecked airliner. The rig was forced to stop repeatedly to allow passengers to flee the area.

About five minutes after arriving, the rig was positioned at the front of the left wing, where Ye was on the ground.

At 11:36 a.m., the dashboard camera's footage showed a man identified by investigators as firefighter [Roger Phillips](#) waving his arms to direct Yee around the girl. The rig waited for a moment to allow another firefighter to walk between the vehicle and the girl. That firefighter didn't pause or look at Ye and continued toward the plane.

Looked dead

Phillips later told investigators with the [National Transportation Safety Board](#) that the girl was in the fetal position, her eyes rolled up, her face waxen and wearing a grimace.

He described her as resembling a CPR training mannequin and said she appeared to be dead. Yee has told Fire Department investigators that as he drove by, he saw what he took to be a dead victim.

Phillips said he told a higher-ranking firefighter, Lt. [Christine Emmons](#), about the girl and that she replied: "Yes, yes, OK, OK. We've gotta get a line inside," referring to the need to get a hose into the burning craft as part of an effort to rescue victims.

'3-second' check

Emmons told the federal investigators she had done a "three-second" visual assessment of the girl and considered her to be "our first casualty."

She said she had tried to make sure that the numerous fire rigs driving around the plane did not run her over, but she does not appear in the dashboard footage reviewed Thursday. The footage shows no firefighter attempting to move Ye or mark her with a casualty flag, as first responders commonly do at disaster scenes.

After Yee drove around the girl, he sprayed foam at the fuel leak on the plane's left wing, then maneuvered to aim his front-mounted nozzle at the burning fuselage at 11:46 a.m.

By then, the footage shows, Phillips had left the scene - the federal investigation found that he went onto the plane - and no firefighters were near Ye. The rig's foam gradually covered the girl, and Yee, working without a spotter, advanced on the plane.



Rig alerted to Asiana victim

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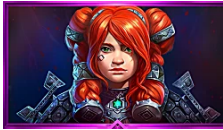
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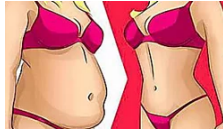
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