

Geyser of fuel erupts

A 60-foot-tall geyser of gasoline on its way to fuel jets at Kennedy and LaGuardia airports shot up into the air yesterday morning in Willowbrook when a digging machine accidentally cut into an underground pipeline.

The 30 mile-long pipeline runs from Linden, N.J., along the Staten Island Expressway, to the two airports in Queens.

The 9:15 a.m. mishap occurred on South Gannon Avenue, the service road off the Staten Island Expressway near the highway's Victory Boulevard exit, while workmen tried to repair a faulty valve on the pipeline.

Officials said as many as 35,000 gallons of high-octane gasoline escaped from the ruptured pipe and into storm sewers during the five hours it took to pinpoint and halt the leak.

After the leak was stopped, the escaped fuel flowed down Victory Boulevard into soil surrounding Willowbrook Park. Some of the oily liquid later surfaced into a creek at the William T. Davis wildlife preserve in Travis — about four miles away.

Firefighters at the accident scene used thousands of gallons of foam and a vacuum to stop the gas from spreading any further.

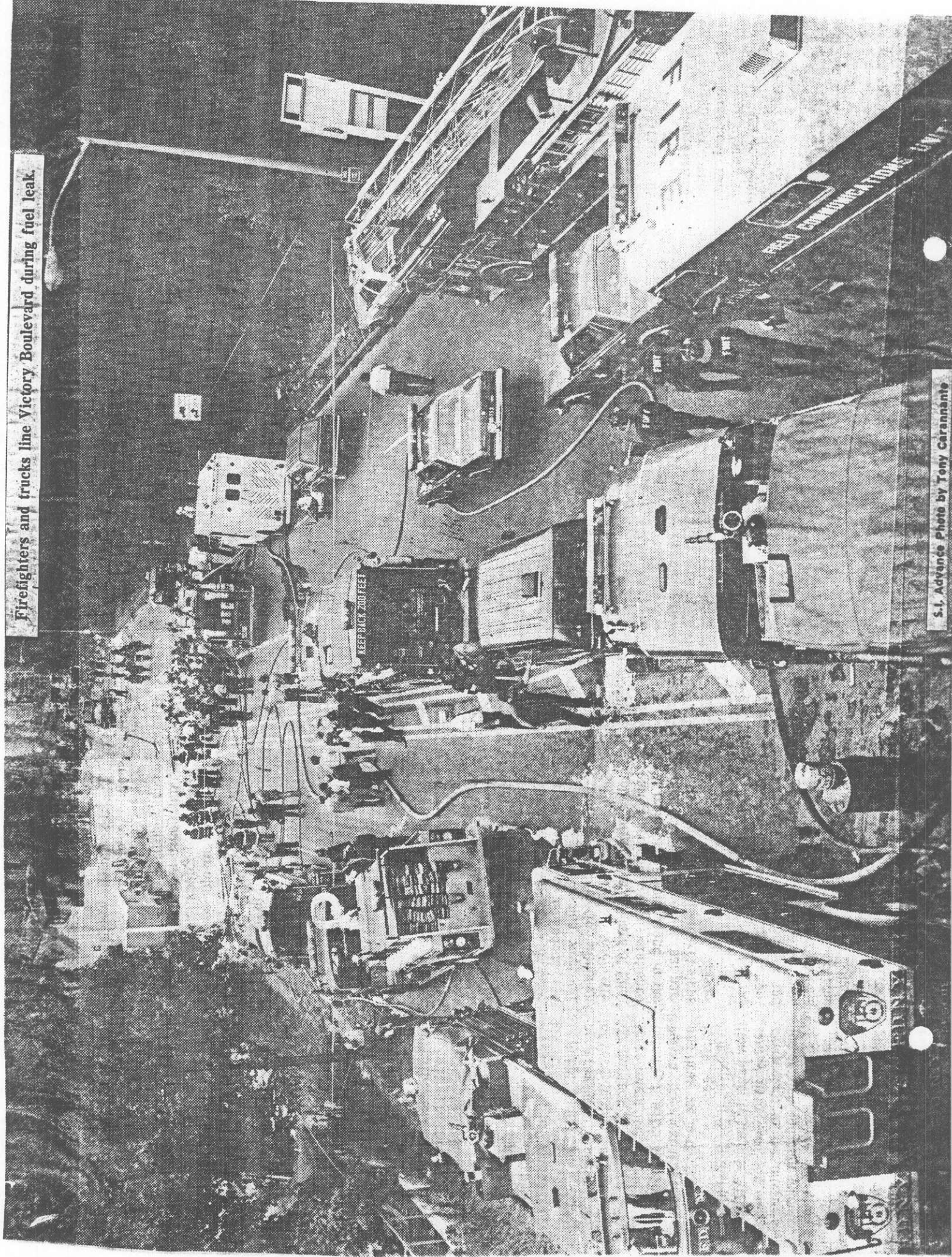


S.I. Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

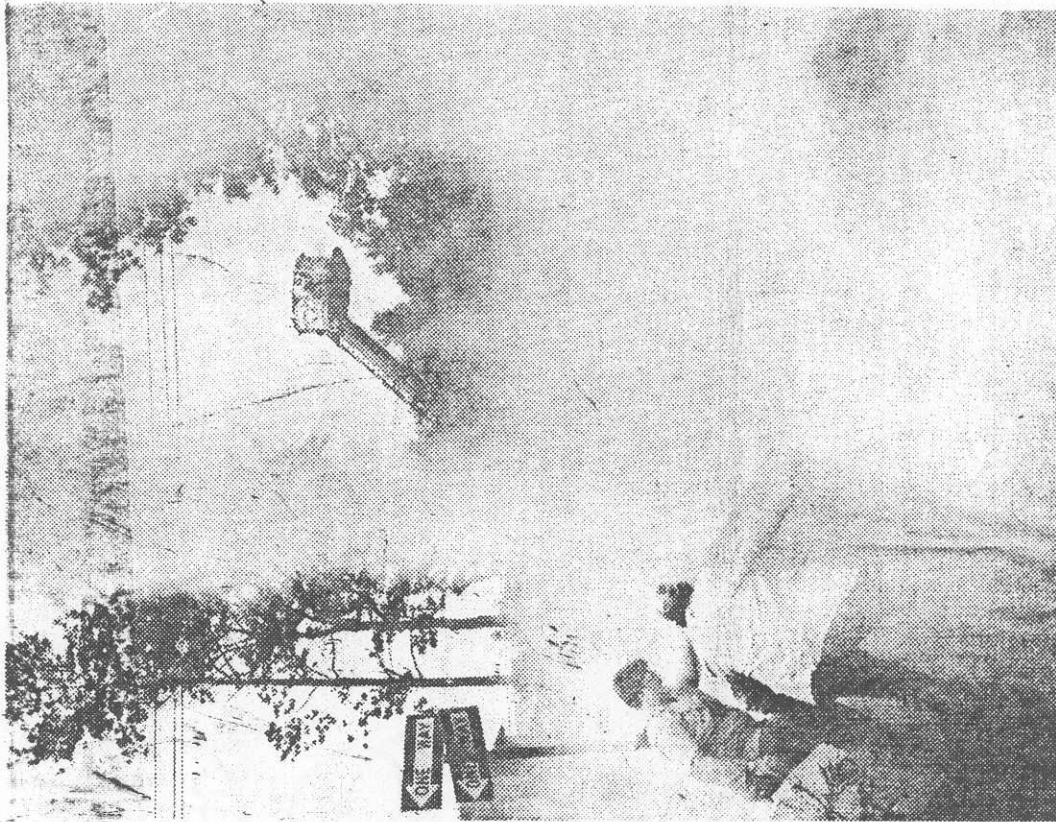
Officials stand outside interagency command vehicle on Victory Boulevard

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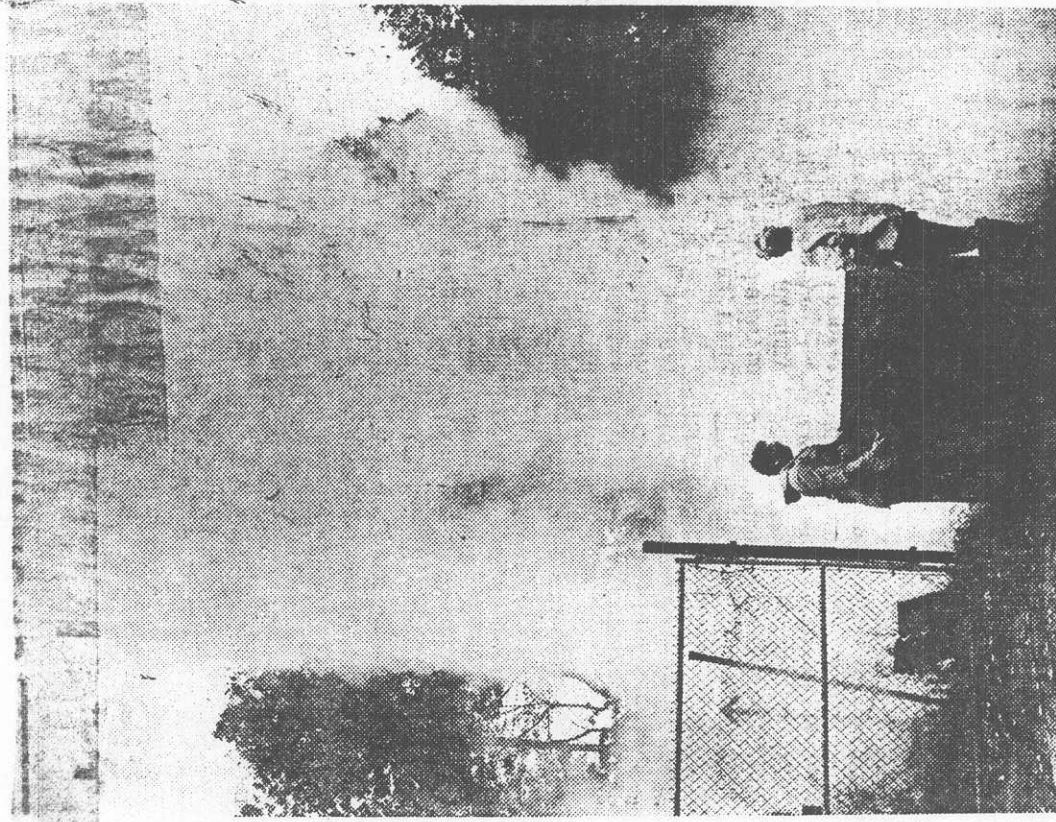
Firefighters and trucks line Victory Boulevard during fuel leak.



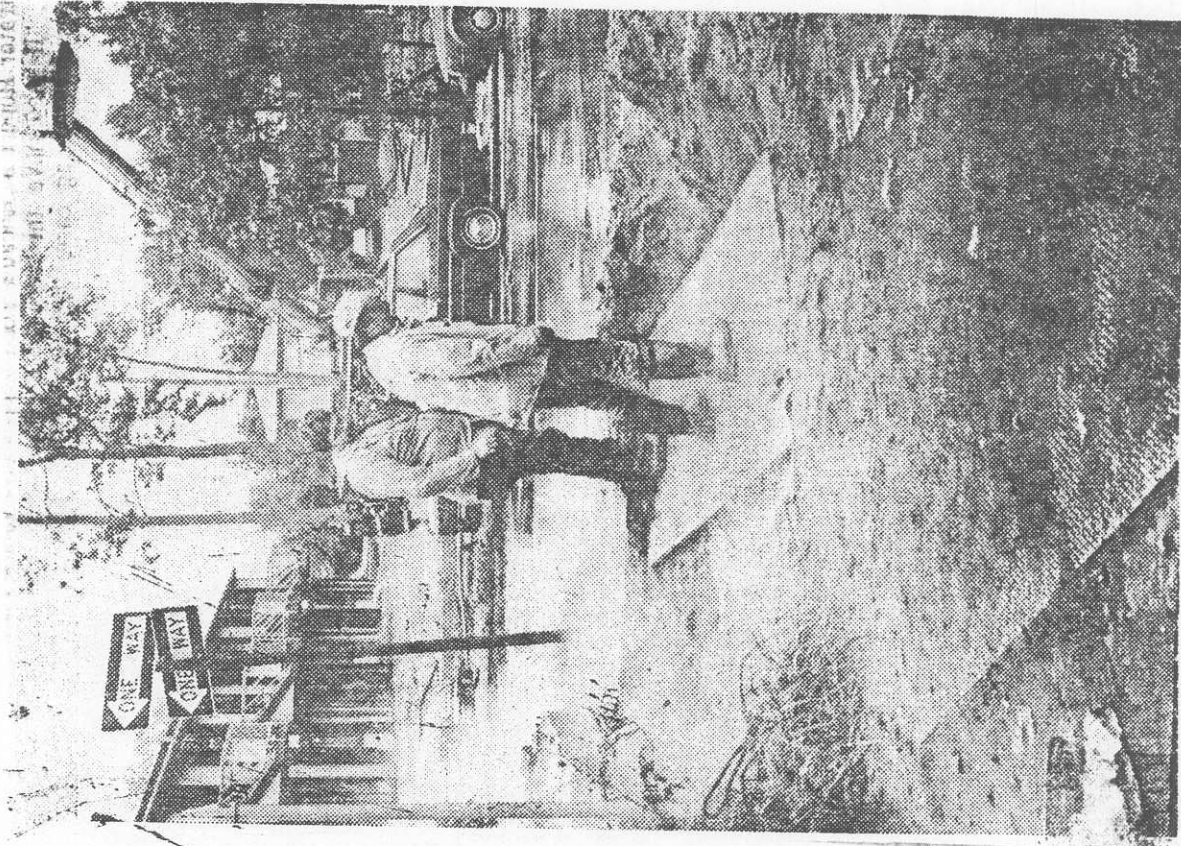
S-I Advance Photo by Tony Carannante



Ignoring gas mist, they hold plywood over hole ...

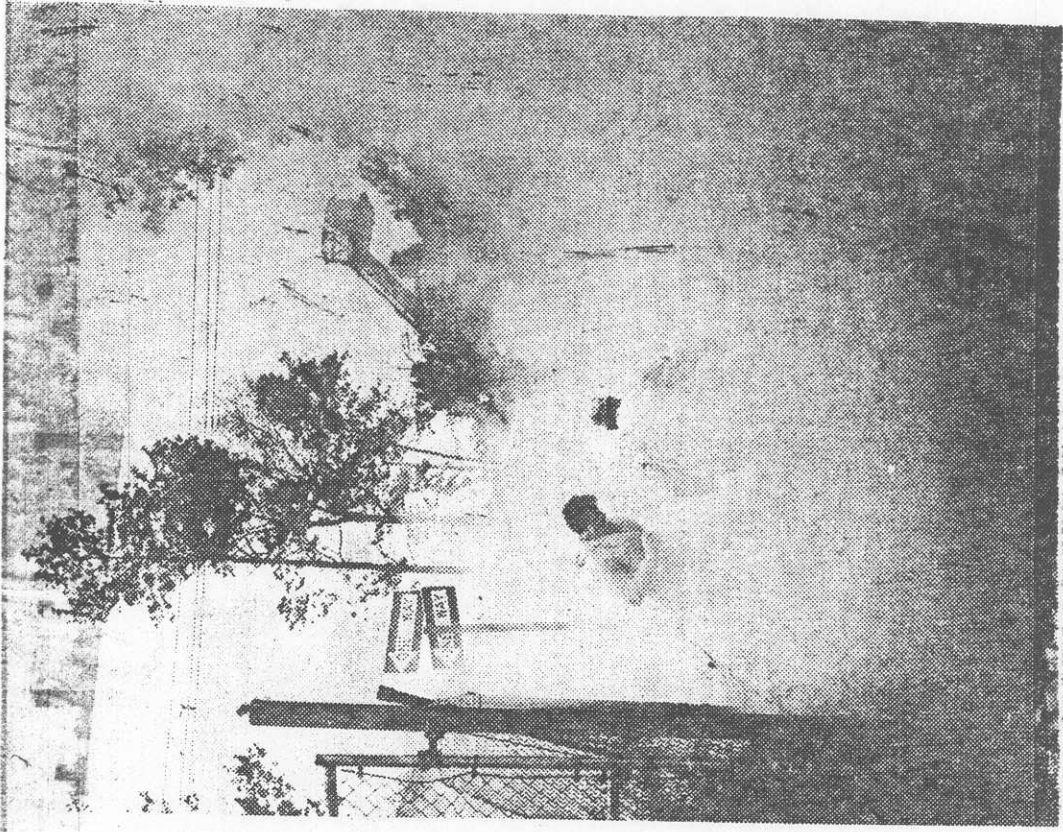


A pair of pipeline company employees prepare to use plywood to stop gusher.



S.I. Advance Photos by Tony Carannante

The gasoline mist subsides after board covers hole



... and a swift kick puts board into place.

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S.I. Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

Workers remove absorbent materials from the scene as the cleanup begins.