

## Exciting Job for Vets With Specialized Skills, Part 2

Michael Archer | May 18, 2010

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As we continue [our series](#) on air-tanker contractors in the U.S., we take a look at Aero Union, one of the largest and oldest companies in the business. In years past, they flew venerable warbirds such as the B-17 Flying Fortress, A-26 Invader, and TBM Avenger. These days, with about 130 employees at their headquarters in Chico, Calif., they maintain a stable of eight Lockheed Martin P-3 Orion military aircraft. CEO Britt Gourley provides some background material on this storied contractor and some pointers for veterans wondering how to get into the field.

### Core Business

Aero Union focuses on two primary missions: flying air tankers for U.S. Forest Service, and the manufacture of aerial fuel tanks and fire retardant tanks. "In our aerial firefighting business, we fly for the USFS and we're hoping to expand that business," Gourley explained. "We manufacture tank systems, including aerial firefighting tank systems for the P-3, Firehawk, and the C-130. We just delivered nine brand new MAFFS-2 [Mobile Airborne Fire Fighting System] units to the Air National Guard and USFS."

"Our customer would like to see probably more volume, so we're working closely with the Lockheed Martin, and the C-130 OEM, to look at other ways we can enhance fire retardant payload," Gourley said.

### International Reach

Aero Union isn't focused just on the USFS or the limits of its market. Gourley says the C-130 is going to play a fairly pivotal role, not only in the U.S. but around the world, including South America. Additionally, a number of foreign governments have expressed an interest in the USFS' tank systems.

"The fire business is getting more international, as South America and Europe are looking for more cost-effective solutions, which we're offering them," Gourley added. "We're hoping to fly in those two continents in the near future. Our tank manufacturing business has always been international."

### ABOUT MICHAEL ARCHER



Michael Archer is a wildfire consultant and writer. He has written articles for *Home and Fire Magazine*, *Wildland Firefighter Magazine*, and other publications, lectured to many groups about fire issues, been quoted by Associated Press and USA Today reporters, and also appeared on cable and network TV discussing wildfire issues. Currently, he is acting as webmaster and technical consultant to Wildfire Research Network ([www.wildfireresearch.org](http://www.wildfireresearch.org)), a Los Angeles-based citizens' action group that promotes firefighting issues involving the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).

His "Firebombers Incorporated" series of novels gives readers an intriguing "what-if" scenario on how 21st century technology could modernize the wildland firefighting force. His novel "Firestorm," received excellent reviews from *Writers Digest*, *The Nashville News*, *The VVA Veteran* (Vietnam Veterans of America's magazine) and firefighting professionals across the United States. His company, Firebomber Publications, donates 50 percent of net profits to organizations that support the families of injured and fallen firefighters.



You can visit his website at: [www.firebomberpublications.com](http://www.firebomberpublications.com)

Firestorm can be purchased at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

Comments can be sent to: [marcher47@firebomberpublications.com](mailto:marcher47@firebomberpublications.com)

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And for those interested in a more Mediterranean venue, Aero Union could be your ticket. "We've been talking to European firefighting agencies about basing P-3 aircraft out of Corsica," said Gourley. "With our aircraft's speed and overall range, we can get to fires pretty quickly from that base."

### Military Edge

Aero Union appreciates what vets bring to the table and look to former servicemembers to fill open positions. "There's a lot of opportunity for military folks in our industry," according to Gourley. "Being a vet can give you a leg up over a guy who's just been a commercial pilot. For the Air National Guard guys who fly our MAFFS-2 systems, that's great experience."

Joining AeroUnion would also put veterans in the company of fellow servicemembers. Aero Union has a high percentage of military personnel, thanks to their P-3 platform. This fire service has P-3 pilots, C-130 pilots, and there's plenty of opportunity in the industry on the mechanic side, too.

So what should veterans emphasize on their resumes? Gourley recommended: "A good record as an airframe and powerplant mechanic for maintenance people, a solid record for the pilots, and we look for guys who have been around for some time, who have been solid pilots for a long time in the military and they want to train for a new mission now."

It also helps if applicants learn to fly different aircraft. Gourley advises that vets become multi-platform, don't just limit yourself -- pilots who have C-130 experience are going to be a leg up on everybody else, but good pilots can be trained to fly anything," said Gourley. "If a pilot comes in here and has P-3 and C-130 experience, he's got an advantage over someone with just P-3 experience."

### The Future

Aero Union isn't standing still. "I know USFS is looking to have an array of platforms, at least for the interim period, but in the long-term, they've made it pretty clear that they're looking towards the C-130J," said Gourley. "USFS has made it clear that they will entertain proposals from people like us on interim solutions. There are many aircraft out there that can nicely fill that need."

And the tank systems are moving forward as well. "We took a lot of the knowledge we acquired on the MAFFS-2 system and are now rolling it out across our other tank products, such as a product called 'MAFFS 1700,' which is a smaller version of the MAFFS system which we would fly on a smaller aircraft, like a C-26 or C-295 aircraft."

Gourley's last words of advice? "As an industry employer, we think we have the best firefighting pilots and mechanics on the planet, so if you're looking for something to do, don't forget to call us." For more info, go to the Aero Union website at [www.aerounion.com](http://www.aerounion.com).

For more information about finding a job in the fire services industry, visit [Military.com's Job board](#).

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