

Fire Departments Want and Need Vets

Michael Archer | June 26, 2009

The San Bernardino County Fire Department (SBCFD) offers many opportunities to vets looking for a career with the fire service. The SBCFD oversees 20,160 square miles and 54 communities of San Bernardino County. Assistant Chief Peter Brierty provides details on the kind of firefighters they're looking for and some interesting stories on what firefighters can encounter.

Veterans in the ranks

"The majority of our folks are veterans," Brierty begins. "One of our planning and engineering guys did a tour in Iraq, and one of our communications center guys was originally supposed to go to Afghanistan, but ended up in one of the other 'stans' and was gone for three years."

We often hear of jobs disappearing when reservists are deployed for more than a year, but not at SBCFD. "The county has a policy which pays the differential [making up the difference between military pay and SB County firefighter pay]," Brierty states. "Folks are putting their lives on the line, so we want to keep their salary and benefits stable. When they return they haven't lost any accruals — they haven't lost any vacation."

Everybody goes home

In the military, there's comfort in the fact that everybody is looking out for everybody else, and it's the same at SBCFD. "Nobody gets left behind" is from the military and translates to "everybody comes home," Brierty says. "We end up with fatalities when somebody misses seeing somebody, goes back in when they shouldn't go back in, and ends up getting hurt or killed."

And it's paid more than just lip service. "We have black wristbands that say 'everyone goes home.'"

Women welcome — but not coddled

As with the military, women have made inroads into what was formerly a male-dominated career. The SBCFD has a rapidly growing population of females and the tests are not gender-dependent. "We have women firefighters fighting alongside men firefighters and there's no difference in the heroism and the performance," Brierty confirms.

"If somebody needs to get pulled out of a building, then they have to be pulled out of the building, and there are minimum qualifications for that," he points out. "Women coming in from the military have an advantage with all the physical activity we have to do."

Military connection — a family affair

Brierty comes from a military family, but has not served himself. "My father and two brothers were in the military," he explains.

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), 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

Firestorm can be purchased at Amazon.com

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"He was in the Army Air Force in World War II and graduated with only three years training instead of the usual four because so many pilots were being lost. He also went into fighter training, then bomber training because they were losing so many bombers and flew 52 missions instead of the usual 25."

Brierty adds that one brother went to Vietnam and the other brother went into the Marine Corps for 26 years as a helicopter pilot. And, although not a vet himself, he still holds them in high esteem. "These folks are putting their life on the line.... Freedom isn't free."

Military advantage

Veterans have some qualifications that put them ahead of other candidates at SBCFD. "If you've made it through the military, you know what chain-of-command is, know how to give and take orders, how to command, work under pressure, so I can't imagine the interviewer not taking that [military service] into consideration," Brierty says. "There are a lot of military character sets that are desirable in the fire service."

"Once you're on the fireground, it's a very chain-of-command oriented procedure, with clearly-identified rankings of authority," he adds. "There's not a lot of room for discussion or debate."

Variety

What's more, this isn't your hum-drum 8 to 5 job. One of the many stories Brierty told involved an unusual incident in the High Desert. "We had one incident up in Adelanto where a guy was trapped in a stairwell. There was a hydrochloric acid leak, so we were trying to neutralize that by spraying down from overhead. The runoff water from the fire was filling up the stairwell. One firefighter went down and buddy-breathed this guy as his head was going under water and kept him alive until we could extricate him."

If you liked this brief glimpse of SBCFD, visit their website at www.sbcfire.org to find out more about serving in one of the best departments out there. And to find more job opportunities in fire fighting, law enforcement or the public sector, visit Military.com's [Careers Channel](#).

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