

Important Points to Consider: LACoFD Air Ops

Michael Archer | June 18, 2007

Los Angeles County [Fire Department](#) (LACoFD), not only has one of the largest fire departments in the nation, but also boasts one of the largest helicopter fleets in the United States. With a fleet strength of 10 helicopters (one Bell 206, six Bell 412, and three Sikorsky S-70 "FireHawks"), they have transformed the way emergencies are handled in Los Angeles County. Air Ops helicopters can fly patients over gridlock in record time. And with the constant threat of brushfires throughout the Los Angeles area, the ability to mount air attack on fires day or night makes Air Ops an invaluable asset, as was shown recently with the fires in Griffith Park and on Catalina Island, where no lives were lost and damage to structures was very light.

Pilot Requirements

LACoFD requires pilots to meet certain minimum qualifications to work at Air Ops. "Pilots need to have a minimum of 4,000 hours flight time," said Air Ops Chief Tony Marrone. "Some of our pilots have come in the door with more than 10,000 hours, others have had more than that." According to the application guidelines, 1,500 hours of that time must have been flown over mountainous terrain at pressure altitudes of 4,000 feet or higher, along with take-offs and landings with maximum loads on unimproved landing areas under adverse weather conditions. A valid commercial pilot's certificate issued by the FAA with a rotorcraft-helicopter rating is also required. And a valid Class "2" FAA Aviation Medical Certificate must also be obtained prior to employment. Experience with all the aircraft listed above is mandatory, of course. The payoff? A very competitive salary, along with all the benefits a job with LACoFD provides: major medical, dental, retirement pension and all the rest.

Paramedics

Air Ops paramedics must have qualified as such with the fire department prior to applying to Air Ops. Typically, paramedics with more than eight years of experience are selected, after which they must complete an 80-hour course familiarizing them with the unique facets of Air Ops.

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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Helicopter Mechanics Wanted

The folks who work on the aircraft also need to meet certain qualifications. "Mechanics have to have an FAA Airframe and Power Plant certificate and be licensed to work on aircraft by themselves," Chief Marrone stated. "They have to be able to work on H-58, Bell 206 and 412s, Jet Rangers, and FireHawks." If these qualifications are not fulfilled by military service, good luck finding civilian venues to achieve them. "Glendale Junior College used to have an Airframe and Power Plant certification program, but not anymore," said Mark Barney, an Air Ops mechanic and former Air Force mechanic. "Most of the junior colleges in the area have discontinued these programs." Those processing out of the military are ahead of the game (if they already have earned an A&P certificate).

Veterans' Advantages

As with other LACoFD jobs, those 10 Veterans Points are added to the final passing grade in the exam if the applicant served in a declared war. With so many people vying for jobs, this gives veterans a notable edge. "I realized after I got here that I should have tried to get here 20 years earlier," says Jerry James, former Army Chief Warrant Officer and current Air Ops pilot. "This far surpasses anything available in the helicopter industry." "This is just one of the best helicopter jobs around," agrees Lee Cranney, a former Captain who flew helicopters in the Army. "I've been all over the planet working for oil companies, but this job is really a compilation of the best of all of them."

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