

Important 'Points' to Consider: LAFD Air Ops

Michael Archer | July 10, 2007

Air Operations (Air Ops) is a separate entity within Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD). It maintains a sizeable fleet of helicopters (four Bell 412 medium-lift helicopters and one Bell 206L-3) for fire suppression, transporting sick and injured to distant trauma or specialty medical centers, complex rescue incidents in remote areas, transport of fire crews, and air recon/command/control duty over a major incident. Air Ops has requirements that may vary considerably from what the department generally looks for in a firefighter.

Pilots Wanted

What exactly does an aspiring pilot need to have to be qualified for flying fires? "LAFD is one of the few organizations that actively trains their own firefighters to fly our helicopters," said Chief Foley, head of LAFD Air Ops. "They have to have a minimum of four years experience as an LAFD firefighter, a commercial pilots license - with a commercial rotorcraft rating and a minimum of 500 hours of flight time, before they are allowed to participate in the Pilot Trainee examination. "If a military veteran has spent some time in a helicopter, that would be very beneficial, of course, particularly medium-lift helicopters," Chief Foley continued. "We're attritioning out a lot of our senior pilots within the next five years and our training program is a little behind right now because we didn't have a consistent training aircraft until recently. As an organization, we would be very interested in former military helicopter pilots who are looking at the fire service, particularly the LAFD, for a challenging and rewarding career."

ARFF

ARFF stands for Airport Rescue Firefighter. "We are pretty unique here at Fire Station 114, because we don't require the member to have an ARFF certification to transfer into a vacant position - when available," Chief Foley stated, "It's all based on seniority as to whether you're allowed to work in here or not. The members are normally trained to ARFF standards within a short period after they arrive at Air Operations."

When asked about where to get ARFF certification, Chief Foley replied, "Some Junior colleges offer courses, internally, our members work with Fire Station 80 at LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) for certification where they receive hands-on training, and the Department sends our members to training venues with outside agencies."

"As far as the crash side, if they get involved in the fire-crash programs in their branch of the service - that would be beneficial," Foley added.

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 USAToday 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.wildfiresearch.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

Comments can be sent to: marcher47@firebomberpublications.com

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Air Medics

And what about the paramedics who fly? "In regards to the air medics who fly in our helicopters, anyone who has helicopter Crew Chief, Corpsman training, helicopter rescue/medivac training, anything like that, would find that beneficial if they wanted to work in this unit as an air medic."

Veterans Points

Since applicants process in through central LAFD hiring, veterans are eligible for five veterans' points for declared wars just like firefighters. These are applied to the entrance interview only. After that, the requirements listed above would apply depending on the specialty the recruit was pursuing.

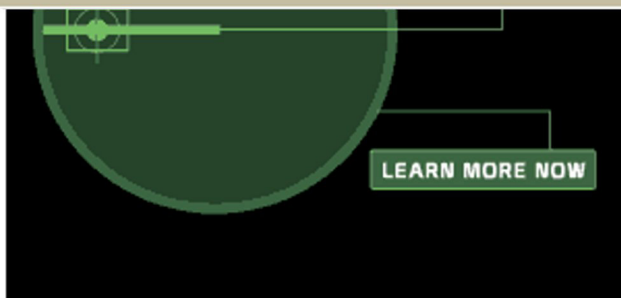
Reflections on Being with Air Ops

So what do current personnel have to say about working at LAFD Air Ops? "I was intrigued with helicopters, so when I got my rotorcraft rating it was just something I wanted to do," said Paul Shakstad, LAFD's Senior Pilot. "I've won two Medals of Valor and an Order of Merit for flying hazardous missions," says the Coast Guard veteran. "They tell me the third Medal of Valor is only awarded posthumously," he added with a smile. There are also benefits that go beyond pay and benefits. "You work with the cream of the crop of society when you're working with people in the fire service," says ARFF Howard Lewis. "I also like the sense of pride in telling people what I do," concludes the former Army artillery observer. And as to job satisfaction, both of these men must like their jobs a lot because Paul has been doing it for 26 years and Howard has been doing it for 31 years. Looking for a good crew to work with? Look no further.

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