

LAFD Academy : Train Like Your Life Depends on It

Michael Archer | July 16, 2008

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The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) ingrains a very honest motto in its recruits: "Train like your life depends on it, because it does!" That axiom is what helps 3,500 firefighters, who are spread over 106 stations, save thousands of lives every year. The department, which receives 600,000 – 700,000 emergency calls a year, wants recruits who will take this motto to heart and continue to help them save lives in the Los Angeles County. What's more, the LAFD knows that no one can understand this saying better than active-duty servicemembers, which is why the academy provides in-service training of all active personnel, too.

Military Connection

There's a definite military influence in the LAFD Training Division. "We've actually pulled a lot from the military, since we're a para-military operation," said Assistant Fire Chief Roderick Garcia, who is in charge of the Training Center.

"I was an Army draftee who left as an E-4. The Army was a great experience that instilled discipline and tenacity that I didn't have before I went in there. I wouldn't be where I am today without that experience. I'll always be grateful for that," added Garcia.

This love for the military is something he's passed on to his children. "I have two sons who were Navy SEALs and one who was an Army medic, all three have seen combat. Two are now firefighters."

Realism Counts

As in the military, realistic training is a must in firefighting and LAFD worked hard to ensure that recruits and active-duty personnel alike get the best training available. "Our drill towers have been revamped to get hands-on experience in this 19-week course with lots of specialized equipment such as the Jaws of Life, airbags for lifting equipment or to catch people trying to commit suicide," said Garcia. "We have a huge paramedic training program over at UCLA Paramedic School. LAFD has [more than] 750 paramedics, now."

"We have this facility, the two drill towers, and hot-room simulators, which are steel-lined like houses with stair wells in them," he continued. "We light fires in them and, under very controlled circumstances, recreate going through a burning building and extinguishing the fires."

Another course also involves crawling through confined spaces in full gear, so anyone with claustrophobia need not apply.

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.



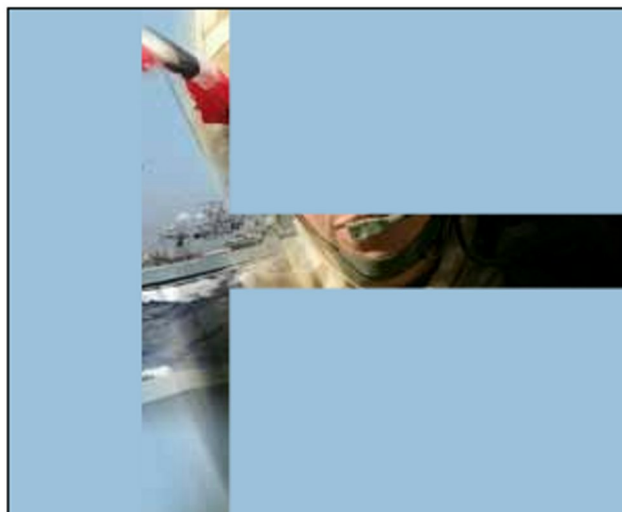
You can visit his website at: www.firebomberpublications.com

Firestorm can be purchased at Amazon.com

Comments can be sent to: marcher47@firebomberpublications.com

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Division of Labor

The academy is divided up into recruit training with two full-time, year-round academies handling 40 – 60 people per class, and continuing education of active-duty personnel, according to Garcia. "In-Service Training involves 3,500 people that covers everyone, all the way up to the fire chief."

And the training doesn't just cover traditional firefighting. One fact that few people realize is that LAFD does not fight strictly structure fires, but also protects a major port, a major airport, and a large population living in wildfire country.

"Our training covers swift-water rescue, structure fires, hazmat, brushfires, everything LAFD does," Garcia affirmed. "We train firefighters to do both ladder truck operations (ventilation, search and rescue, forcible entry, laddering, and rescue operations) and engine operations, like extinguishment (high-rise or brushfire), all involving lots of different tactical operations."

Envious Visitors

Garcia proudly stated: "People come from other departments and see what we have and they say: 'You guys are awesome!'" He added, "We've trained 400 cooperating agencies on our borders from Area A with whom we have a Memorandum of Understanding to assist when requested. Since we help them, it's in their best interests to train with us, particularly with firefighter survival and rapid intervention."

How to Prepare

So what should a potential recruit do to prepare for a career with LAFD? "Number one, continue or start a physical fitness training program because firefighting is extremely physically demanding, climbing sixty flights of stairs, carrying more than 100 lbs of gear, pulling a hose," said Garcia.

He also advises that trainees get an education. "The more education the better (GED minimum, but two- to four-year fire admin/science curricula is better)," he says.

Additionally, you should try to keep your driving record as clean as possible (DUIs could be a problem). Get an EMT certification and preferably a paramedic certification, because it is very expensive for LAFD to pay for that training, so it gives the candidate a competitive edge.

Why do you need that edge? "Every time we open the doors we have 8,000 -10,000 people," Garcia explained. "I would also encourage people thinking about a fire service career to visit an LAFD fire station to see what's involved. During the oral exam part of the interview, a candidate will be asked why they want to be a firefighter, so they need some idea of what's involved. You have to want to serve people, while understanding that the job is extremely dangerous. Picking up literature on taking oral/written exams is helpful."

Last Words

"LAFD not only appreciates military service, but it also has an open door to anyone from the military," emphasized Garcia. And to show their appreciation, LAFD offers five Veteran's Points on the entrance exams to help veterans achieve their dream of a fire service career. For more information: <http://lafd.org>



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